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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Dilemma and Resistance of “the Other”: An Analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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**ABSTRACT**

The classical piece *Half of a Yellow Sun*, composed by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie garners critical acclaim. Post-colonial perspectives such as diaspora, identity, and history have gained popularity among scholars; however, more comprehensive research is required. Grounded on post-colonial theory, this article attempts to present the dilemma of the “other” from the perspective of race and ethnicity and examines how the “other” resists and constructs their space for survival within the colonial discourse. Evidence suggests that Adichie, as the black and the Igbo, delineates the dilemma and resistance of the “other” to convey her firm racial, ethnic, and cultural confidence.

**KEYWORDS**

*Half of a Yellow Sun*, the “other”, dilemma, resistance, confidence

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**1. Introduction**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the promising female writers in Nigeria, has been dubbed “the successor of the African literary giant Chinua Achebe in the 21st century”. Adichie positions herself as a writer who composes realistic works set in an African context, and her works reflect both the history and realities of post-colonial Nigeria and the African continent. Her major works include *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah*, etc. The novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* remains a classic of war literature since it is written against the backdrop of the Nigerian civil war and awards the Orange Prize for Fiction. The novel consists of four parts spanning the entire 1960s and is told through the perspectives of Ugwu, Olnana, and Richard, three characters living in Biafra. Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old boy from a poor village, works as a houseboy for a university professor Odenigbo. Olnana, a privileged woman who lives in Lagos while receiving her education in London, abandons her lush life and relocates with her lover Odenigbo. And Richard, an English man who is obsessed with the roped pots of Igbo-Ukwu art, falls in love with Kaneine (Olnana’s twin sister). The novel represents in-depth historical truth and enlightens the reader to consider moral responsibility, the end of colonialism, national loyalty, issues of race, class, and gender, and the processes and ways in which love, affection, and friendship complicate all this.

**2. Literature Review**

Despite its recent release, this novel has been favored by academics both at home and abroad. The primary research perspectives consist of trauma, diaspora, issues of identity, and feminism. As a work of war literature, war can bring endless trauma to people while forcing them into exile. Susan, in her article “Diasporic Vision in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*,” discusses diaspora, and she thinks that “the loss of Biafra renders these figures spectral in their powerlessness and foreign in their alienation from the triumphant nation” (Strehle, 650). To some extent, the spiritual dispersion caused by this alienation is even more horrible. Seretha D. Williams, in her article ““Dark Swoops”: Trauma and Madness in *Half of a Yellow Sun*,” tries to examine the systemic, individual, and gendered traumas of the Nigerian-Biafran War to comment on the aftermath of the empire (Seretha, 139). Based on post-colonial theory, this article probes into the dilemma and resistance of the “other” in terms of race and ethnic group and further explores the intentions of the black Nigerian women writer Adichie.

### 3. An Analysis of the Dilemma of the "Other"

#### 3.1 Racial Dilemma - the black as the "other."

At the source of Western philosophy, Plato mentions the relationship between the same and the other in his *Dialogues*. Zhang Jian defines "other" as a concept formed in relation to the self (118). The term "other" is commonly used to refer to the colored people who live in the whole third-world countries and regions outside the western white world in the traditional western colonial discourse. And the antagonism between the white and the black is particularly obvious. Black people serve as the "other" in the western-centric discourse represented by white people. The British always tell jokes to illustrate each of the characteristics of Africans. The most impressive one is that when an African was walking a dog, an English asked, what are you doing with that money?" and the African answered, "It's a dog, not a monkey" (64). The British compare Africans to monkeys and see them as the same species as animals, while the Africans think the British mistake dogs for monkeys. The Africans are completely unaware that the British were mocking them. In this regard, the white believe that they have inherent superiority, while the black are inferior and subordinate in a marginal position. Although the novel fails to detail what black men suffer, their plight is vividly portrayed in the conversations of Odenibo and other politicians.

We are living in a time of great white evil. They are dehumanizing blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia; they fermented what happened in the Congo, and they won't let American blacks vote, but the worst of all is what they are doing here. This defense pact is worse than apartheid and segregation, but we don't realize it. They are controlling us from behind draw curtains (122).

As far as the English are concerned, there exists no disparity between the black and the original inhabitants because both do not belong to orthodox ethnic groups but rather the marginalized "other". They are not only deprived of legitimate rights but even subjected to political and ideological control, thus descending into puppets pushed around by the white.

According to post-colonial feminism theory, what the Western world supports is feminism featuring white women as the main body, which pursues equal rights between white women and white men. Within the power discourse that white men are the "self", black women and even women in the entire third country are forced to be placed in a dual marginal position. Susan, a white female of the British elite in the novel, is a typical racist who speaks with authority and despises colored people. At first, she comments on Nigeria from a typically Western perspective, "they have a marvelous energy, but very little sense of hygiene" (66), in which she highlights the backwardness and filthiness of eastern countries. In addition, her racial discrimination extends to Kainene. Upon first meeting Kainene at a party, Susan is informed that Kainene is the daughter of Chief Ozobia and has recently graduated from a master's program in London. Susan just said hello to Kainene and turned around immediately to talk to others, indicating her scorn for the black woman. When Susan knew that Richard had an affair with Kainene, she calls Kainene "lady love", "lady love in the comic caricature that she assumed was an uneducated accent" (247). Even Kainene's father, a chief who owns half of Lagos, Susan thinks that "he doesn't have much of a formal education, and neither has his wife" (70). Susan becomes enraged and even violent when Richard interacts with other white women; however, she is never concerned that Richard would be drawn to a black woman. "She would not have said that if he had been talking to one of the British women, even though some of them had helped write the Nigerian constitution. It was, he realized, simply that black women are not threatening to her, were not equal rivals" (65). In Susan's view, white women are far superior to black ones in terms of ethnic origin, social status, and personal cultivation.

In brief, it is obvious that the racial prejudice of Westerners represented by Susan is deeply ingrained. She takes it for granted that the colored people are inferior and belittles them at will because of their low social status and poor cultural breeding. In Richard's love triangles, Susan assumes that his love for Kainene is just a momentary impulse, a desire to experience lovemaking with a black woman. In this sense, Kainene is completely objectified as an object to be played with by the white man, an object of sexual desire, rather than an independent individual.

#### 3.2 Ethnic Dilemma - the Igbo as the "other."

The term "nation" can be defined in a broad and narrow sense. Generally speaking, "nation" in a broad sense refers to the human community of a country or region based on geographic relations, such as the Chinese nation. In a narrow sense, "nation" refers to a group of people who are distinguished from other groups in terms of culture, language, and history. At this point, the "nation" mentioned in this article refers to the narrow sense. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country, mainly composed of Hausa in the north (29% of the population), Yoruba in the west (21%), and Igbo in the east (18%). Britain, as the former suzerain state of Nigeria, "exercises various forms of control over the former colony" (Bill, 162). With its support, the Hausa people in the north dominate the central government and military. At the same time, the Igbo people in the east have amassed enormous material wealth due to the discovery of oil, thus becoming the richest region in the country. The Hausa is a noble and orthodox ethnic group, and other ethnic groups, as "others," are minorities. Susan described the three main tribes of Nigeria in the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*: "the Hausa in the north were a dignified a lot, the Igbo were surly and money-loving, and the Yoruba were rather jolly even if they were first-rate lickspittles" (66). There are the three largest tribes of Nigeria: the Hausa of the North, who are mostly Muslim (and favored by

the British, as they were easiest to rule from afar), the Yoruba in the Southwest, and the Igbo in the Southeast. The Igbo developed the strongest middle-class and originally lived in small republican societies. In a sense, Susan's comments elucidate the views of the British and even the West on the Nigerian nation. In their eyes, the Hausa are the authoritative rulers recognized by the West, while the Igbo are forced to act as the "other" in the national discourse system constructed by the authoritative rulers. This so-called authority gives the Hausa an innate sense of superiority over others, especially the Igbo.

Olana meets an upper-class Hausa man on a flight from Kano to Nsukka, who accuses the Igbo of their greed on the occasion of the removal of the Igbo vice-chancellor from the University of Lagos. And he demonstrates that Olana's delicate face and generosity seem more Hausa than Igbo. In his eyes, the Hausa symbolize nobility, while the Igbo are supposed to be worldly, snobbish, and uncivilized. If Olana's suffering is merely considered as the "other" in appearance and temperament, then what happens to Martin and Anulika seems to rise to the "other" of personality and dignity. The northern soldiers lock him up in a barrack cell and compel him to eat his own shit. Such an inhuman punishment dishonors his dignity and traumatizes him a lot. After the war, Ugu returns home and finds that both his mother and sister, Anulika, have died in the war. Her little sister has been gang-raped by five Hausa soldiers. "The sister he had remembered as beautiful was not at all. She was an ugly stranger who squinted with one eye" (500). Faced with this inhuman atrocity, Anulika fights back but still ends up in failure, which leaves scars on her flesh and mind that are hard to heal. In contrast, another Igbo woman, Nesinazi, chooses to live with a Hausa soldier and gives birth to a child. She also tells Ugu that the Hausa treats her well, and if she had been there at that time, Anulika would not be in such a situation. We must realize that even if Nesinazi has not suffered the same abuse as Anulika, both must submit to the Hausa because they are low-class aliens without the ability to resist in the eyes of the Hausa soldier. The way Nesinazi submits is to have an affair with the Hausa, which signifies that she must be attached to a Hausa man to keep herself safe in the war. Anulika endeavors to resist the Hausa soldiers and ultimately is forced to succumb to their force and authority, becoming the "other" in their brutal violence.

*Half of A Yellow Sun* is a novel set against the backdrop of the Nigerian civil war. In the national discourse constructed by the Hausa, the ruling authority, the Igbo are portrayed as the "other". Even the accent is first-rate when it comes to the Hausa. The Igbo, on the other hand, whom soldiers claim are pagan, are seen as barbaric, uneducated, and a source of unrest in Nigeria.

#### **4. An Analysis of the Resistance of the "Other"**

##### **4.1 The Image of transformed Richard**

Richard, who is a representative of the white people in the novel, shows a temperament completely opposite to the colonialists. Susan and Richard are related, whereas whenever they go to a party, Richard always stands by silently without saying a word and does not join in the circle of others. Meanwhile, he is even dubbed "Susan's pretty baby". The word "baby" is a term of endearment for a man to a woman, and calling a man "pretty baby" denotes that the man is worthless and subordinate to women. It is evident that Susan and Richard hold primary and secondary positions, respectively, in their relationship. Susan did almost everything for Richard without asking his permission: what kind of work does he do? Where does he work? And where does he live? And so on. He does not act as he wishes but rather makes Susan satisfied, which leads us to question their relationship. The image of Richard runs counter to the patriarchal system that upholds the superiority of men over women and the subordination of men to women. Richard is just curious about black women; in Susan's subconsciousness, however, she never imagines that the white man has fallen in love with a black woman with a black complexion and nearly flat chest. Richard finds himself speaking differently than usual in the presence of this black woman.

His naked body was pressed to hers, and yet he was limp. He explored the angles of her collarbones and her hips, all the time willing his body and his mind to work together, willing his desire to bypass his anxiety. But he did not become hard. He could feel the flaccid weight between his legs (73).

There exhibit numerous details to describe Richard's strong affection and love for Kainene, whereas the white man becomes sexually impotent in the face of the black woman. Freud argues that sexuality is the driving force behind all human thought and action, and sexual desire becomes the primary expression and demonstration of a person's charisma. Richard's sexual impotence His sexual impotence minimizes masculinity, which is also manifested as a resistance to white racial superiority.

"Using an anonymous third-person narrator who perceives narrative information through several focalizing characters, the novel represents rich analogous personal accounts of historical events" and shows a real picture of life in Nigeria (Akpome, 22). Culture is embodied in all aspects of life, among which diet, as the most basic element of everyday life, is fully as well as vividly reflected in this novel. Harrison serves as Richard's servant with a fanatic passion for all non-Nigerian food. He takes pride in his ability to cook food that Westerners enjoy but Nigerians will not, such as beets. This act of distinguishing himself from his own race gave him great confidence. He cooks for Richard according to American recipes every day in a different way, and he thinks the master

will like it. When Richard resists such food, Harrison grumbles disappointedly, "but, say, I am cooking the food of your country; all the food you are eating as children I cook. I am not cooking Nigerian foods, only foreign recipes" (83). The native Nigerian man, who is thin, hunchbacked, and middle-aged, supposes that all western West is superior to that of his native country. Even though Richard enjoys Nigerian cuisine, he still prepares meals in the Western style. He hollows out the eggplant, fills it with cheese, and adds spices to make "stuffed garden eggs", on which Odenibo makes comments as follow, "You know the Europeans took out the insides of an African woman and then stuffed and exhibited her all over Europe" (120)? The fact that the original things are fundamentally altered by external matter. Hanison is a case of someone who is raised in Nigerian culture and who worships Western ideas and culture wholeheartedly despite being a native of that country, denoting his lack of cultural confidence. Apart from the food culture, there exist exquisite Igbo-Uku arts which attract, as the novel mentions, to reach Biafra. His fascination with Igbrst dates to relative reports about Igbo-Uku, and He has been "utterly fascinated by the bronzes since he had perfected the complicated art of lost-wax casting during the time of the Viking raids. There is such marvelous complexity in the bronzes, just marvelous" (122). Odenibo believes that Richard's excessive surprise shows distrust that the Igbo people create such delicate art. Odenibo, a sagacious university professor, behaves with cultural inferiority.

Even though the African continent has been liberated from colonial rule, Western ideology has had a profound impact on the continent. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies, and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all" (Ashis, 11). Uwgu changes his cooking style under Olana's influence while retaining the regional flavor. Harrison's blind obedience to Western culture results in no one eating his dishes. The author expresses her complaint of this cultural insecurity through Odenibo: "If you don't like what is inside a particular food, then leave it alone, don't stuff it with something else" (120). It is undeniable that Western rule has advanced culture, but we must strengthen our cultural self-confidence as we extract the essence and eliminate the bad.

#### **4.2 The Resistance of the Whole Ethnicity**

It's widely acknowledged that Nigeria features a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Muslims in the north and Christians in the south have fought for control of the nation since the country's independence from Britain in 1960. The conflict between the two sides is sharpened on account of the discovery of economically valuable oil deposits near the Igbo region, a Christian area in the south. The entire country suffers massacres because the east poses a threat to the centralized government in the north. And the hatred stems from "the informal divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial exercise" (178). The entire nation protested the massive Igbo massacre carried out by the Hausa. Ojukwu announced the secession from the Federation and established the independent Republic of Biafra, which is a new country, a new beginning. Odenibo, a representative of the revolutionaries, calls for the independence of the people of Eastern Nigeria. The independence of Eastern Nigeria is countered by the federal military government. Therefore, the federal army launched a military attack on Biafra called the Nigerian civil war (also known as the Biafra War), a war between the Hausa and the Igbo. During the war, people from all classes of the Igbo fought against the brutal Hausa. Odenibo flees with Olanna and their baby several times during wartime, and they both spare no effort to battle the war in their own ways. Odenibo travels a long way to the human resource department to compile names and addresses day after day; meanwhile, he also joins the propaganda team to educate the people after work. At the same time, Olanna espouses the revolutionary cause, first at a sewing group to sew uniforms for the soldiers and then at a school to teach basic lessons to children. Kainene, Olanna's twin sister, shows a strong sense of duty as a member of the Igbo community. Despite the fact that Kainene remains in a perilous situation during the war, she still takes control of the camp's food supply and makes the best use of the resources at her disposal to improve the refugees' living conditions. Besides, she attempts to cultivate farms and grow edible crops in the camps, meanwhile hiring people to teach the refugees skills in order to generate some income. As the war extends and natural conditions deteriorate, an increasing number of refugees suffer from hunger and disease. Kainene insists on regularly checking on the well-being of the refugees living there, and when she discovers someone has passed away, she buries them alongside the priest. Confronted with the ethnic crisis, the Igbo did not ignore it but fought it.

#### **5. Conclusion**

As an ethnic writer, Adichie deeply senses the plight of the "other" who she encounters. She positions herself as, first, a black person, then an Igbo person, and finally, a writer. She, a writer of the new generation, does not experience the war, yet both her grandfather and maternal grandfather died from it. Adichie was exposed to the stories of the civil war from a young age, and the aftermath of Biafra remained with her. Post-colonialist Schwab proposes that both victims and perpetrators of violence should grieve, take responsibility, and make amends for the loss and harm caused by the history of violence. If they remain silent or cover up the violence and refuse to take responsibility and acknowledge the crime and shame, future generations will be subjected to psychological trauma and deformity. Adichie contends that despite the end of the civil war, Nigeria has always been at war, as evidenced by ongoing ethnic conflicts and frequent military coups. The cycle of violence continues, and the history of violence repeats. It is imperative to reconstruct the collective memory of the black ("May we always remember" (445), as Adichie mentions in the afterword), acknowledge the historical injustice done to the Igbo community, and engage in constructive dialogue to reach

a reconciliation. In a sense, Adichie documents the plight of the "other" in terms of race and ethnic group in the hope that all minorities can receive equal treatment.

The "other" who descend into the dilemma also rebel. The portrayal of Richard as a sexually impotent man who loves Nigerian food and art demonstrates, in fact, a rebellion against the plight of the race and a strong voice for the colored people. Richard eats pepper soup with ease, while even another African cannot do that, which is proof that Richard is "an African in his past life" (120). Such an image of Richard, as a matter of fact, can be seen as a kind of deconstruction of race and culture, breaking the inherent situation between the West and East and seeking the peaceful coexistence and integration of the two cultures. Resistance to the plight of the country is elucidated by Biafra's independence and the contributions of all Igbo people against the Hausa. The "half of a yellow sun" is a part of the Biafra flag, which is described in the novel by Olana: "Red was the blood of the sibling massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future" (294). Adichie, as a black writer, speaks through the mouth of the character in the novel: "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" (32). The writer's attitude towards hypocritical Western civilization is outlined in a few short sentences, whose sensitivity stems from the establishment of her self-identity. By presenting the existential plight of the "other" and exploring how the "other" seeks the possibility of resistance in the colonial discourse system and constructs the space for survival, what Adichie really wants to convey is that black people and the Igbo are supposed to keep firmly racial confidence, ethnic confidence, and cultural confidence. As professor Wang Ning says in his book *Comparative Literature and Contemporary Cultural Criticism*: today we have clearly entered an era of cultural pluralism... We feel as if we are in a vast global village where there are many nationalities, varied cultures, and civilizations. All of us are aware of the cultural fit and unfit quality as well as its difference, therefore making communication with each other. Only with firm racial confidence, ethnic confidence, and cultural confidence can we achieve peaceful coexistence and cultural sharing. The author's intentions are further understood by presenting the suffering and resistance of the other from the post-colonial perspective, and other struggling nations and peoples are given the courage to resist. However, there still exists a shortage with this study in that it only covers two major factors, namely nationality and ethnicity, and leaves out smaller factors like class and gender. Future studies are expected to close this gap.

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