

## Questioning Nationhood and National Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun* (2009): Between Politics of Othering and Ethnocide

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**Abstract:** Using Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's fictional work, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2009), this article explores nationhood, national identity, social identities and their impacts on inter-group relationships in Africa. It posits that cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic affiliations can be subjects of inter-group conflicts. Therefore, instead of putting stress on what all human beings have in common, that [we] all belong to the same nation and human race, these social identities confine [our] interactions and compel [us] to view members of the out-group as different from one another. This perceived difference and differentiation create situations of dichotomies between various groups and between 'us' and 'them', thus triggering conflicts whereby hateful rhetoric and discrimination of all kinds become the first weapons of choice and the standards. Against this backdrop, leaning on Homi Bhabha's third space perception and togetherness plea, this paper argues that these socially constructed identities, as they are the result of personal choices, climate conditions or geographical locations, prevent inter-group relationships, the only way to come to terms with [our] differences and to get the most out of them. This gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning, (un)being, (un)becoming, (un)belonging and [national] identities.

**Keywords:** Culture, race, ethnicity, religion, inter-group conflicts, (un)being, (un)belonging.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A large volume of literary texts have been written on nationhood, national identity, stereotyping and othering, focusing on rivalries over political and economic power, forced religious and cultural proselytization, cultural denigration, among others. These factors have many a time torn apart the social fabrics that have always formed the basis of human society and human interactions and African societies have not been spared from the consequences of these sources of dispute, thus putting into question nationhood and national identity. Indeed, the 1960s Africa, a period filled with the hope of rebuilding a new continent free from centuries of cultural, political, and economic subjugation, witnessed some internal discords that abruptly muffled the blowing "wind of change" (MacMillan 1960). This has led to the delay, if not cancellation, of the ongoing reconstruction project, leading many postcolonial writers to be concerned with this disillusionment and its underlying causes and consequences in African people's daily lives. Drawing her inspiration from a historical fact that has left an indelible marks on the history of post-colonial Africa in general and on that of Nigeria in particular, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses her gripping page-turner fictional work *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2009) to go back over and revive one of the early symptoms of the abortion of the unification and rebuilding process of a new Africa: the frightful war of Biafra. As a diagnostic tool, her literary text has left no stone unturned in her efforts to show how identity-based discrimination can foster inter-group discords, which, in turn, lead to differentiation, stereotyping, hatred and dreadful massacres. Set in the early 1960s, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a reconstruction of the devastating Nigeria-Biafra pogrom. It underscores the long-standing cause of disagreement between the Igbo and the Hausa ethnic groups, which, in the story, is caused by a conspicuous economic disparity between the North, land of the Igbo, and the South, land of the Hausa and the Fulani. In the face of what people from the 'Igbo ethnic group perceived as a form of injustice, as a marginalized community, they decide to stand against the Nigerian authorities, most of whom are Hausa. The need for action has however become more pressing as other forms of injustices such as institutional discrimination emerged.

Fed up with remaining idle as their kids continue to be kicked out of the Nigerian schools, in response to what they consider to be also a form of ostracization, the Northerners set to build up their own schools, one of which is known as “the Igbo Union Grammar School” (Adichie 2009, 38) in the literary text. All these forms of discrimination have in the end led Igbo and Hausa characters into viewing each other as strangers in a country, Nigeria, they both belong to but refuse to share anymore, thus making a situation of othering prevail and an inevitable secession war. In fact, othering, as a phenomenon in which the Igbo and Hausa communities, as groups, define and label themselves as not fitting in within the norms of the Nigerian social groups, becomes an effect that influences how they perceive and treat one another. Because of the situation, they view themselves as being parts of the in-group versus those who are seen as part of the out-group. That is how in-groups and out-groups have been formed. This also includes, attributing negative characteristics that differentiate them from the perceived normative social groups that make Nigeria as unified entity. It is an “us versus them” way of thinking about human connections and relationships that have become the norms, a process essentially involving looking at others and saying ‘they are not like me’ or ‘they are not one of us.’ The politics of othering becomes for each group a way of negating their belonging to the nation and their having a [common] national identity individual, humanity and, consequently, those that have been othered are considered less worthy of dignity and respect.

Therefore, the conflict is the direct result of what Saliou Dione terms “*otherization* and differentiation that lead to conflict, hatred, and generate the *us versus them* dichotomy.” (Dione 2018, 28). The strong feeling of hatred and mistrust that fuels the flames of the daily life of the two communities has been born out of the ashes of a diuturnal ethnic, political, territorial, and religious discrimination that has sadly led to a devastating conflict that has taken a heavy toll on human lives. The Igbo-versus-Hausa antagonism, in Adichie’s portrayal of the politics of othering, encompasses all forms of differentiation that are socio-economic, political, cultural, ethnic, religious, ideological etc., that end up pitting characters from different social groups against each other. Moreover, the strained relationship between Nigerian indigenous people, especially the Igbo, and white western expatriates, British people, stems from an age-old ideological dissension. That is the belief that one’s race is ‘superior’ to and more ‘civilized’ than the other race and is therefore ‘entitled’ to rule over it all the time. So deeply entrenched is the myth of the superiority of the white race, product of “*western civilization*” (Hountondji 262) that the presence of British expatriates in Nigeria, a newly independent-black-governed country, does not bring any change as to the way they behave towards the indigenous people. The latter are, in the words of Okeoma, an Igbo character, characterized as “*mental children*” which, Susan, a racist British expatriate, strengthens saying “*people who can’t control their hatred of each other.*” (Adichie 2008, 158-154). She is convinced that what she perceives as a lack of ‘self-control’ is none other than the result of a cultural and civilizational ‘backwardness,’ because as she goes on to say “*civilization teaches you control*” (Adichie 2008, 154).

In denying Nigerian indigenous people of self-control, Susan strips them off their humanity and reduces them to the level of ‘wild animals.’ Her condescending attitude towards the natives encapsulates the ill effects of what Achille Mbembe (2017) calls “*the hierarchization of human types*” (177). To wit racism and cultural denigration, she reveals the extent to which Africa is “*assign[ed] to special unreality such that the continent becomes the very figure of what is null, abolished, and, in its essence, in opposition to what is: the very expression of that nothing whose special feature is to be nothing at all*” (Mbembe 2001, 4). It is in this imaginary of Africa, as a place cut out of any civilization that Susan actually sees Nigerians as being the descendants of, for the characteristics of this fictitious continent match pretty much her conception of the mentality of the indigenous people. It is clear from the foregoing that the politics of othering is a mechanism that feeds on egocentrism, or more specifically on ethnocide and “*ethnocentrism*” (Hountondji 262). It consists in negating “*the existence of any ‘self’ but its own.*” (Mbembe 2017, 2).

Any belief, cultural practice, or attitude different from one’s own is considered nonexistent and, therefore, not worthy of consideration. It is for this reason that the politics of othering is believed to be a socially constructed system, whose aim is to “*disunite, alienate, and dehumanize*” (Looney 2017). Its ambiguity lies in the wide range of characteristics upon which negative judgment of the ‘other’ may be based. “The attributes of who gets defined as ‘other’ differ from place to place, and can be based upon race, religion, nationality, [and] language” (Powel 2017). Applied to the portrayal of Adichie’s *Half of*

*a Yellow Sun*, these social identities relate specific inter-group tensions, chiefly Igbo versus Hausa and Igbo versus British expatriates. To this end, this paper examines the politics of othering regarding the different forms of inter-group contestations it has given rise to and the motivating factors for each form. Through ethnocide and the struggle for self-determination, it shows how unbalanced access to political and economic power paves the way to other forms of social discrimination, which in the end spark off social chaos such as interethnic conflicts. While further drawing attention to racial othering, it analyzes racial chauvinism and xenophobia, to demonstrate how they generate taut interracial relationships sustained by paternalistic discourses and stereotypes, and produces a discursive plea against egocentrism and antagonism for dialogism and attitudinal Changes.

## **2. MAPPING OTHERING AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION**

Echoing the Nigerian civil war, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays characters who are involved in a struggle for self-determination in the face of ethnocide. In her attempt to reproduce a historical fact that has disfigured the sociopolitical atmosphere of Nigeria ever since, the author genuinely puts the stress on the triggering motives, that are *inter alia* economic, religious, cultural, and political. She creates an accurate discourse about the immensity of the resources of the Northerners, capable of arousing the envy of the Southerners. To this end, *Half of a Yellow Sun* opens with a description of the North/South economic and political success dichotomies. In fact, it is on the first pages of the narrative that the reader learns from the thirteen-year-old houseboy, Ugwu, that "*there was, after all, a fortune to be made in the North.*" (Adichie 2008, 7). The first part of the novel is then central in heralding the outpouring of the characters, especially those who live in the Southeast in the North and look for better living conditions. The visit of Olanna, the daughter of a rich Igbo businessman and wife of a revolutionary university mathematics lecturer Odenigbo, to her uncle and aunt Uncle Mbaezi and Auntie Ifeka at Kano, which is an area located in the North, reaffirms the existence of multiple opportunities to be found in that part of Nigeria. She astonishingly notices:

[...] how the North as a whole was different from the South. Here, the sand was fine, grey, and sun-seared, nothing like, the clumpy, red earth back home; the trees were tame, unlike the bursting greenness that sprang up and catch shadows on the road to Umunachi. Here miles of flat land went on and on, tempting the eyes to stretch just a little further, until they seemed to meet with the silver-and-white sky (Adichie 2008, 36).

Adichie bases the beginning of *Half of a Yellow Sun* on the portrayal of both undergoing relationships, past events and relationships that drive home different messages concerning the conflict. The mutual affection that exists between Uncle Mbaezi's family and Abdul Malik, the Hausa slippers vendor, gives the impression that the Igbo and the Hausa live in perfect harmony, that nothing can actually pit them against each other. So does the close relationship between Mohammed, a wealthy Hausa man, and Olanna. Contrastingly, the focus on some past events shows a relatively different picture and foreshadows the gloomy future of the two groups' cohabitation. As such, the reader gets to know that Mohammed and Olanna used to date and that their relationship was broken up because of ethno-religious reasons. Neither Mohamed's mother nor Olanna's parents were in favor of this 'inter-faith' union.

This is stressed in the following passage that features the two former lovers: "*I am no longer the Igbo woman you [Mohamed] wanted to marry who would taint the lineage with infidel blood,*' Olanna said [...] '*Your parents felt the same way as she [Mohamed's mother] did,*' Mohamed turned to look at her" (Adichie 2008, 46). The focus on events that preceded the ongoing story at the onset of the narrative also unearths another source of discord between the Igbo and the Hausa. It is revealed that in the past the Northerners had chased out the Southerners' children from their schools. All these flashbacks are meant to coherently link up past and present events in the narrative, and to herald an eventual eruption of a conflict, confrontation, a civil war.

In fact, the division of Nigeria into two parts, Nigeria and Biafra, is the result of a series of North/South discords marked by unsuccessful past relationships and breakups between the inhabitants of the two geographical areas and an 'arbitrary' denial of rights and opportunities to the Igbo ethnic group. The title of the novel itself, *half of a Yellow Sun*, crystallizes this division and internal conflict. Morve Roshan K. (2014) breaks down the symbolic meaning of the title of Adichie's literary work by arguing that:

Metaphorically, the half of a yellow sun is the rising sun on the Biafran flag. It is a new hope for a bright and glorious future. It also identifies that Nigeria was one country like the sun, but it has parted into two states. This is how Nigeria and Biafra separated like the half sun. The sun is comparable with the country and, half means separation of the people or country. The title of the book [...] is a sign of revolt (Adichie 2008, 152).

Indeed, the republic of Biafra is in the story representative of the desire of the people of an ethnic group to evince their anger and frustrations in the face of otherness. More inhuman still is all the social problems that this 'segregation' engenders as the story unfolds. Discrimination of any kind has become prosaic.

Despite cohabiting within the nation, the Igbo and the Hausa communities undertake well-defined relationships centered on strict religious rules and cultural norms. The failure of the love relationship between Olanna and Mohammed results from the strictness of the religious and cultural backgrounds of each of them that do not tolerate the two protagonists' union. Together with the face-to-face conflict that happens on the battlefield, the day-to-day life of the members of the two ethnic groups reflects a strong antagonism sustained by the absence of happy ending love union throughout the story. What this reveals is rather a cohabitation based on fear and mistrust of the 'other.' This mutual distrust and hatred manifest itself through the character of Olanna's cousin, Arize, and her parents, Auntie Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi. Despite their having open-heartedly welcomed the Hausa slippers vendor Abdulmalik to their family, Arize's and Auntie Ifeka's reception of Olanna's joke to look for a husband for her cousin among Mohammed's siblings helps grasp how truly divided both ethnic groups are: '*No, no! Arize waved her hands in the air in mock horror. 'Papa would kill me first of all if he knew I was even looking at a Hausa man like that [...] 'Unless your father will kill a corpse, because I will start with you first,' Auntie Ifeka said*'" (Adichie 2008, 142). This is proof that both communities' relationship hangs on a string and that the peaceful and harmonious social cohabitation they display is mere masquerade. Often subtle and involving (un)conscious assumptions about each other, with some signs of the phenomenon, through her characterization, Adichie seems to be rejecting a perceived union between the North and the East. She opts for a robust intra-ethnic coalition with people of the same heritage and common destiny, while still keeping an arm to accommodate the 'others' (Awelewa 2017).

Adichie's 'tribalistic' stance, which is a position shared by many Igbo characters in the novel who are ideologically molded in her image, calls into question the leading role played by the economic disparity between the North and the Southeast in the civil war. The Igbo have, from the get go, viz., before the outbreak of the first coup, which they have initiated, embodied some indifference towards the idea of nationalism in favor of their own individual culture. Odenigbo's stance on this issue is unequivocal and owes him the name of "*tribalist*" (Adichie 20228, 21). According to him: "[...] *the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe,*" because "*I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came*" (Adichie 2008, 20). While openly and proudly cherishing his tribal identity, Odenigbo also denigrates both his *Nigerianness* and blackness.

Therefore, the idea of setting up Biafra, a nation ruled by and for the Igbo alone seems, first and foremost, to be a settling of scores not between the Igbo and the Hausa ethnic groups but between the Igbo and the British colonizer. Had it seen the day, the republic of Biafra would have been the symbol of the Igbo community's total break with whatever they consider a white invention, to wit, *Nigerianness* and blackness. In view of the foregoing, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an overview of the socio-economic problems that have turned post-colonial Nigeria into an active theater of inter-tribal conflicts. So important and sensitive is the issue that some postcolonial African scholars like Chinua Achebe have pointed out in their literary works some of the conflict factors dealt with in Adichie's narrative as being more liable to engender conflict than others are. It is against this background that one needs to understand one of them, Kenyan writer Ali Mazrui's (1980) observation that "*ethnicity is a more serious line of cleavage in Black Africa than religion; Africans are more likely to kill each other because they belong to different ethnic groups than religion*" (Mazrui 1980, 69).

Yet, Abdulmalik's taking part in the extermination of the Mbaezi family, at the outbreak of the second military coup led by the Hausa, on the ground that the killing of the Igbo Christian family "*was Allah's will!*" (Adichie 2008, 148) slightly juxtaposes against Mazrui's standpoint. The involvement of Allah's

name shows in no small measure the religious dimension of the massacre. Though brought about by political and economic incentives, religious affiliation cannot be excluded from the aggravating factors of the different forms of conflicts in Adichie's novel. Together with the face-to-face confrontations between Igbo Christians and Hausa Muslims, soldiers and civilians, are included, the negative connotations and naming such as "*bloody Muslim*" (Adichie 2008, 191) and "*infidels*" (Adichie 2008, 58) as ways of creating situations of otherness and differentiation. This underscores the irrefutable role that religion has played in the emergence of the conflict. However, both Adichie's and Mazrui's ideas cohere when it comes down to it even though one has to assume that *ethnociding* is indeed the driving force behind the conflict between Northern Hausa and Southern Igbo. As a proof to that, the first coup is rather perceived as an Igbo deed, not a Christian one. Given the hydra-headed problems that prevail between the two ethnic groups in the story prior to, during and after the conflict, "*Adichie appears in her literary work to project the opinion and position of her people on the question of religion, culture, and nationhood*" (Awelewa 2017).

All the forms of othering dealt with in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are either directly or indirectly, linked to a greater force: colonization. As Strehle (2011) has asserted it, "*Half of a Yellow Sun* places Nigeria in historical context as a nation created in Europe, by Europeans, for European profit, and infused with European ideological commitment to the nation as an emblem of popular unity" (Strehle 2011, 654). This historical setting in which the narrative places the country is very significant inasmuch as it justifies the havoc wrecked on post-colonial Nigeria as a nation by the British colonial system. At the outbreak of the second coup, led by the Northerners in response to the first one initiated by the Igbo, Colonel Madu, an Igbo soldier, makes it crystal clear that the pogrom is the result of the inherited colonial policy that favors the Northerners over the Southeasterners. He states, "*the problem was the ethnic balance policy. I was part of the commission that told our GOC (General Officer Commanding) that we should scrap it, that it was polarizing the army, that they should stop promoting Northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our British GOC*" (Adichie 2008, 141). This statement points out the role of Nigerian senior military officials in perpetuating a system that favors the Hausa soldiers over the Igbo ones. This flagrant discrimination in the army reveals itself one of the numerous factors that have led to the Igbo's denial of their civic bonds with the Hausa, thus questioning Nigerian national identity.

Moreover, Nigerian novelist Adichie recalls the two forms of Western interference in Nigerian internal affairs. The first is through a divide-and-rule system, whose implementation predates the country's independence, to wit, during colonization. The second is more direct through providing weapons to the war protagonists, Nigerian and Biafran armies. The latter form has a lot to do with the extent of the disaster the war has generated. The weapons that are used to kill off thousands of civilians and soldiers are neither Nigerian nor Biafran-made ones; they come from abroad: "*the arms and advice Britain gave Nigeria shaped other countries [...] The Soviet Union sent technicians and planes to Nigeria [...] France sold Biafra some arms [...]*" (Adichie 2008, 258). The internationalization of the war has contributed in worsening the situation and Biafra has suffered more from the consequences of the involvement of western countries. Huge amount of money has been spent on weapons and mercenaries, along with its inability to exploit its oil because the federal government has laid hand on many of the exploitation sites. Consequently, the war rages on fragilizing the economy of Biafra and leading both to a shortage of adequate weapons for the soldiers and foods for the civilians, the consequence of which is the increase of the concentration camps and starvation. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* serves then as a reminder of the poisonous legacy of colonialism and at the same time a wake-up call against ethnocide for many African countries that harbor various ethnic groups. It features characters who undergo the consequences of a colonial system which forces them to view their individual culture as being more important than what they actually have in common, in particular Nigeria (nation, nationhood, national identity) and Africa in general. The fact of 'pushing' their *Nigerianess* into the background and, adopting their colonial identities based on geography, Northerners and Southerners, has led to intense rivalries over political and economic power, whose consequences are repetitive military coups, thus generating a volatile nation.

### **3. PLEA AGAINST INTERRACIAL DISSONANCE AND EGOCENTRISM FOR DIALOGIC ATTITUDES**

History has revealed so many deceptively misleading versions regarding the creation of humanity, whose impacts are still patent in the very nature of the relationships between human 'races', more

specifically between Blacks and Whites, and ethnic groups, the Igbo and the Hausa. Arguably, mistrust, hatred, and underestimation have always marred their relationships instead of mutual consideration. Such forms of antagonism occupies a critical place in postcolonial African literature that is reflective of the antipathy between black and white protagonists, and the Igbo and the Hausa, hence the need for a dialogic philosophy that values the human over race, ethnic group, origin, identity and location. Among the themes developed in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the construct of interracial dissonance, which functions as a defining term for the uncomfortable and obscure nature of interethnic relations, as well as a psychological concept that deals with the internal processes of people and their collectives (Ani 2012, 66), has significantly been given a major part. Chandler (2010) describes it as feelings of physical, psychological, and social disconnect resulting in divergent ideas and intentions which serve to order the phenomenological properties that shape the perceptions and interactions of people in cross-racial situations (Chandler, 2010, 915). It covers a wide range of concepts and purposes around which the whole plot of the narrative revolves with mechanisms influencing the dynamics of *ethnically distinct cultural norms*, with focus on strategic individual-level choices in interethnic interactions. The aim is to point out some historical achievements up to know denied to any other continent but the West. Adichie seeks to mend such inconsistencies and to give back to black people their stolen humanity. Therefore, the first pages of *Half of a Yellow Sun* are devoted to laying out a set of fallacious historical points meant to be broken down. The privilege of carrying out such a mission is given to Odenigbo whose position as an instructor allows deconstructing those fallacies and stereotypes. Nevertheless, for his teachings to amount to something and his words not slip into oblivion, Odenigbo needs to entrust them to a young audience so that the latter does not consciously or unconsciously perpetuate some conventional wisdoms. In this respect, the twelve-year old houseboy Ugwu's first lecture from his boss and mentor is centered on how the position of Africa in the world map is skewed and stands for what is commonly known as Western 'supremacy':

This is our world, although the people who drew this map decided to put their own land on top of ours. There is no top or bottom, you see [...] Our world is round, it never ends. Nee anya, this is all water, the seas and oceans, and here's Europe and here's our continent, Africa, and the Congo is in the middle (Adichie 2008, 10).

A little further, in the novel, Odenigbo introduces to his houseboy Ugwu another man-fabricated historical version, saying, "*they will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born*" (Adichie 2008, 11). Then, there are here a set of fallacies meant to urge Africans to admit the superiority of the white man. Odenigbo's telling Ugwu "*they will teach you*" (Adichie 2008, 11) is a warning message regarding the presence of a western-made device that keeps promoting the cultural superiority of the West while pretending otherwise: the educational system of African countries. The bookish curriculum of their educational system is centered on the teaching and learning of Western history and civilization instead of instilling the valiant deeds of black heroes in the minds of the young generation.

Adichie seems to understand the importance to get rid of this destructive colonial system when she features in her literary text a houseboy whose role is not only to do the cleaning and the washing up as it appears in so many literary productions in postcolonial Africa, but also rather engage the reader in learning, unlearning and relearning processes. The strategy she uses is to thematize 'translating Africa and Africa in translation and trans-relation.' In that prospect, the author introduces to the reader a teenage boy and his boss/teacher with both being keen on showing a reverse view of what is up to now believed to be the real history of Africa and African people. Both characters are reflective of consciousness and change. While serving Odenigbo, Ugwu takes advantage of his pan-Africanist lectures and debates during mealtime.

Those instructive talks between colleagues induce patriotic sentiments in Ugwu and get him ready to take part in the urgency of the moment, i.e. to be able to have his say when the dignity of his community has ever to come under question again. Odenigbo is aware of the way out from the colonial shackles when he states, "*it is now that we have to begin to decolonize our education! Not tomorrow, now! Teach them our history!*" (Adichie 2008, 75). His unflinching commitment to dispense with this colonial legacy reminds of distinguished Kenyan author and playwright, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's two critical essays which are *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) and *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012). These highly acclaimed masterpieces owe their worldwide

reception to the importance they have given to Africa and its diaspora through the advocacy of their languages, whose top position in the curriculum they view as being prerequisite if Africans are ever to recapture their stolen dignity and identity. Indeed, both Adichie and Ngugi are aware that it all started with the education that African indigenous people had received during colonization. That education was purposely designed to instill in African indigenous people submissive ideas that would always push them into full acceptance of their fates as mere colonized subjects, people who would never dare question their status.

Therefore, the early portrayal of twisted historical facts and the awareness about them on the part of some African intellectuals like Odenigbo already inform about the strained and conflictual relationship between British expatriates and native intellectuals all along the story. Adichie describes the life of the individuals who, though bound to live together as one race, have all the same to come up against cultural and ideological differences and politics of differentiation. Odenigbo's mocking some Eurocentric scholars, saying "*nobody can take Hegel seriously [...] He's funny, very funny. But Hume and Voltaire and Locke felt the same way about Africa*" (Adichie 2008, 50) reminds the reader of the falsity of these Eurocentric scholars' theories about Africa. The western characters involved in the narrative look down on the indigenous people they interact with. All of them share the belief that neither African civilization nor African indigenous people's mentality has been affected by the evolution of humanity so far, that the continent and its people have remained 'static' throughout time. The desire of Richard Churchill, another British expatriate, to write about the Igbo culture gets him to admit the creativity of black people, a reality that he would not have acknowledged had he been detached from the Nigerian people as so many other British expatriates in the story did, specifically his ex-girlfriend Susan.

However, Richard Churchill's astonishment upon learning about the roped-pot, an Igbo-made sculpture, reveals how small-minded Africans are considered when it comes to creativity and invention. Such a discovery leads him to imagine how should have been "*the lives of people [the Igbo] who were capable of such beauty, such complexity, in the time of Alfred the Great*" (Adichie 2008, 72). His fascination is taken by Okeoma as a condescending attitude towards Nigerian indigenous people's intellect and intellectuality when he utters, "*you sound surprised, as if you never imagined these people capable of such things*" (Adichie 2008, 111). The discovery of an Igbo-made sculpture that dated back to the time of Alfred the Great (871-99 A.D.), a period that predates far colonialism which, in turn, is believed to mark the trip of Africa into human history, is a forensic evidence used to debunk the lack of creativity of African people. This discovery confirms African indigenous people's intellect and contribution to the evolution of world science and technology prior to the coming of the colonial schools. More to the point, the sculpture also substantiates the author's point about revealing the ancientness of the African civilization over the Western one. In *Soul on Ice* (1968), African American writer Eldridge Cleaver hilariously pictures the relationship between Black and White as a human body whose different segments, though interconnected, follow some hierarchical orders: the most vital organ to the less important one. He argues, "*the mechanics of the myth demand that the brain and the body, like east and west, must never meet [...]*" (Adichie 2008, 151).

In other words, whenever, the brain is a symbol of intellect and creativity and, therefore, governs the world, the body, which is an epitome of black people, void of any ability to bring into existence anything genuine, thus capable of enhancing the development of humankind, is here to get orders from the brain and to put them into effect. Cleaver's description fairly captures the conflictual relationship between Nigerian indigenous people and some egocentric British expatriates featured in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The two groups though belonging to the same race, the human race, as the brain and the body to the same body, see each other as different. This preconceived difference results in the concoction of all kinds of theories aiming at elevating one racial group over the other while dehumanizing the members of the other racial group; thus creating a situation of othering and antagonism. Furthermore, at the closing of his essay *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said has raised a set of questions, which he considered critical in discussing the problems of human experience. What he is concerned with is:

*how does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (When one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the "other")? (Said 1978; 325).*

The excessive egotism that Said underscores is the basic reason for the intrinsic ideological discord between Blacks and Whites in Adichie's literary text. In the same line of thought, in *The Critique of Black Reason* (2017), Achille Mbembe terms the self-centeredness attitude that consists in praising oneself while belittling or dehumanizing the other, writing:

the narrative of Western consciousness of Blackness", which he argues "in seeking to answer the question 'Who is he?' the narrative seeks to name a reality exterior to it and to situate that reality in relationship to an I considered to be the center of all meaning [...] anything that is not identical to that I is abnormal (Mbembe 2017, 28).

In so doing, he posits that the root cause of interracial dissonances stems from this egomania, the excessive desire to create a world in which all positive things, beauty, knowledge, creativity, invention and so on are said to be the characteristics of one single race. In this imaginary world, all those who do not belong to that racial category are considered 'backward,' 'uncivilized' excluded from the class of human race. Adichie presents Richard Churchill as the embodiment of sociability and as someone who is different from "*English people who thought they understood African people better than they understood themselves*" (Adichie 2008, 36). That is why he is assigned a symbolic role in the narrative. All the incidences that provide a better grasp of the position of his people, i.e. White people, are transmitted to the reader through his gaze. He either takes part in the scenario, that is, participates in the conversion, or simply attends it as a mere spectator. In fact, the worst forms of stereotypes and clichés are displayed at the onset of the third section of the first part of the novel entitled *The Early Sixties*. In this section, the narrator displays all the dehumanizing images and stereotyping in order to better picture the British expatriates' pictorial representation of Nigeria people:

They [the British expatriates] chuckled about how tribal Nigerian politics was, and perhaps these chaps were not quite so ready to rule themselves after all [...] And when he [Richard] said he had just arrived in Lagos and wanted to write a book about Nigeria, they gave him brief smiles and advice: The people were bloody beggars, be prepared for their body odours and the way they will stand and stare at you on the road, never believe a hard-luck story, never show weakness to domestic staff (Adichie, 53-4).

The argument captures the overall sense of a grotesque misrepresentation of the Nigerians and their communities. The narrator meaningfully links here historical facts with her British characters' thoughts. All along the description, she relies on one particular characteristic to picture the behaviors and mentalities of a whole community. The representation is replete with negative concepts, which one knows are on a par with the real perception of the Westerners towards black people, but more especially towards Africans. This reminds the reader of what Adichie calls such "the danger of a single story", to debunk the misrepresentation and misinterpretations Africans are subjected to and whose impacts she discusses arguing that "*the consequences of a single story are this: It robs people of their dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar*" (Adichie 2009).

Following the same logic, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Susan's archetypal role in spreading preconceived ideas helps to better understand the opinions white supremacists have about black people, not as a sheer coincidence but rather a settled belief. She sees Nigerian women as not jealous worthy persons, as unattractive beings incapable of enticing her boyfriend, Richard Churchill. As for British expatriates, women are believed to be gorgeous enough to divert Richard's attention from her, Susan objects to his boyfriend's interacting with them. She is imbued with all the negative characteristics and thoughts. Through her characterization, one always comes across the existence of a 'static' continent inhabited by 'savages' and 'primitive' beings in dire need of salvation from a liberator who can be none other than a Westerner.

Still dwelling on Adichie's account of interracial divisions, the worst interpretation of Africa and its people in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is laid out by the Western media. Her perception of the latter has a lot to do with the various representations of propaganda which she devotes a great part to in her account of the civil war. To raise awareness about the contribution of this means of communication in spreading fake news, Adichie has entrusted the mission to Richard whose new job as a journalist, together with his racial identity, helps voice out the truth. As colonel Madu explains it to him on one occasion in the narrative:

They [the world] will believe a white man who lives in Biafra and who is not a professional journalist. You can tell them how we continue to stand and prevail even though Nigerian MiG-Seventeens, I-Twenty-eights, and L-Twenty-nine Delfins flown by Russians and Egyptians are bombing us every day [...] (Adichie 2008, 305)

Then it is through Richard's racial category and new profession that his account of his people's exaggerations seems to be given impetus in the novel. Had he been a writer, which he claims to be at the beginning of the story, the author's conviction about the need to adhere to a group in order to know their ways of life would not have been realistic. Talking about the role of Western media in the coverage of the Biafra war, one is not surprised when examining the portrayal of such issues by certain media outlets:

The articles annoyed him [Richard]. 'Ancient tribal hatreds', the Herald wrote, was the reason for the massacres. Time magazine titled its piece Man Must Whack, an expression printed on a Nigerian lorry, but the writer had taken whack literally and gone on to explain that Nigerians were so naturally prone to violence that they even wrote about the necessity of it on their passenger lorries. Richard sent a terse letter off to Time. In Nigerian Pidgin English, he wrote, whack meant eat. At least the observer was a little more adroit, in writing that if Nigeria survived the massacres of the Igbo, it would survive at anything. But there was a hollowness to all the accounts, an echo of unreality (Adichie 2008, 166).

The purpose of the hyperbolic headlines and the twisted names is primarily to install fear and disgust in whoever has never come to Africa but just heard about it from such media. Western media's coverage of the civil war reminds of Mbembe's (2017) assertion that "*European discourse, both scholarly and popularly, had a way of thinking, of classifying and imagining distant worlds that was even based on modes of fantasizing*" (Mbembe 2017, 12).

Throughout the twisted interpretations of the media propaganda tools like *Herald*, *Time*, and the *Observer*, Adichie lays out the unsubstantial and phantasmagoric Western ways of covering, evaluating, analyzing, and even dehumanizing African people from afar. Despite Richard's strenuous efforts to write back articles to Western editors in order to correct these misinterpretations, his account is considered "*bland and pedantic*" (Adichie 2008, 167). Because he fails to lay the emphasis "*on the human angle*" that is, whether the Hausa and the Igbo "*mutter any tribal incantations while they did the killings*" or if "*they eat body parts like they did in the Congo*" (Adichie 2008, 167). This set of interrogations explicitly reveals that knowing the truth is not important for the Western media. What mostly matters for them is rather twisted information that would lay out the 'barbaric' and 'savage' angle of African people they like so much to talk about. What they expect to see is a 'stagnant' version of Africa; a version that Adichie (2009) terms a '*single story of catastrophe*' in which there is no possibility for Africans to be like Westerners. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity; no possibility of a connection as human equals. Part of the Western disenfranchising mechanisms is centered on the construction of a 'self' around which revolves all the 'rest.' The attitudes of a British and an American journalist both by the name of Charles, is an additional example that further shines light on the Western egocentrism in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Upon coming on the concentrate camps where the Igbo refugees starve to death, one of the journalists' first concerns is to be shown the spot where an Italian oil worker is shot dead by the Biafran soldiers, an attitude that shocks Richard:

Richard exhaled. It was like somebody sprinkling pepper on his wound: Thousands of Biafrans were dead, and this man wanted to know if there was anything new about one dead white man. Richard would write about this, the rule of Western journalism: One hundred dead black people equal one dead white person (Adichie 2008, 369).

That glaring egocentrism is buttressed by both journalists' belief that Africa is a place where "*there's a lot of free sex*" (Adichie 2008, 369); a place inhabited by "*Niggers [who] are never choosy about what they eat [...] [who] are eating everything*" (Adichie 2008, 370-1). Understandably, there should be no established norms or rules to abide by in a 'jungle.' It is for this reason that one of the journalists feels offended when asked to show his passport at the airport. The preconceived ideas that he has already acquired and instilled in his mind about the African continent prevent him from facing the reality so much so that he channelizes his deception into rage, and says that "*it's ridiculous that they still follow protocol in this shithole [Africa]*" (Adichie 2008, 372). Arising from this observation, one can argue

that othering is, to some extent, a deliberate action, for one does not necessarily need any palpable evidence or logical reason upon which to base one's negative and demeaning judgment of the 'other.'

Unlike the racist attitude of the British expatriates towards the natives, which is based on the belief in the superiority of the white race and of white supremacist ideology in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the racism and xenophobia of Nigerian indigenous people is of a different nature: "*it is neither biological nor metaphysical, it is social and historical. It is not based on a belief in the inferiority of the detested group but on the conviction, and in large measure on the observation, that this group is truly an aggressor and dangerous*" (Memmi 131). To put it bluntly, racism is, in this context, a mechanism of reaffirmation, a way of snatching back one's stolen humanity and dignity. According to Mbembe (2017) "*for those who have been subjected to colonial domination, or for those whose share of humanity was stolen at a given moment in history, the recovery of that share often happens in part through the proclamation of difference*" (Mbembe 2017, 183).

It is therefore under this context that the racist reactions noticed in the representation of the indigenous people in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is to be understood. Aspiring for difference is a byword for proclaiming their worth as human beings. Richard Churchill's rejection and belated integration into the Igbo community has much to do with the old-age image that he and all those who resemble him in terms of skin color project through the minds and eyes of the Nigerian people. Despite his remarkable commitment and effective actions towards the Biafra cause, the static image of the 'ruthless' white colonizer follows him all along the story and makes him aware of his otherness. Major Udodi's interpretation of Kainene's, Olanna's twin sister, relationship with Richard shows how discrimination is used in this context as a hitting back. According to him, as rich as Kainene is, she normally should not date a white man because, usually, only broke and materialistic women are interested in having white boyfriends:

I magonu, you know, what I am saying is that our women who follow white men are a certain type, a poor family and the kind of bodies that white men like [...] Fantastically desirable bottoms [...] The white men will poke and poke and poke the women in the dark but they will never marry them. How can! They will never even take them out to a good place in public. But the women will continue to disgrace themselves and struggle for the men so they will get chicken-feed money and nonsense tea in a fancy tin. It's a new slavery, I'm telling you, a new slavery. But you are a Big Man's daughter, so what are you doing with him (Adichie 2008, 80-1).

Heretofore, one can hardly dissociate the racial problems exposed in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* from ideological disconnect. Chauvinistic attitudes have motivated false discourses and given rise to unfriendly dispositions between black and white characters. The other critical element that fuels inter-group antagonism is the attempts of one racial group at restricting the histories and abilities of another one based on supremacist ideologies. In either way, the consequences of such discords form a whole chapter in the vocabulary of humankind, abundant in extremely pejorative terms:

They result ultimately in the creation of caricatures worth loathing on either side (Black and White); from devils and niggers to crakas and coons, enemy and foe. 'White devils' and heathen, 'Black animals', rather than European and African descended men, women and children with particular cultural frames, strengths and ways of interacting (Ani 2012, 78).

The politics of othering fosters then antagonism and gives rise to xenophobic and racist rhetoric. It appears that in addition to the geographical boundaries, Africa and the West, the deep-seated habit to show little affection for individuals (un)belonging to the out-racial groups is the initiating cause of interracial hatred and distrust.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The article has analyzed *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a reminder of the real incentives that fuel inter-group conflicts in postcolonial Africa: racism and ethnocide. It has also revealed that the monopolization of political and economic power can create social unrests, which in the end, question nationhood, national identity, and tear asunder a homogenous society. Besides, religious inclinations and cultural affiliations are key factors that easily jeopardize social stability. Nigerian political and military leaders' roles in perpetuating a colonial system that draws wedges between the Igbo and the Hausa ethnic groups in Nigeria has been pointed out as one of the main factors that have given rise to the civil war; known as

the Biafra war. The analysis has further leaned on the strong attachment of Adichie's characters to their ethnic, racial, and religious identities to show how they cause them to foster solid intra-group coalitions while putting members of the out-group on the back burner. Indeed, this situation has deprived them of any possibility to get closer to each other and to get the most of their cultural and religious differences. Scant regard for the 'other', hatred and mutual contempt, are the only fruits that Adichie's characters have reaped from their relationships. The complete absence of happy ending interethnic and interracial relationships is a yardstick against which to measure the implications of the politics of othering, nationhood and national identity in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. From the beginning to the end of the story, stereotyping and mistrust of each other have been the only feelings that have united the Igbo and the Hausa people. The novel's sole interracial love relationship between Richard Churchill and Kainene, Olanna's twin sister has ended up with the tragic disappearance of Kainene at the end, though it purports to confirm the 'impossibility' of a reconciliation between Black and White but also between Africa and the West, one can still nurture hope for a post-racial world.

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