The Female Voice And The Experiences of Women in Conflict Situations: The Truce in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun

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Without the female voice, no complete picture of the Nigerian Civil War will be recorded in Nigerian literary history. 

_Marie Umeh

Abstract
After the impressive imaginative pieces on the Nigerian holocaust of 1967—1970 by such as Buchi Emecheta’s Destination Biafra (novel), Pauline Onwubiko’s Running for Cover (novel), Flora Nwapa’s Never Again (novel), Rose Njoku’s Withstanding the Storm (novel), Catherine Acholonu’s Into the Heart of Biafra (play) and Nigeria in the Year 1999 (poetry collection), and Amanda Adichie’s play —For Love of Biafra —Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has come again with a bang, in her epic novel —Half of a Yellow Sun. Her work is a strong, bold contribution to the ever on-going discourse and/or conversation on the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War, an event, according to Nwachukwu Agbada (141), like Enyinnaya (421) and Amuta (85), that has provoked the largest literary recreation in the history of African literature. More fundamentally significant, however, is that with Half of a Yellow Sun, Adichie has voicefully broken the icy silence that had seemed to hover over a rather belated but supposed resonant feminine voice to Nigerian Civil War literature.

We should remember that before very recently what used to be the favourite chronicle of the novels recreating the late 1960s genocide in Nigeria would feature Cyprian Ekwensi’s Survive the Peace and Divided We Stand, Festus Iyai’s Heroes, Chukwuemeka Ike’s Sunset at Dawn, Eddie Iroh’s Forty-Eight Guns for the General, I.N.C. Aniebo’s Anonymity of Sacrifice, Ali Mazuri’s The Trial of Christopher Okigbo, Kalu Okpi’s Biafra Testament, Kole Omotoso’s The Combat, Onuora Ossie Enweke’s Come Thunder, Meki Nzewi’s And I Spied, et al. In addition, each of these novels, it is man who is the subject, the hero, and usually, the message is as well derived only through him. Women are backdropped, as if they did not exist during the war, or did not fight or suffer as a result of the war. Worse still is that literary criticism on the subject of this war would, unfortunately, pay a blind eye to any discussion on the female victims, maybe, since often, the novels are populated with minor female characters who play inconsequential roles. When we consider El-Bushra & Lopez view that, “though wars may be mostly fought by men, women are of course deeply affected by wars in a number of ways” (6), and Udumukwu’s attestation that, “wars and other forms of civil conflict are not initiated by women…women are drawn into these conflicts willy-nilly” (109), it then becomes imperative that in whatever women were or are part of, they ought to be part of its making, part of its story. Because they participated, it is expected that they should be part of the story telling process. Besides, it is believed that women have peculiar narratological dexterity. It is in this respect that Buchi Emecheta once asserts: “I write about the little happening of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes” (qtd in Uwakweh, 395). This exclusive characteristic of theirs cannot be denied them. Agreeing to this notion, Khanla Bhasin upholds the view:

The female way to communicate is not just with the head but with the heart: communicating with feelings and emotion with love and passion…communicating as equals, communicating to share rather than to take away and control, communicating to empower rather than to manipulate and mislead. (qtd in Abu, 158)

Eugenia Abu goes further in quoting Bhasin who decries the unjustifiable sidelining of women in the scheme of things. According to Abu, Bhasin laments that: “unfortunately, the female ways have been discredited and marginalized. Man’s march towards civilization not only marginalized women but also the feminine principles…” Udumukwu equally raises pertinent issues when he asks:

More often than not, women are drawn into conflicts and are expected to bear the pain, loss and even to die? …Or
can they, within the framework allowed by the dominant authority in their context of their own autonomy and therefore can they have a separate opinion about wars and conflicts? (109)

Bryce asks a similar question thus: “Is it possible that Nigerian women novelists, most of whom are, after all, from the east or the Igbo-speaking mid-west, do not in fact perceive the war with as much ‘interest’ as men?” (30). She goes further to admit that, “There is an intrinsic and inevitable distancing of women, or at least, bourgeois women, whose roles were neither combative nor concerned with policy making, but centered on survival”. The above condition beleaguering women had risen because it was men that had taken the pen and mounted on the writing stage. And in their patriarchal intuition and leaning, they under-represent the women. This sex bias by men is confirmed by Osafisan when he tells us categorically that “we are all unfortunately trapped in our sex, and crippled by the experience of our bodies in their sexual space” (9). The implication on Osafisan’s stance is that the female voice should be heard and included in any social discourse and deliberation knowing full well that men are not only sex prejudiced but also ignorant of the true feminine self and world.

Bordering on conflict situations, literatures on them are not only reflective but also protesting, rebuking, redressing and liberating. And on the last points of redressing and liberating, Nwachukwu-Agbada, while emphasizing the need to liberate womanhood from every shackle so as to achieve a true sustainable development in Nigeria, asserts: “Incidentally, no writer has celebrated liberation and various forms of freedom better than the female, whether it is in orature or ecriture” (30). Osafisan points out like Nwachukwu-Agbada thus: “Try as we can, we, men, will never see women like fellow women can” (9). This is invariably expressing the view that no matter how audacious men try to create the vision, imaginatively, they can never have a feminine eye or voice to the matter.

Women on their own side have insisted that their voice must be heard on crucial historical and national issues; that their voice must complement those of men for any story to be holistic. Edith Ikekeazu (German-born but married to a Nigerian) stresses on the need to incorporate women into the corpus of African literature. In her interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto, she is asked to comment on how African literature has benefited from the issues of feminism as a literary development. She makes this elaborate explanation:

Men and women have different ways of looking at things. They have different ways of perception even in literature. If literature was for a long time perceived by men the female view becomes complementary. It is an enriching perception and I do not think it is competitive. If one side has been dominating in any situation, once the other side emerges, it has to assert itself […] There are really different ways of writing and writing about literature. If a woman reads a book it is possible for her to pay attention to certain aspects that may not have fascinated a man. I think it is necessary to allow this complementary perspective to unfold and develop. For instance, in the world it is not clear whether there are female philosophers but I believe that women have their own philosophy, I think that women have not been encouraged. (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 159)

The above remarks could be termed as a mild protest, what Ezeigbo sees as “[questioning] male domination” that has been an “unhealthy status quo” (121). Impartially, she here calls for a level playing ground between male and female writers. Ikekeazu probably pairs with Ifeoma Okoye who regards herself as a personist. Okolo quotes Okoye saying that a personist “abhors discrimination against any person, woman or man… believes in the equality of persons and fights against the subordination of persons, women or men” (357).

Arguably, positively, however, this lack of regard to women by the male writers has compelled women to embrace writing as a way of expressing and representing themselves especially concerning issues that affect them. Writing is essentially voicing. They (women) through writing voice their silence, they voice their pain,
they voice their violence against them by men, they voice their predicament that has been perpetrated and entrenched by both patriarchy and colonialism. Hence, writing today is no longer an exclusive preserve for the men. Osafisan acknowledges one of the goals of women writers of Nigeria as trying “to discover and nurture into the limelight as many female writers as possible, in order to bring the female voice into the hitherto male monologue of history and literary creativity” (5). In another forum, he emphasizes the crucial point that “writing redeems [as well as being used] to sublimate pain and deconstruct despair; as D. H. Lawrence sings as quoted in Teilanyo (48) ‘One sheds one’s sickness in books” (56). So, writing has come to afford women the expressive opportunity, the representational medium and the therapeutic advantage.

We are not, therefore, surprised to see burgeoning number of women writers today. Even before this 21st century, Okereke while enumerating the male writers of the Nigerian Civil War literature, upholds firmly that “now female writers, among whom are Flora Nwapa, Rose Njoku, Pauline Onwubiko and Buchi Emecheta, have stormed the male literary bastion by contributing to Nigerian war novels” (145). In point of fact, women have traversed every subject area, war subject inclusive, through creative literature, and Porter expressly submits: “the fact that women now may actively engage in war [accounts for why] women today can write authoritatively, authentically about almost any subject” (313).

This paper essentially submits that the literature of Nigerian Civil War can never be complete without the inclusion of the female voice, because it is the voice that crafts a more detailed story and explores, as well, the implications on the human person. Specifically, it makes an appraisal of how the writer re-visits history in *Half of a Yellow Sun* through making a critique of that period that was a conflagration in the history of the Nigerian nation, making illustrations with some of the female characters of the story. It exemplifies the various ways the ensuing upheavals of a war precipitated by men impacted on the women, disjointing and fragmenting their lives, and ultimately, causing them not to live meaningful, peaceful and fulfilled lives. It sees Adichie’s narrative as a harbinger of a long-awaited renaissance in Nigerian/African literature.

II

No doubt, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has clearly announced her intimidating large presence on the present day literary scene. Remarkably, she has become a global toast. Her recognition and commendation even began from the diaspora. With her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, she comes into limelight, winning several awards and securing lecturing jobs in different universities in the USA. Having made this giant stride, Adichie has become a household name not only to the literary society but to the general audience. Chinua Achebe can affirm that Adichie is a committed writer. We are reminded about his declaration concerning the committed writer thus: “it is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant.” He goes ahead with a dictum: “The African writer cannot therefore be unaware of, or indifferent to, the monumental injustice which his people suffer” (78).

Differently said, any Nigerian writer, specifically, who is worthy of recognition must, of necessity, be interested in recreating, and reliving the Nigerian Civil War experience. Most probably, in harkening to Achebe’s view, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa especially, after writing on the socio-cultural life of their people, divert their voices to the big issues concerning the Civil War in Nigeria, via *Destination Biafra* and *Never Again* respectively. What they have said in these historical novels cum what glowing remarks critics have made on them are very relevant and commendable.

However, it is instructive to point out that of all the literary works on the internecine war of 1967 —1970 in Nigeria, it is believed that none has attracted the world reception and accommodation such that Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* has. It is understandable, for *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a *magnum opus*. In it, Adichie exhibits an awesome degree of vision, mission and narratological, linguistic
expertise. Her phenomenological intellect and skill informs Chinua Achebe’s unequivocal testament in the blurb of the novel:

We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it. She is fearless, or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria’s civil war. Adichie came almost fully made.

While Achebe sees her as 'fearless,' Charles E. Nnolim, while confirming that Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a historical novel, collaborates Achebe on the wonderful skills with which the novel is woven. He states:

The stunning thing about *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the author’s objective rendering of these horrors devoid of emotional outcries by a daughter of Biafra. The impartiality, the refusal to take sides, the absence of judgemental stance or apportioning blame is part of the greatness of this novel. (18)

Binyavanga Wainaina, seeing the novel as an epic that is penetrating and confident, is amazed that “Adichie refuses to look away” (net) from the big issues. Moreover, Will Blythe’s opinion is that *Half of a Yellow Sun* outclasses all other war novels, regardless of the popularity of their authors, for *Half of a Yellow Sun* is sure to “subsume the history upon which it is based, [for] that is what great fiction does—it simultaneously devours and ennobles, and in its freely acknowledged invention comes to be truer than the facts upon which it is built” (net).

Adichie’s (feminine) voice is, no doubt, a brave contribution to the Nigerian Civil war discourse, and it can be rightly said that without this voice of Adichie’s —of course with those of earlier females (Nwapa, Emecheta, Onwubiko, Njoku, etc.) blazing the trail though they struggled to be heard —Nigerian literary history, mostly as it concerns conflict situations of the 1960s, cannot be said to have been completely recorded or rendered. It is important to state that these female writers, apart from having a divergent but accurate and necessary angle and/or view to the pogrom, they very significantly, incorporate as well the antecedents that blossomed into the full-blown war. For Ikideh tells us that “before June 1967 when the battle line were formally drawn, Nigeria had virtually been at continuous war with itself since the first years of independence” (346).

In essence, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a novel of conflict situations —the conflict of war precisely. The Nigerian Civil War was a war that was fought on two major divides with one group being referred by the other group as the vandals, while the second group —the seceding Biafrans —being termed the rebels. The strangulating ethnic bias and bitterness that precipitated the conflict in the first place has led to the war being labeled either 'The Nigerian Civil War’ or 'The Nigeria Biafra War’ “depending on the affiliation of who is telling the story” (Nwahunanya). It is such a war situation which Elsaesser describes as being “symptomatic of the chaos and disorder in society” (292). In addition, Adichie explains her major motivating factor in telling the story thus:

I wrote this novel because I wanted to write about love and war [...] because I wanted to be engaged with my history in order to make sense of my present, many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of the egos and indifference of man leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children enrages me, because I don’t want to forget. (39)

As has been earlier stated, this study focuses on the writer’s delineation of the many ways this conflict of war impact on the female characters mainly. As Adichie’s voice echoes to us, even as she masks behind her narrator and her female characters and through the female point of view, we are given the opportunity of seeing clearly the true pictures of the horrors of the conflict coupled
with the back-grounded female victims who are in actual fact the neglected heroines.

The story is, in the main, a story of Olanna and her twin sibling, Kainene. The twins have undergone quality educational training abroad and are back to Nigeria with each possessing a master’s degree and nursing shining prospects and dreams only for these dreams to be shattered, raped and their hopes left in tatters by the ravaging Civil War. These two daughters of a very affluent parent the Chief Ozobias, are the worst hit by this war. However, the suffering of other females is not less horrendous and sympathetic. Starvation is always a theme in many war novels and women are the major victims of this tool of war. As we find in the novel, soldiers who have access to food and other relief materials, use them to hold girls to ransom: tempting them with these and seducing or raping them in exchange. In page 313 of the novel, we hear that Ojukwu snatches wives off their husbands and sleeps with them (women). For instance, Special Julius’s brother who happens to be a director is known for taking up to five young girls at once to his room and seducing or raping them. More bewildering is that Father Marcel takes advantage of hungry girls in the refugee camp where he is in charge of sharing relief materials made available by the ever struggling brave girl, Kainene. It is not only Urenwa that Marcel impregnated, hence, Kainene complains: “He fucks most of them [girls] before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here!” (398). Even more mundane is that Ambrose cashes in on the lack of adequate housing facilities, where women have to rush their baths in the open air at dawn before the breaking of the sun, and peeps at the nakedness of Olanna. Let us not forget about the bizarre case of Eberechi whose parents willingly hand over to a soldier to violate with impunity only for us to be told that “The next morning, the beaming officer thanked her beaming parents while Eberechi stood by” (200). Oddly, she may have been returned with some food items —mere food, in exchange of her being. What a wanton violation of womanhood! Similarly, Nnesinachi and Eberechi, two females who have tickled Ugwu’s fantasies, willingly offer their bodies as their own way of ensuring their continued survival in the war. Nnesinachi gives Ugwu her reason for her affair with the enemy soldier saying, ‘[…] he was good to me, a very kind man’ (434). In such desperate situations, the enemy’s unwholesome gestures are accepted by the victim as acts of generosity. Remarkably, some of the women in this novel who experience sexual exploitation in form of rape or sexual manipulation owe their experience to their lack of security, food and/or protection. The men who abused them knew this and took undue advantage. Nwahunaya, illustrating with Toads of War on the issue of exploitation during war time affirms:

Given the situation where a few people have everything and the majority have nothing, the stage is set for the exploitation of whoever turns up. Women turn out to be the main victims of these power profiteers. A typical toad of war is Chima Duke. He is aware of the helplessness of Kechi Ugboma and girls of her type, and therefore wants to exploit it to the fullest. “The longer the war lasted, he calculated with callous ease, the harder the pinch of hardship … and the more Kechi would depend on him”. (183)

As a corollary to the above, it should be stated that rape is a concept, a theme that is so prevalent in many war novels such as in Yvonne Vera’s Without A Name and Under the Tongue. It is an inverse ratio that is always against women. It is not women that rape men. Incidence of rape abound in Half of a Yellow Sun. Special Julius laments over how the vandals, who are alleged as looting the Igbo people’s belongings, “force people’s wives and daughters to spread their legs for them and cook for them” (285). Here, women are intimidated, exploited and raped. Kainene gives us the shocking information that Radio Kaduna has decreed that “every Igbo woman deserves to be raped” (346). Apart from the enemy’s assaults, Ugwu, an Igbo boy, and a soldier fighting for Biafra joins other conscripts in raping the innocent bar girl who helplessly writhes in pain as she cries: “please, biko” (365). According to Nnesinachi, “They said the first one that climbed on top of her, she bit him on
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The arm and drew blood. They nearly beat her to death. One of her eyes refused to open well since” (434). There is also the case of Anulika —Ugwu’s sister —who loses one of her eyes to her rapist who claims that she is stubborn to give in to her being raped. Often times, it is the women who bear the brunt of different levels and forms of wickedness and depravities in conflict situations.

Deprivations and loss are usual accompaniments to war. Since any war usually claims lives and properties, it is therefore inevitable that characters who are involved in it would be assailed by much deprivations and loss. Although these are general experiences in war, women seem to suffer them more than men. In every conflict, a significant percentage of them is often at the receiving end. That is why during the riots and massacres in the North, so many women get maimed and others slaughtered in inhuman ways. Because of her humane nature and imbued with fellow-feeling —these unique attributes of the woman —Olanna cannot be free from the horrific memory of the “little girl’s head with ash-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-black eyes and open mouth” (149) inside a bowl being carried by a woman beside her (Olanna) on the train conveying them to the East. The woman wants to bury the girl’s head in her home town, a head chopped off in the massacre. Such horrendous sights make the women go through psychological torture that permeates their beings and refuses to be erased. In this case, both the woman who is carrying her daughter’s head and Olanna suffer inner shocks and hurts that leave permanent scars in their consciousness.

With regard to the permanent losses the characters experience before and during the war, the writer elicits our sympathy through the experience of the heroine of her story. Olanna’s travails begin when she visits the North (Kano) to meet her relatives and especially her ex-lover, Muhammed. The love atmosphere she enjoys in Muhammed’s veranda is interrupted by the Kano riot. She manages to be smuggled out and thrown on the train Eastward. More pathetic is that the war disrupts her already on-going wedding with her lover-professor Odenigbo. At the verge of cutting the cake, hell is let loose by the roar of rockets and air raids. Both bride and prospective husband are set apart as each runs for cover. Olanna is depicted as she lays down on the muddy ground in her sparkling white gown that now turns brown, wet and muddy. It is this war that has denied her the pleasure of a happy honeymoon, a peaceful married life, and most probably, a more fruitful and fulfilled life.

After running to Umuahia with her family as refugees of war, Olanna feels deprived of the good life she was used to with her parents in Enugu and with Odenigbo at Nsukka. We read that at breakfast,

Olanna placed her cup against her cheek, to warm it, to delay the first sip of weak tea made from a reused tea bag. When he [her husband] stood up and kissed her goodbye, she wondered why he was not frightened by how little they had. (268)

As far as Olanna is concerned, she believes she has lost ‘everything’ (343). Her experience of loss takes a worse turn when she gets the news of Ugwu’s supposed death. In a spontaneous reaction, she marches down to Tanzania bar to confront her husband (whom she has almost ‘lost’ too, albeit, emotionally) as though he were responsible for Ugwu’s conscription and death. But fate was not done with Olanna yet. Her twin sister, Kainene, leaves to trade at afia attack just few days before the war ended and does not return. Besides, every now and then, this character’s peace is broken by the war tensions and hostilities. She is truly traumatized. In one of the heart-breaking air raids and bombings, the narrator tells us about another of her heart-wrenching experiences. As the bomb wrecks havoc and as people (mostly women) helplessly but repeatedly shout the name of Lord Jesus, “her bladder felt painfully, solidly full, as though it would burst and release not urine but the garbed
prayers she was muttering” (275). While she lay in the bunker carrying Baby with others on top of them, the crickets make feast of them. She only allows “her teeth chatter [as] she slumped in the bunker and ignored the crickets” (275). Like other female characters, crying has assumed an emblematic function that reflect the numerous troubles of their lives.

Adichie’s depictions as well, show that women are meant to bear some extra responsibilities because of the disruptions in the lives of loved ones and relations. For instance, during a war, most people are bound to lose their jobs. It is the case in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Odenigbo becomes idle and has to resort to drinking to escape his worries. It is now Olanna that has to run around organizing teaching units to sustain the family. It becomes an additional stressful burden. Nevertheless, she rises up squarely to the situation. She takes care of Baby (her adopted child from Amala whom Odenigbo is responsible for her pregnancy), takes care of Odenigbo, plus other house-helps. The character Muokelu, whose husband lost one of his legs while fighting in the war, grapples also with additional challenges. This situation can be substantiated by Wolfensohn’s assertion that

...during economic shocks, such as those in the transition economies [...], rapidly worsening unemployment has produced such high anxiety (especially among men) that alcoholism, suicide, domestic violence, and the dissolution of families have risen considerably. These in turn, have their own impacts on women and children. (73)

The strong-willed character, Kainene, deserves our recognition and respect too. She is so large-hearted irrespective of the stiff demands made on her in various respects. Remember that she worked off her socks ensuring that she caters for even her live-in lover, Richard. She walks herself into the job of a refugee camp attendant where she is gravely emotionally disturbed seeing so many women dying unattended to. We have already noted the she struggles to get food stuffs and other relief materials to be shared to the refugees which Father Marcel feels empowered with, thereby, using them to bait girls into sexual harassment, until at a point she resolves, “I’ll distribute the food to the refugees myself” (318). The writer exemplifies her resourcefulness and innovative ingenuity when she maps out some survival strategies for the refugee camp:

[...] We can start a farm at the camp: we’ll grow our own protein, soya bean, and *akidi*. [...] There’s a man from Enugu who has a fantastic talent for making baskets and lamps. I’ll have him teach others. We can create income here. We can make a difference! And I’ll ask the Red Cross to send us a doctor every week. (318)

In addition, the narrator tells us of her passion and dedication to work thus: “There was a manic vibrancy about her, about the way she left for the refugee camp each day, about the exhaustion that shadowed her eyes when she returned in the evening” (318). It is on her ‘attack market’ journey, a journey undertaken in her desperation to get and fend for others that she disappears and does not return even at the end of the war. In spite of her heroic deeds and the enormous sacrifices she has made during the war, society may erroneously perceive her to be just one of those general casualties of the war.

The thought of a loss or a life of deprivation begets fear. The witness or remembrance of a painful loss fuels sorrow, and in severe cases causes trauma. It is such fear that grips Olanna in the novel whenever she and others dash into the bunker to hide from incessant shelling from the enemies. This is likely the nature of worry that caused her mother to collapse upon seeing her daughter crippled by psychological trauma. Olanna has just returned from Kano where she saw the brutally butchered bodies of her relatives with herself narrowly escaping the same bloody fate. The witness of such gory sight coupled with the thought of the nature of the loss impacts tremendously on her psychic conditions.

We have already noted that Kainene, Olanna’s sister is an emotionally stronger woman, but even her strong-willed nature could not save her from the shock that eclipsed her at the sight of Ikejide’s death. The manner of this character’s death stuns her
beyond speech. We read:

A shrapnel, the size of a fist, wheezed past. Ikejide was still running and, in the moment that Richard glanced away and back, Ikejide’s head was gone. The body was running, arched and slightly forward, arms flying around, but there was no head. There was only a bloodied neck. Kainene screamed. The body crashed down near her American car, the planes receded and disappeared into the distance, and they all lay still for long minutes, until Harrison got up and said, ‘I am getting bag.’ […] Kainene sat on the ground and watched them. ‘Are you alright?’ Richard asked her. She did not respond. There was eerie blankness in her eyes. Richard was not sure what to do. He shook her gently but the blank remained, so he went to the tap and splashed a bucket of cold water on her. (324)

Harrison, Richard’s servant and Richard himself both witnessed Ikejide’s terrifying death, but only Kainene, despite her bold heart, shows her shock so glaringly. The reader experiences the horror better and understands the tragic implications more from Kainene’s reaction. According to the novel, “At nights, she cried. She told him [Richard] she wanted to dream of Ikejide but she woke up every morning and remembered his running headless body clearly […]” (325).

III

What emerges from the foregoing is that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a lachrymal story that has been told by a woman. It is a story which exposes the depth of the immense and debilitating losses that were consequent upon the Nigerian Civil War. The paper maintains that Adichie’s voice is a female voice that is more articulate and more robust in her comprehensive imaginative representations of Nigeria in the 60’s. It affirms that the writer is, as well, very courageous in her depictions as she has, with an underlying protestation, confronted a sensitive history and delved into “forbidden” areas, particularly as they concern the experiences of women during the war. She, per se, stirs the hornets’ nest and brings so much to the open, and, without doubt, provokes a lot of questions. In a more concrete manner, she exposes the varied unresolved issues that pertain to that war.

We cannot take it away from Adichie that her novel recreates the horrific, dehumanizing, experience and that through her depictions, she arouses the desired pathos and implicitly makes a passionate appeal to the humanity of the human person generally. In sum, her historical novel is her own artistic RE-MEMBERING —her creative piecing together —of that history from the female perspective which insists that the female voice should complement that of the male, that the female voice should fill up appropriately the loopholes inherent in the male that took place in art and in textiles; their nature and their scope and what made these changes modern. The paper will also throw light on the changes that took place with the artist, his thinking, his materials and artistic means that led to modernism in Igbo textile art. This discourse will further bring to light the roots or origin of the modernism in Western art, Nigerian art and Igbo textile art, the minds that created them and their processes of evolution. The developments in the west will be used as the pivot because the evolution of what is now known as modernism in Nigerian art and Igbo textiles took its genesis from the modern western art.

**Art Modernism**

The futility of attempting a definition of modern art is discouraging because of the enormity of the creative activities that sought to redefine art and artistic boundaries. Modernism in art is not a movement, it is not a style. Indeed it is a multiplicity of styles that was consistently shifting the art goal post in the midst of the game, in an attempt to create a new paradigm in art.

The conception and fetal development of modernism in the Nigerian and Igbo textile art can be located much deeper in history than the 20th century when the birth took place. In the words of Witcom, writing on the Western art, “A discussion of modernism might easily begin in the Renaissance period when we first encountered secular humanism, the motion that man (not God) is
the measure of all things, a worldly civic consciousness, and “utopian” visions of a more perfect society…” (Witcombe, 2000). The Renaissance humanism established that modernist expression of self-confidence. Though this was for the history of man in general and not for art per se, the Renaissance, nevertheless, was the sowing of the seed and the metamorphosis that gave birth to modernism in art as a whole, not only in the Western art. We can see this idealism in Aina Onabolu’s leadership of modernism in Nigerian art and Uche Okeke’s vanguard in the development of modernism in Igbo textiles. A self-assertive idealism that is akin to the Renaissance spirit, that propelled these two pioneers is also seen in Ifedioramma Dike’s solo and pioneering drive to achieve creative and aesthetic parity between textiles and other areas of art like painting, sculpture and architecture monologues, for a whole brand of Nigerian Civil War literature to emerge. In point of fact, the story of the war cannot be complete if it is devoid of the feminine point of view, because it is only through her/story that his/story will be able to gain objectivity and validity. Finally, it can rightly be said that with Adichie’s Half of a Yellow Sun, the true story of the Nigerian Civil War has, at last, been told.

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