



Women's Roles during Biafran War in *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie (2006)

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Abstract – Since the end of the Nigerian civil war there has been a scanty literary production about women's contribution during this war. Fortunately, since 2000 a new generation of women writers is born and is now challenging this underrepresentation of women in war fiction. In this perspective, Adichie, an Igbo writer, addresses women's roles during Biafran war basing herself on her parents' personal experience of Biafra. In this paper I lay emphasis on women's images and roles during the Nigerian civil war which lasted from 1967-1970.

Key Words: Women's fiction, the forgotten victims, violence, women's resilience, education.

Résumé – Depuis la fin de la guerre civile au Nigeria, il y a eu une rare production littéraire sur la contribution des femmes au cours de cette guerre. Heureusement, dès 2000, une nouvelle génération de femmes écrivaines naît et remet en cause cette sous-représentation des femmes dans la fiction de la guerre. Dans cette perspective Adichie, une écrivaine Igbo, aborde le rôle des femmes pendant la guerre du Biafra se basant sur l'expérience personnelle de ses parents au Biafra. Dans cet article, je mets l'accent sur les nouvelles images et les rôles des femmes pendant la guerre civile nigérienne qui a duré de 1967-1970.

Mots clés: La fiction féminine, les victimes oubliés, la violence, la détermination au féminin, l'éducation.

1. Introduction

Although Adichie was born in the seventies seven years after the Nigerian civil war, she puts this very war on stage in her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). More precisely she discusses Igbo women's roles in this novel because male Nigerian novelists keep silent about women's contribution in this war. On the one hand, in men's fictional narratives women's active participation is either silenced or female characters are associated with stereotypical roles. In his latest autobiography, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012) Achebe too fails to put to the fore women's roles during Biafran war. On the other hand, scholars rarely concentrate on the effects of the war on women in their papers. For example, Chijioke (2012) while studying the connection between literature (narrative) and life (history) in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* shows how Adichie casts insights into the characters' human feelings. As for Hawley (2008), he assesses the impacts of the war on Nigerian cultural expression in the twenty-first century in the latest generation's war fiction like Dulue Mbachu's *War Games* (2005), Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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(2006), and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* (2005). Effective accounts of women's contribution in war time may be the challenges of coming generations of writers. A Nigerian, Eddie Iroh quoted by Hawley John more prophetically foresees that: "we [Nigerians] express sentiments now because we remember it so closely, but I believe the greater work about the war is yet to come – an unbiased, total assessment of the whole tragedy – and it will be necessary". (Hawley, 2008: 18).

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* set in the sixties is the story of Biafran secession war through characters of different social backgrounds. She reinvents the experiences of Igbo people's roles and more particularly those of women from all social classes. By roles, I mean not only women's positive contributions but also their self sacrifice. Adichie's representation of the female characters is outstanding as they transcend the traditional stereotypical roles. Kainene, Olanna, Mrs Muokelu among many others are presented as people who are forced by either personal experience or idealism, to become active participants in the struggle for genuine freedom in Biafra. In this paper, light must be first of all shed on women characters' sufferings during Biafran civil war and then on their win-the war-effort. It goes without the saying that women strongly associate their children in their struggle or it may also be implied that children's fate during this war acts as the stimulus that urges women to react and to counter attack the evils of war most of the time with their bare hands.

2. Women and Children: The Forgotten Victims.

By the phrase, 'the forgotten victims', I mean the absence of records on women's efforts during Biafran war. It is as if only men committed themselves to Biafran war. Simply put, women and children are neither remembered nor celebrated. The majority of scholars and critics often assess the economic and political drawbacks of the Biafran civil war. For example, Nnenna argues that late Chinua Achebe in "The Trouble with Nigeria" "outlines the issues that impede the socio-economic cum political development of Nigeria to include, tribalism, false image, leadership problem, lack of patriotism, social injustice and mediocrity; indiscipline and corruption. This issue according to Achebe slows down the wheel of development". (Nnenna, 2011: 14). It is clear that accounts of women's exploitation during this bloodshed are deliberately silenced. The narrator in *Half of a Yellow Sun* highlights the negative impacts of the war on Nigerian Igbo women through some female characters. During this civil war women are subjected to different forms of violence: military raids and more specifically, as far as women are concerned, rape that can be seen as a metaphor.



2.1. Rape as a Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared implicitly that is, without the use of a signal such as the word *like* or *as*. Rape, in this paper, is used as a metaphor because it helps the narrator to lay emphasis on the victimisation of women during Biafran war. In literature, rape is often interpreted as men's weapon against women. According to some feminists like Maggie Humm quoted by da Silva Riberio, rape can be defined as "an act and a social institution which perpetuate patriarchal domination and which are based on violence, rather than specifically as a crime of violence..." (da Silva Riberio, 2005: 21). It is one of the most insidious forms of social coercion because rape is a constant reminder to all women of their vulnerable condition (...). Currently, feminist theory takes the view that rape is a political act of terror against an oppressed group. (da Silva Riberio, 2005: 21). In this vein, while discussing the problematic of rape in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Georgiads Mboya Kivai agrees that:

Rape is an expression of power and authority. It is a form of violence and most of the perpetrators of the crime are men. Men desire to rape women in order to assert their authority over them. Rape can even be a symptom of inequality and the desire on the part of those who wield power to assert it on the powerless. It is an action rooted in masculine behaviour that serves to perpetuate patriarchal order. The basic argument here is that in Adichie's novels rape has a deeper political significance than just men forcing themselves on women sexually. The several episodes of rape identified by Adichie serve to communicate the plunder, misuse and destruction characteristic of the ruling class. It is the men who are depicted as powerful and they rape women who are seemingly powerless... (Kivai, 2007:87)

Similarly, in this paper, I may discuss rape as male characters' expression of power and authority over the female characters. Since war is basically an act of violence, Adichie uses it as a space to create heartless male characters. Thus, in *Half of Yellow Sun* both Nigerian and Biafran soldiers are depicted as oppressors.

Rape, in this context, is a political metaphor because it symbolises Nigerian and Gowon's superiority over Ojukwu and his soldiers. This can be read in Anulikpa's rape by the federal forces: "They forced themselves on her. Five of them.... They nearly beat her to death". (Adichie, 2006: 421). Other instances reflect Nigerian army's oppressive machinery against Biafran women: "They raped pregnant women before they cut them up". (Adichie, 2006: 191). Since radio is a powerful means of propaganda during a conflict; men therefore use it to broadcast different episodes of women's victimisation. In this vein, Special Julius' narration of women's rape is very poignant: "And they choose the best houses and force people's wives and daughters to spread their legs for them and cook for them". (Adichie, 2006: 285) Radio Kaduna, for instance, asserts publicly that every Igbo woman deserves to be raped.

As for Biafran soldiers, rape indeed symbolises their strong desire to catch up with the humiliation their antagonists, the Nigerian soldiers have submitted



them to. Female characters are therefore the victims of Ojukwu's failed promise to arm his soldiers. Once more, rape is a political weapon because it helps Biafran male characters such as High-Tech and his friends to establish themselves as members of the ruling class. As a consequence, they use rape to oppress any woman they come across. This expression of power and victory occurs when the soldiers applaud while Ugwu rapes the little girl as the passage below shows it:

When he finally went back inside, he stopped at the door. The girl was lying on her back on the floor, her wrapper bunched up at her waist, her shoulders held down by a soldier, her legs wide, wide ajar. She was sobbing, 'Please, please, *biko*. Her blouse was still on. Between her legs, High-Tech was moving. His thrusts were jerky, his small buttocks darker-coloured than his legs. The soldiers were cheering. 'High-Tech, enough! Discharge and retire!' 'The food is still fresh!' 'Target Destroyer, aren't you a man? *I bukwa nwoke*.
On the floor, the girl was still. Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her... (Adichie, 2006: 365)

The place where this rape happens is symbolically used because it is commonly said that only bad women serve as waitresses in a bar. Having witnessed so many atrocities soldiers use bar as restrooms where they seek for psychological peace by drinking too much alcohol. They raid such places because they are in search of sexual orgies.

Besides, some white male characters who pretend to be Biafran commit the same crime against Biafran women. Therefore, rape is an expression of colonial oppressive force against women and the African nation as a whole. This can be seen in the scene Okeoma narrates about the white man mercenary, his commander: "He throws girls on their backs in the open, where the men can see him, and does them, all the time holding his bag of money in one hand. (Adichie, 2006: 323). For this white man women as well as African countries are worthless.

Still, in the same novel, the narrator discusses rape as a form of women's oppression by religious men. Indeed, Roman Catholic Church is a masculine institution. Here, rape, symbolises gender hierarchy within a divine institution that is expected to promote equality. Simply put, a Reverend Father's dress covers him as with a shell that conceals his masculine lust. So, some Fathers shamelessly use their position to abuse Biafran women sexually. In *Half of Yellow Sun* Father Marcel takes advantages of his position and put many little girls in the family way during Biafran war. Kainene out of rage says: "He fucks most of them before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here." (Adichie, 2006: 398). Father Marcel commits this crime in the presence his colleague Father Jude. When informed, Kainene is infuriated and shouts at him: "How could you stay here and let him spread the legs of starving girls? How will you account for this to your God? You both are leaving, right now."



(Adichie, 2006: 389). Father Jude's silence reveals the existing complicity among religious men and their disregard of women. In short, these priests' attitude is evidence that Religion contributes to women's oppression. Not only Igbo women are sexually exploited and raped but they are also the greatest victims of air raids and evacuations.

2.2. *Other Forms of Violence Against Women*

Apart from rape women are subjected to other forms of violence. For example, they are the easy preys of Muslim religious extremists in the northern part of Nigeria, and during evacuations they are the ones who are slow to run away. Adichie overtly denounces the policy of Igbo extermination and more particularly women's victimisation in the Northern regions of Nigeria after Major Kaduna Nzeogwu's coup; historically known as the Igbo anti-corruption coup. For example, Obiozo, Odenigbo's kinsman who lives in the north, recounts that he sees "a whole family... a mother and three children, lying on the road to the motor park." (Adichie, 2006: 144).

Radio broadcasts news on the massacres: "a solemn voice on ENBC Radio Enugu recounted eyewitnesses accounts from the north.... A pregnant woman split open in Kano." (Adichie, 2006: 144). Another instance can be read in the killing of Olanna's extended parents: "Aunty Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips." (Adichie, 2006: 147). The description of the female corpses and the travelling conditions of Igbo leaving the north shows that women and children are the victims of this genocide:

The train was a mass of loosely held metal, the ride unsteady as if the rails were crossed by speed bumps, and each time it jolted, Olanna was thrown against the woman next to her, against something on the woman's lap, a big bowl, a calabash. The woman's wrapper was dotty with splotchy stains that looked like blood.... The train swerved and Olanna bumped against the calabash.... The woman with the calabash...said..."Take a look", she said again. Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-grey skin and the plaited hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. The woman closed the calabash. 'Do you know', she said, 'it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair.... She thought about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. She visualised the mother plaiting it, her fingers oiling it with pomade before dividing it into sections with a wooden comb. (Adichie, 2006: 148-149)

Here, the narrator makes a thoroughly selection of words referring to kitchen sets to enforce women's pains: the state of the train (a mass of loosely held metal); woman's wrapper with stains like blood. This simile is to illustrate that blood and basically women's blood is everywhere. Calabash is used for drinking, carrying water and eating. But, in this quotation, it contains the head of a little girl to emphasise women's great attachment to their offsprings. The calabash, in this respect, symbolises woman's womb and a woman's struggle to keep her kid alive despite its physical death. The reader gets a picture of the



horrors of the war and its devastative effects on women through the lap and the Calabash. Olanna provides more information by describing some specific parts; first, the colour of the skin of the little girl's head (*ashy-grey*), the quality of the hair (*thick*), then after the abundance of the hair on the girl's head, her eyes (*rolled-back*) and open mouth (*a blurred greyish picture*).

Moreover, Adichie uses air raids as the lenses through women's victimisation is analysed. An air raid is an attack by military aircraft, especially when armed with bombs and rockets. It symbolises the power relations among the protagonists of the war. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* the air raids target mostly Igbo provinces because, similar to Igbo women, they represent the weaker, the powerless and subsequently the other. Since marriage is an institution that guarantees and perpetuates the subaltern position of women, the narrator seizes Olanna and Odenigbo's wedding as a golden opportunity to emphasise the powerlessness of Biafran military aircraft in Umuahia as the narrator recounts:

Ugwu heard the sound just before they cut their cake in the living room, the swift wah-wah-wah roar in the sky. At first it was thunderous, [...] Somebody said, 'Enemy plane! Air raid! [...] Ugwu looked up and saw the planes, gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey. They spurted hundred of scattered bullets before dark balls rolled out from underneath as if the planes were laying eggs. The first explosion was so loud [...] the second explosion followed and then the third and fourth and fifth, ... they would continue to fall until everything was destroyed and everyone died. (Adichie, 2006: 200).

This number of explosion denotes the intensity of the air raids and the leading position of the Nigeria army while the narrator's use of sentences like 'they would continue to fall until everything was destroyed' shows Igbo people's hopelessness. At the end of the air raid, the narrator underscore the negative effects of the air raid on the female characters while male characters can still stand: "Master and Okeoma were first to walk out to the road.... Olanna continued to sit on the ground holding Baby, the camouflage-print army shirt wrapped around her wedding dress." (Adichie, 2006: 203). Furthermore, the narrator pictures the devastative drawbacks of the air raid on women as follows: "A car was on fire; the body of a woman lay next to it, her clothes burnt off, flecks of pink all over her blackened skin, and when somebody covered it with a torn jute sack, Ugwu could still see the stiff, charcoal-black legs." (Adichie, 2006: 421).

Besides the air raids, the evacuation operates as a machine against women. Indeed, it hails from the verb to evacuate that means to remove someone from a dangerous place. Evacuation, during a war, is the ordered or authorized departure of noncombatants from a specific area by the Department of State, the Department of Defense, or appropriate military commander. This refers to the movement from one area to another in the same or different countries. The evacuation is caused by unusual or emergency circumstances and applies



equally to command or non-command sponsored family members. In some cases a town or a village must be evacuated the narrator emphasises upon women's attitudes because they are mostly preoccupied by their husbands and children's welfare. In this perspective, the narrator associates women characters with specific objects and children as it can be read: "The main road was crowded; women are seen with boxes on their heads and babies tied to their backs, barefoot children carrying bundles of clothes or yams or boxes, men dragging bicycles." (Adichie, 2006: 179). In Umuahia, a woman, her baby tied to her back, recounts her story when the vandals have occupied their land:

We were on our ways back from the market when we discovered the vandals had occupied the junction and were shelling inside the village. We could not go home. We had to turn and run. I had only this wrapper and blouse and the small money from selling my pepper. I don't know where my two children are, the ones I left at home to go the market." (Adichie, 2006: 289).

This unnamed woman's revelation accounts for the pains a nation as a mother endures for the loss of her children, those who are expected to foster a sustainable development. In order to highlight the intensity of her pain the narrator adds: "She started to cry. The abruptness of her tears, the way they gushed out of her, startled Ugwu." (Adichie, 2006: 289).

In addition, Adichie associates women with kitchen objects like pot in case of evacuation. Odenigbo also called Master, summons his wife to get a few things. Embarrassed she replies "What will I take? ... I'm still cooking." (Adichie, 2006: 178). Conscious of the importance of food in their new house, Odenigbo advises her to put it in the car. By so doing, the narrator is showing how much women worry about people's wellbeing. Olanna's attitude after her husband's suggestion is illustrative as the narrator points out: "Olanna looked dazed; she wrapped the pot of soup in a dishcloth and took it out to the car." (Adichie, 2006: 179). The cooking pot that formerly gathers all lecturers in Nsukka in Odenigbo's house is by now used as a symbol of displaced people's worries. These people are giving everything away. Françoise Ugochukwu (2011) states that the roundness of the pot evokes another image, that of the belly, the war and its dangers, the prospect of an uncertain future, trigger a shift in people's priorities. In a word, women suffer from air raids and evacuation. During Biafran civil war they are also subjected to starvation because of the lack of food.

2.3. *Women and Starvation*

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie criticises the holly alliance between the Russians and the British to block food access to Biafran soldiers while the federal troops receive great support from them (food, weapons) as a man overtly reveals to Richard. It results in a great shortage of food in Igbo



provinces as Mr Ovoko says, "Nobody is donating much these days. These people keep coming here and asking for food, and then they start to ask for jobs..." (Adichie, 2006: 173). Many women and children died of starvation as declared by William Norris (Sunday Times' reporter) quoted by Ojukwu:

I have seen things in Biafra this week which no man should have to see. Sights to scorch the mind and sicken the conscience. I have seen children roasted alive, young girls torn into two by shrapnel, pregnant women eviscerated, and old men blown to fragments. I have seen these things and I have seen their cause: high-flying Russian Ilyushin jets operated by Federal Nigeria, dropping their bombs on civilian centers throughout Biafra. (Makokha, 2014:113).

The scarcity of food is highlighted through the emptiness of Olanna's basket the day Olanna returns from the relief center with an empty basket. Through Olanna the reader gets a glimpse of the expensiveness of food items. A cup of salt costs a shilling more each week and chickens are chopped into bits that are still too expensive, rice is no longer sold in large bags because nobody can buy. Salt is scarce as Alice declares that it cannot be found anywhere. As a result, the narrator confesses that: "women knocked on the door often to ask if there was any work they could do in exchange for food. They came with their thin, naked children. Sometimes, Olanna gave them *garri* soaked in cold water before telling them she had no work." (Adichie, 2006: 285). So many mothers are dying in the camp because of the lack of food. Olanna realises it the day she pays Kainene, her twin sister, a visit in Orlu: "That woman is dead. We have to get her removed ... [she] lay face down on the floor, with a thin baby clutching her back..." (Adichie, 2006: 348). The lack of food jars on women's nerves. They read it as a failure to meet their children's need as it can be guessed from an unnamed woman's attitude: "A woman walked briskly up to him [Okoromadu] and thrust her baby boy into his arms. Then, take him! Feed him until you open again! She began to walk away. The baby was thin, jaundiced, squalling..." (Adichie, 2006: 270-271). The attitude of this woman signifies the uncertainty about future and the suffering of the Igbo woman. Kwashiorkor damages children physical growth. This is what the narrator meant through his selection of some adjectives like 'thin, jaundiced, squalling'.

Indeed, this shortage of food during Biafran civil war results in the spread of malnutrition diseases because mothers cannot feed their kids. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* many children are dying of kwashiorkor that women rename "Harold Wilson Syndrome" after the British prime minister of the period. These children lack a good quality of food as well as the right amount of food. For example Adanna, the little daughter of Olanna's neighbour suffers from it: her belly "was swollen and her skin was a sickly tone, much lighter than it was only weeks ago". (Adichie, 2006: 338). So do a great number of children in Kainene's refugee's camp in Orlu:



A mother was sitting on the floor with two children lying next to her. Olanna could not tell how old they were. They were naked; the taut globes that were their bellies would not fit in a shirt anyway. Their buttocks and chests were collapsed into folds of rumpled skin. On their head, spurts of reddish hair ... (Adichie, 2006: 348).

It is unfortunate that these children may die of this disease because hospitals during Biafran war run out of adequate medicines. In Nwala's hospital in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where Olanna brings her sick baby she realises that the doctor stays indoors because he cannot afford them any medicines: "Olanna felt sorry for him and was not sure why. He spent too long looking through so few things. I'll give you a cough syrup, but she needs antibiotics and I'm afraid we've run out," he said, staring at her again, in that odd way..." (Adichie, 2006: 264). In a word, women and children are the silent victims of Biafran war. Apart from these images, the narrator presents women fighting for their family and for Biafra.

3. Women and their Win-the-War-efforts

As stated further above, in 1967 Igbo seceded under Ojukwu's command and every Igbo is requested to make their contributions for the success of Biafra Republic, thus, the concept of Win-the-War comes about. Women's contributions are the most expected because of their leading positions within households. In male writers' war fiction women are often delineated in their subaltern duties. In contrast, women writers highlight their resilience and defiance. Adichie underscores and praises women's achievement since it goes beyond their biological and social roles. She portrays women from different backgrounds fighting daily to help their household survive and support their men on the front and taking an active part in win-the war-effort.

3.1. *Poor Igbo Women's Resilience versus Igbo Middle Class Women*

In this section, I intend to point out poor Igbo women's active roles during Biafra in contrast with that of the wives of the Big men. For example, Abba women demonstrate their great commitment for Biafran civil war. Abba women's behaviour in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is praiseworthy.

It is worth pointing out that Abba is an Igbo hometown that goes down in history. In 1929, there was a women's war against colonial taxation in Southeastern Nigeria. Abba Igbo women successfully defeated the colonial administration. Adichie brings it into the fabric of her second novel by contrasting poor Abba women's resilience with that of Lagosian rich middle class women. Generally speaking, poor female characters are often portrayed as the have-nots and the weaker. While rich women fear for their jewelry, poor women give away everything to Biafra. Olanna discovers this moral dichotomy among the rich and poor people in Abba when she joins women's groups:



She had joined them two weeks ago, in the town hall, sewing singlets and towels for the soldiers. She felt bitter towards them at first, because when she tried to talk about the things she had left behind in Nsukka- her books, her piano, her clothes, her china, her wigs, her singer Sewing machine, the television- they ignored her and started to talk about something else. Now she understood that nobody talked about the things left behind. Instead, they talked win-the war-effort. A teacher had donated his bicycle to the soldiers, cobblers were making soldiers' boots for free, and farmers were giving away yams. Win the war. (Adichie, 2006: 185).

This passage highlights poor women's determination and resilience. All this strengthens Olanna's adherence to Biafra. She understands that as a good wife and a lecturer in Sociology she has to support her husband, Odenigbo, a pro Biafra.

Conversely, Lagos as a cosmopolitan town hosts women who are in quest for luxury. While poor women in Abba demonstrate their great sense of patriotism, middle class Igbo women, the representative of whom is Olanna's mother, Mrs Ozobio, craves for their material possession instead. She moves around with all their possessions: "... her handbag... was full of the glitter and twinkle of jewelry, corals, and metals and precious stones... I carry them everywhere I go now. My diamonds are inside my bra.... Nobody knows what is going on. We are hearing that Ummunnachi is about to fall and that the federals are very close by." (Adichie, 2006: 188).

While poor women give away their properties to support Biafra, rich women flee to London where they are involved with 'Save Biafra Campaign'; this means sending small donation, from time to time. There is also a change in the vocabulary the two groups of women use while poor Igbo women refer to the Nigerian soldiers as vandals, the rich ones call them federalists. Simply put, rich Igbo people rally to Gowon in order to protect and preserve their interests and their business. Dignity is then poor people's business. While the nouveau rich Igbo and their wives flee the civil war as Olanna's mother explains "your father and I have finalised our plans. We have paid somebody who will take us to Cameroon and get us on a flight from there to London. We will use our Nigerian passports; the Cameroonians will give us no trouble. It was not easy but it was done." (Adichie, 2006: 188), poor men and women stay and support Biafra because its success stands for their liberation. They are conscious that the victory of Biafra may be the end of their suffering. Biafra may bring them their lost happiness and their space (territory).

Clearly, Igbo middle class women living in Biafra provinces have not experienced the devastative effects of the civil war. Similarly to Lagosian Igbo women, they still crave for new luxury items and enjoy an interesting lifestyle. Olanna's visit to professor Ezeka allows her to realise the hypocritical attitudes of the leaders of war. Olanna is simply surprised by Professor Ezeka and his family's lifestyle. Mrs Ezeka still wears golden necklace. While poor women are being killed, Biafran leaders live in a well furnished house where they even



afford a new freezer. In professor Ezeka's house, people still drink cold water and they use a silver tray to carry it. Socialising among upper class people is still part of Mrs Ezeka's agenda as she says: "our socializing these days is so official, this government-house event today and another one tomorrow". (Adichie, 2006: 340). Like Mrs Ozobia, Olanna's mother, Mrs Ezeka concerns herself about fleeing to the West as she confesses to Olanna:

You see, we should have gone abroad last week. The two older ones have gone. His Excellency gave us permission ages ago. We were supposed to leave on a relief plane, but none of them landed. They said there were too many Nigerian bombers. Can you imagine? Yesterday, we waited in Uli, inside that unfurnished building they call a terminal, for more than two hours and no plane landed. But hopefully we'll leave on Sunday. We will fly to Gabon and then on to England - on our Nigerian passports, of course... (Adichie, 2006: 341).

Adichie's critique of the hypocrisy of Biafran leaders can be observed through the well off of their offspring. Professor Ezeka's little daughter, Pamela, is well nourished and dressed: "fat-cheeked face, and the pink satin ribbons in her hair swayed." (Adichie, 2006: 340). Contrarily to poor kids who suffer from malnutrition and die because of the scarcity of adequate medicines, she has a dollhouse with tiny exquisite doll plates and teacups.

All in all Olanna's stay in Abba among these strong women sharpens her active participation to win-the-war- effort by her husband's sides. It makes her revisit her attitude towards the war. As a result, she challenges her mother's plea to flee to London with her and Kainene although she feels pity at her mother's plea: "You know I won't go", she said gently, wanting to reach out and touch her mother's perfect skin. ... I'll stay with Odenigbo and Baby. We will be fine." (Adichie, 2006: 189).

Olanna and her sister's outright refusal symbolises younger women's will to take a different path. A sign of this difference is the celebration of Olanna's wedding in wartime. She resents her mother's extreme attachment to material possessions. That is the reason why she does not inform them of her marriage. The wedding takes place in St Sebastian's Catholic Church in Abba. She does not hold flowers. Very few people attend it: there are some members of Olanna's extended family and some friends of theirs. In a word, poor women make great sacrifices. Olanna's wedding celebration symbolises women's self sacrifice and their allegiance to Biafra. Since marriage cements ties among families, Olanna's marriage epitomizes women's intangible support to Biafra.

In order to enforce women's empowerment the narrator captures Abba women's resilience through Odenigbo's mother. Whereas Abba is about to fall and people are fleeing from bomb raids Odenigbo's mother objects to going. To her mind, it is defying an old truth: Abba has never been defeated. Her rebuff proves that people should hold to their convictions. The old woman is convinced that her hometown will not fall a prey to enemies. It has never



happened and it will not happen in her times. It is her belief that she had better die than run away as she says: "But why are you running? Where are you running to? Can you hear any guns? I will stay here and watch over the house. After you all have run, you will come back. I will be here waiting. Who am I running away from my own house for, gbo?" (Adichie, 2006: 195). An old person never leaves his / her house because he / she is the guardian of the spirits (the departed, the living and those to be born) dwelling there. If she runs, who will take care of them? Odenigbo's mother dies in Abba fully dignified: "Aniekwena... found Mama lying dead from gunshot wounds near the compound wall". (Adichie, 2006: 321). The death of Odenigbo's mother in Abba is evidence that Adichie's hometown is a land of strong and brave women. Even poverty does not shake their convictions.

Another dimension of women's commitment can be appreciated through breadwinning. Previously men's prerogative, breadwinning becomes women's duty and first challenge in wartime. Some men return wounded from the front. In this case women have to take additional roles; I mean their husbands'. Adichie agrees with the formulation made by Ogun-dipe-Leslie Molar (1994) about women's autonomy so as to create assertive women in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. For example, Mrs Muokelu, an Elementary School teacher, changes and starts trading in the enemy line because she needs extra financial resources to support her family. In fact, her husband returns not only as an invalid from the war but she also has a large family as she says: "I have twelve people to feed", she said. And this is not counting my husband's relatives who have just come from Abakaliki.... I am going to start *afia attack* [going behind enemy's line to buy food] and see if I can buy salt. I can no longer teach." (Adichie, 2006: 293). Adichie then captures Biafran war as a space to address the actual formulation of gender roles in an African context.

Similar to Mrs Muokelu, so many women are seen fighting over food. This must not be interpreted as part of women's subaltern roles. Indeed, it is their contribution to win-the-war-effort. Food, clothes and moral support are essential in wartime. Biafran women are strong and they should be acknowledged. For instance, notwithstanding food shortage in relief centre, these women stick to their win-the-war-effort. In this vein, in order to challenge the stereotypical women's roles, the narrator also associates women with jobs that demand previously men's prerogatives like strength, toughness, courage, rigor and vigilance. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* some women carry out these duties better men do. They work as security guards and civil defenders. The narrator introduces the reader to a woman civil defender checking a lorry:

The driver had stopped at a checkpoint. A lorry loaded with sofas and shelves and tables was parked by the side, and a man stood beside it talking to a young female civil defender wearing khaki jeans and canvas shoes... She asked the driver to open the boot, looked inside the glove compartment, and then extended her hand for



Kainene's handbag.... "The woman looked through the bag carefully. She brought out a small radio. "What is this? Is this a transmitter? ... The young woman examined their special duties passes, smiled and adjusted her beret. "Sorry, madam. But you know we have many saboteurs who use strange gadgets to transmit to Nigeria. Vigilance is our watchword! (Adichie, 2006: 312)

In short, women are not only breadwinners but they also secure their community against vandals. By so doing, they win back in their troop their fellow who may be caught by the viruses of hunger, treason or despondency. Apart from the poor women, educated Igbo women have made their contribution. What have they done so far?

3.2. *Educated Women's Roles*

Adichie in second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, has also analysed educated women's contribution to win-the war-effort. Even if they are less seen in relief centre fighting over food their role is invaluable too. For instance, university women's association donates food for the refugees' camps. They even organise a war seminar where they teach people what to do in case there would be war. It is a good idea people should be prepared. As educated people, they are convinced that the war would end and at this moment people would need their certificates, their degrees, because they are the testimonies of one's achievement on this earth. In a word education is the best legacy parents should give their offsprings. For this reason the university women advised people to wrap their certificates in waterproof bags and make sure those are the first things they take if they have to evacuate. (Adichie, 2006: 169). The resilience of a waterproof bag justifies its choice by the university woman.

These educated women's piece of advice is illustrative of the benefits a society gains while educating women. This is the reason why the narrator makes Olanna teach kids during Biafran war. Igbo, indeed, value education too much as the narrator in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* says: "Education is our saviour from poverty and diseases." (Emecheta, 1994: 9). In this vein, Olanna turns herself into a primary school teacher during Biafra. She is aware that education may help resist Nigerian soldiers. So she decides to turn her yard into classes since most of the schools in Umuahia have become refugee camps or army training camps. Many Igbo support this idea providing her with materials to build classrooms and women particularly are looking forward to sending their children to school. Some donate corrugated iron for replacing blown-off roofs. Professor Achara, for instance, promises to provide her with some books and benches and blackboards. An army contractor donates a carton of books for early readers: six copies of *Chike and the River* (Chinua Achebe, 1966), eight simplified editions of *Pride and Prejudice* (Jane Austen, 1813). Some parents bring palm oil and yams and garri, a woman brings chicken because pupils should be well fed otherwise they cannot listen to their teacher carefully.



These books are not mentioned at random. Late Achebe's children's book *Chike and the River* is to redress the racist orientation of curriculum in African schools in the sixties while Jane Austen's novel addresses the issue of gender in the sexist English society.

Indeed, the selection of subjects to be taught is more challenging. Olanna as an outright defender of education selects mathematics, English and civics as subjects to be taught because, as she says, "We have to make sure that when the war is over, they will all fit back easily into regular school. We will teach them to speak perfect English and perfect Igbo, like His Excellency. We will teach them pride in our great nation." (Adichie, 2006: 291). Olanna's selection is purposefully and meticulously made. Mathematics is important and useful in meeting the demands of everyday life. Transactions and real-life problems, and most forms of employment, require confidence and competence in a range of basic mathematical skills and knowledge – such as measurement, manipulating shapes, organizing space, handling money, recording and interpreting numerical and graphical data, and using information and communications technology (ICT). Therefore, children in primary schools should be exposed to mathematics because it provides opportunities for developing important intellectual skills in problem solving, deductive and inductive reasoning, creative thinking and communication.

As for civics it is important to ingrain in children's mind patriotism and citizenship. In an article published by Tanesha Mundle, Leon Mitchell, the once General Manager of Jamaica National Building Society (JNBS) addressing the scores of Jamaican students suggested: "a more structured placement of Jamaican history and civic-based teachings in our primary schools' curriculum which emphasise respect for our national symbols, landmarks and history". Further he adds: "Our first national hero Marcus Garvey puts it very succinctly: a people without a knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots..." (Tanesha Mundle, 2014). Olanna seems to have perceived the same years ahead of Leon Mitchell. By teaching Biafran kids civics Olanna is calling for a swift action to revisit the curricula of African primary and secondary schools. Her civics lessons are centered on Biafra. She teaches Igbo kids the meaning and the significance of the Biafra flag. In addition, she makes them draw the two war leaders in different styles: His Excellency, Ojukwu, is burly, sketched with double lines; while Gowon's effete body is outlined in single lines. Nkiruka, the brightest student's reaction, demonstrates the worthiness of her teaching:

Nkiruka, her brightest student, shaded contours into the faces and, with a few strokes of her pencil, gave Gowon a snarl and His Excellency, a grin.

"I want to kill all the vandals, miss", she said, when she came up to hand in her drawing. She was smiling the smile of a precocious child who knew he had said the right thing. (Adichie, 2006: 281).



Nkiruka's drawing is evidence that Olanna's objective is achieved. While Ojukwu is the saviour and the good leader that deserves praises, Gowon is the enemy. The choice of a female student, Nkiruka, to show the success of Olanna's lesson proves that women can defend their nation provided that they are taught the right national values. This little girl's attitude symbolises that Olanna is a successful teacher. Olanna herself beams of satisfaction as it can be read: "...it was as if she had finally become an equal participant in the war effort." (Adichie, 2006: 281). Definitely, Olanna has established herself as an active participant. Odenigbo, her revolutionary lover, and husband proudly says: "My wife and Ugwu are changing the face of the next generation of Biafrans with their Socratic pedagogy". (Adichie, 2006: 293). The ongoing chaos in present African States hails from the suppression of civics teaching to younger generations. Adichie is inviting education authorities to introduce this subject in the curricula of African schools.

Additionally, Adichie creates other female characters that make interesting win-the-war-effort. Kainene turns herself into an army contractor; a previously male's occupation. She creates a refugee camp ran by two priests: Father Marcel and Father Jude in Orlu. Her camp is original because it does not rely on relief services' contribution. She sets a farm in the nearby of the camp in which protein and soya beans are grown. On this behalf, she asks the Agricultural Research Center for some shit. She also recruits a man from Enugu to teach the refugees how to make baskets and lamps. This is a genuine strategy to make the camp raise fund to survive. She makes a great difference as she observes: "We can create income here. We can make a difference!" (Adichie, 2006: 318). Preoccupied by the refugees' health she finds a doctor to examine the patients every week. This is genial coming from a woman and a daughter of a Big Man. Simply put; Igbo women (poor and educated) are the greatest heroines that male narratives have consciously ignored.

4. Conclusion

Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, provides interesting insights into the roles of women during Biafran war. Indeed, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a hybrid novel because it is a successful combination of history and imagination in a creative writing. This genre allows not only Adichie to portray women of different social classes, but also to emphasise poor women and their educated sisters' invaluable contribution. *Half of a Yellow Sun* also showcases the effects of the war on women who have sold their soul to Ojukwu's cause. They struggle hard to make ends meet.

For Adichie, the present Nigerian community as well as the world may acknowledge Igbo women's greatness and courage during the Biafran war.



They have made great sacrifices; yet in a society where only men are called upon to defend their fatherland. Most of them die while seeking shelter or food for their family. Kwashiorkor named the Harold Wilson's Syndrome after the once British Prime Minister kills so many children because they lack the appropriate food and medicines.

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