

## Protestation and the Search for Redress in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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### Abstract

This study evaluates Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as vociferous protestations and call for redress concerning diverse forms of historical and contemporary misrule, inequalities and injustices in the Nigerian society and beyond. Thus Adichie is not just a feminist but also a humanist who is genuinely concerned with the predicaments of the subaltern in the hands of their powerful oppressors. Using New Historicism as a theoretical parameter, the study posits that several factors that resulted to conflict situations and discontent in the past in certain societies are still prevalent in contemporary times, hence the continuous agitations from various ethnic nationalities and sections of such domains, particularly in Nigeria, Adichie's country of birth. This demonstrates that injustice and oppression perpetrated anywhere can only be laid to rest when they are sincerely redressed with nothing else but justice. The study, therefore, avers that several unresolved historical injustices and ills raised in the novels be resolutely redressed by the contemporary leaderships in those jurisdictions, and where necessary make appropriate reparations, restitution or tender decisive apologies. Doing so in the right manner will invariably contribute to global peace and stability. This implies that for lasting peace to reign in the concerned domains, several issues bordering on historical and modern-day injustices, misrule, human rights abuses, ethnic, racial and religious rivalry, etc., of which the novelist has consistently raised eloquent protestations through her fictions under study should be given serious positive attention and redress in the interest of all.

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### Keywords

Protest, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nigeria, Literature, Injustice

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## Introduction

Protest literature is any piece of artistic creation or writing which overtly or covertly denounces any perceived unjust situation in society. Every society has one issue or the other which negatively affects the well-being of its citizens. Such issues can be socioeconomic, sociopolitical, cultural or even religious in nature. Protest literature, therefore, directly or indirectly, demonstrates displeasure or resentment against such unjust economic, social, cultural or religious condition in order to elicit positive change from the institutions of society that may be responsible for the perpetration of such practices which often border on injustice and inequality. Simply put, protest literature is an artistic approach through which creative artists revolt against injustices or inequalities existing in their society in order to ensure the enthronement of justice and equity for all. It is a writer’s unique way of raising placards through the construction of ideologies which raises social consciousness against perceived social evils, and consequently arouses the people for actions intended to bring about positive development. In articulating the foreword to *American Protest Literature*, Stauffer (2006, p.xiii) states:

*I define protest literature broadly to mean the uses of language to transform the self and change society. By language I refer not only to words, but to visual art, music and film. Protest literature functions as catalyst, guide or mirror of social change. It not only critiques some aspects of society, but also suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, a solution to society’s ills.*

Implicit in Stauffer’s definition is the firm notion that protest literature should not just point out societal ills and oppose them but should also proffer meaningful solutions to such problems. This means that raising alarm and condemning perceived evils in society is one side of the coin while proffering or suggesting reasonable solutions constitute the other. The ultimate purpose of both efforts is to ensure that orderliness, equity, stability and justice are enshrined in a society’s code of conduct in order to attract sustainable development and progress for all. Akingbe (2012, p.1) concurs to Stauffer’s perception of protest literature when he states:

*Protest literature may be defined as a sub-category of literature in which the works espouse protest explicitly, either as a major theme, a recurring motif, an overarching metaphor, or as a structuring device. It is a literature which is characterised by the existence of a clearly-defined viewpoint, strong moral convictions, an often-strident tone, a pronounced sense of outrage, a clear perception of the issues at stake, and a usually optimistic belief in the ultimate triumph of justice. Protest literature does not necessarily utilize techniques which are radically different from those of other categories of literature. However, they often combine such techniques in such a way as to produce effects that are peculiar to the sub-category. The techniques might include a strong emphasis on realism, the use of demilitarization strategies, the liberal development of satire, irony and paradox, the utilization of anti-heroic characters, as well as unique methods of plot construction, structure and narrative perspectives. Its effects can*

*include pity, anger, disgust and awareness. Because the main aim of protest literature is that of increasing awareness of the audience, many works within the sub-category use techniques of demystification that are designed to unsettle long-held assumptions and attitudes in the audience.*

Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* aptly fit into quite a number of these calibrations and yardsticks for determining whether a piece of literary work can be categorized as protest literature. It is noteworthy, however, to state that protest literature is not limited to the novelistic art alone but indeed encompasses all literary genres. This implies that it is actually content and not necessarily form that determines this significant categorization. For Abdullah (2018, p.2),

*Protest literature has existed in different forms throughout literary history. Many of the important writers over the ages have utilized their expertise to awakening the societies to injustices locally and universally. They have in its spectrum some of the most instigating thoughts to provoke the emotions, besides such writings focus on the struggles of individuals against social injustice. In other words, protest art is the art that concentrates on disavowing the society's drawbacks and art that either supports or opposes some types of political or social amendments.*

The aforestated novels do not just portray a myriad of "society's drawbacks," particularly and profoundly the Nigerian society, but equally demonstrate her opposition to them as well as her altruistic desire for the necessary "political and social amendments" which, again, Akingbe (2012, p.2) concurs is one of the cardinal intentions of protest literature. One of the ways in which protest literature can be understood is by assessing its aims, its features and its techniques. Regardless of differences of culture, time and place, all protest literature seeks a three-fold objective: to testify, to indict and to seek redress. In testifying, protest literature consciously aims to remember and commemorate acts of injustices perpetrated against particular persons or groups. The act of remembrance to honour those who suffered, celebrates those who endured, and enables future generations to have a proper understanding of their roots. The act of indictment is a central purpose of protest literature, and in doing so it exposes those implicated in acts of oppression and injustice, identifies, analyses and characterizes the acts of oppression of which they are guilty, as well as outlining the social, political and economic factors which facilitate such oppression. It is a crucial aspect of the goals of protest literature to symbolically or literally 'name' injustice and its perpetrators so that they stand condemned by all right-thinking people. In seeking redress, protest literature seeks to end the injustices it portrays, as well as the punishment of perpetrators and provision of restitution to the victims. Such restitution is often physical and psychological because it seeks to comprehensively repair the damage inflicted upon individuals, institutions and society as a whole over a sustained period of time.

Akingbe’s calibrations and notations as stated above, apart from concurring to Abdullah’s observations, also emphasizes the multi-faceted nature and appearances of protest literature, indicating that there is no unilateral, straight-jacket approach to it. However, the underlining element remains the content of protest it carries; the societal ills it unravels as well as the language with which such issues are addressed either symbolically or literally, and then the underlying intentions. Again, in her “History of Protest Literature in India: Trails from the Bhakti Literature,” Oza (2020, p.2) succinctly maintains that “the literary protest is multi-dimensional as it upholds certain values in a specific environment and is concerned with the ironies, contradictions, and paradoxes inherent in the expression of dissent, protest and freeform.” Oza’s perception of protest literature as a veritable tool or agency that contributes in “upholding certain values in a specific environment” or society is corroborated by Hasso (2020, p.1) in her “Social Protest in Art” when she states:

*Artists play a major role in illuminating, challenging and critiquing injustices that impact... Artists provide a voice for the voiceless and have the ability to reach the masses through their vision. Human rights art has utilized direct messages during more tolerant eras, or has been embedded allegorically when imagery was strictly controlled. Artists inform our understanding of...aesthetics as a set of values...*

By “illuminating,” “challenging” and “critiquing” societal ills and injustices, protest literature figuratively or literally projects the right and acceptable values, and arouses people for the necessary actions that can entrench and sustain such values in society. This is one of the significant contributions creative writers make in the development of societies across the globe. It, therefore, implies that apart from being an effective tool for education and entertainment, literature in the context of protest can also serve as a revolutionary medium with great potential to alter undesirable status quo. This study focuses on evaluating the protest content of Adichie’s aforementioned novels, particularly as it concerns certain sociopolitical and sociohistorical injustices.

## **Theoretical Parameter**

This study adopts New Historicism as its theoretical template. Although it is widely acknowledged that the writings of Michel Foucault largely influenced quite a number of New Historicists, it was Stephen Greenblatt who eventually coined the term in 1980. Bressler (1999, p.238-240) who prefers to refer to the theory as “cultural poetics” vividly captures the development of the theory as well as the forces that influenced it thus:

*Although the assumptions of cultural poetics and its accompanying practice have been used by critics for several decades, the beginning of New Historicism dates to 1979-80 with the publication of several essays and texts such as ... Renaissance Self-Fashioning by Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt, and a variety of works by Louis Montrose, Jonathan Dollimore, and others. What New Criticism (which preceded New Historicism) did not*

*provide for Greenblatt and other critics was an attempt to understand literature from a historical perspective. From a New Critical perspective the text was what mattered, not its historical context. Consideration of any given text as the result of any historical phenomenon was devalued or silenced. Upon reading sociological and cultural studies by Michel Foucault, Greenblatt and other critics admired and emulated Foucault's tireless questioning of the nature of literature, history, culture and society; like Foucault they refused to accept the traditional well-worn answers. From the Marxist scholars (George Lukacs, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams and others) they learned that history is shaped by people who live it, and they accepted the Marxist idea of the interconnectedness of all life.*

New Historicism like formalism and their critics not only recognizes the importance of the literary text but also analyzes the text with an eye on history, culture and socio-economic developments within the context of the literary work. It is this sort of focus and approach that prompts Brannigan (1998, p.6) to state that “New Historicism is a mode of critical interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds.” In other words, it does not subscribe to the text-only approach earlier pursued by formalism, structuralism and indeed other related critical approaches which focus only on the form and content of a literary text.

## **Issues and Discussions**

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's representations of the character of “Big Oga” otherwise referred to as the Head of State and the cruelties associated with his style of governance is a protestation against military despotism. Soon after Big Oga takes over the reigns of power through a coup d'état, the nation is set on a trajectory of chaos, suppression, pandemonium and forlornly as the major concern of the military government is how to remain in power at all costs, at the expense of development and progress in the nation. When Eugene condemns the idea of military men ruling Nigeria because he believes that they are “power drunk” (p.24), and that “...what we Nigerians needed was a renewed democracy” (p.25), the junta at first tries to bribe him to submission. And when he refuses to succumb, they begin to “threaten his businesses” and to ensure that his *Standard* newspaper “lost advertising” (p.5). This, however, does not deter Eugene as the *Standard* remains “...more critical, more questioning than it used to be” (p.27). As a result, the junta adopts more stringent and cruel measures of caging the opposition. Ade Coker, the editor-in-chief of *the Standard* is serially apprehended and tortured as Kambili says, “...the wife of Papa's editor. She was crying. I could hear her because my room was directly above the living room and because I had never heard crying that loud before” (p.37). In his criticism of the junta on one of such occasions of arrests, Ade has written “...about how the Head of State and his wife had paid people to transport heroin abroad, a story that questioned the recent execution of three men and who the real drug barons were” (p.38). Eugene also goes spiritual in his fights against military despotism when he “prayed” and “added long passages urging God to bring about the downfall of the Godless men ruling our country” (p.43). Yet, the Godlessness of the junta is further demonstrated in the way and

manner civilians in a market at Enugu, particularly women are being humiliated and the symbol of their coverage and glory, their wrapper, stripped from their bodies by soldiers being portrayed as agents of the junta. Kambili observes the situation thus:

As we left the market with our sandals...soldiers were milling around. Market women were shouting, and many had both hands placed on their heads, in the way that people do to show despair or shock. A woman lay in the dirt, wailing, tearing at her short afro. Her wrapper had come undone and her white underwear showed. (*PH*, P.44)

By the portrayal of a woman’s wrapper coming “undone” and her “underwear showing,” Adichie is protesting against the mindless and barbaric humiliation of innocent civilians by military authorities upon their usurpation of political power via the route of coup d’etat. Thus military dictators are indeed portrayed as “Godless men” whose downfall should be prayed and desired for. The despicable imagery of the shocked and “wailing” market women is similar to that seen in the funeral of an only son who dies untimely. Adichie deploys this to show the level of injury, humiliation, sorrow and pain military dictatorship can inflict on the masses of a nation. The concept and imagery of a woman’s wrapper coming “undone” and consequently exposing her white underwear also comes to the fore. A woman’s wrapper symbolizes the coverage for her nakedness and bestows a kind of dignity, glory and honour on her whenever she ties it on her body. But when she is stripped of her wrapper as it is the case in the above cited passage, the opposite is the result. By the deployment of this imagery, Adichie suggests that military dictatorship has stripped Nigeria naked over the years, taken away her glory, denied her of realizing her great potentials and of taking her rightful position among the comity of nations hence her advocacy for “a renewed democracy” (p.25) as a solution. Kambili, again observes the unjustifiable maltreatment of civilians in the market-place by soldiers upon seizing political power.

As we hurried past, ...I saw the soldier raise a whip in the air. The whip was long. It curled in the air before it landed on the woman’s shoulder. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing. I thought about the woman lying in the dirt as we drove home. I wished I could have gone over and helped her up, cleaned the red mud from her wrapper. (*PH*, p.44)

The observation that the “...soldier was...squashing papayas with his boots and laughing” indicates that soldiers in their arrogant display of bravado and power against defenseless civilians are usually remorseless and unrepentant. By this portrayal, Adichie suggests that military men, when in power, are usually unsympathetic concerning the pains and plights of the people they rule, rather, they take pleasure in inflicting injuries and losses on them. Thus while the soldier was laughing and “kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots” right in the marketplace, the market women are seen to be helplessly wailing without attracting any iota of mercy from their oppressors. Of course, the “trays of fruits” being kicked down as well as the “papayas” being squashed with boots represent the means of livelihood of the people. The destruction of the means of livelihood of the people implies more hunger and

poverty in the land. Kambili will later observe the debilitating poverty in the land when her father follows her to her school, Daughters of the Immaculate Heart Secondary School and she states: “Hawkers, girls much younger than I, defied the school gate men, edging closer and closer to the cars to offer peeled oranges..., their moth-eaten blouses slipping off their shoulders” (p.45). Not only are the young girls out of school as a result of poverty, the blouses they wear are described to be moth-eaten. These are the possible consequences of the actions of the soldiers on the lives of citizens as demonstrated. Yet one of the soldiers is ‘laughing’ while doing so. Adichie uses such portrayals to advance cogent reasons capable of convincing readers that democratization is better than militarization.

The economic policy of the military government spearheaded by Big Oga brings untold hardship and poverty to the people. There is also a high level of unemployment such that a female supervisee at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is compelled to ask a rhetorical question to Aunty Ifeoma, her supervisor, “What is the use of a degree when we cannot find a job after graduation?” (p.75). Aunty Ifeoma squarely places the problems at the doorstep of the military ruler when she says:

*Look what this military tyrant is doing to our country. We have not had fuel for three months in Nsukka. I spent the night in petrol station last week, waiting for fuel. And at the end, the fuel did not come. We just called off another strike, even though no lecturer has been paid for the last two months. Ifukwa, people are leaving the country. (PH, p.76)*

In addition to the issues of poverty, unemployment and hardship associated with fuel scarcity in a nation that constantly ranks as either the fifth or sixth largest oil producer on planet earth, Aunty Ifeoma equally raises her placard of disgust concerning the instability in the education sector; a direct consequence of incessant strike actions by university lecturers whose salaries are not usually paid as and when due by the government. Then there is the expression of resentment against the phenomenon of brain drain in the country. Adichie clearly uses the instrumentality of literature to discountenance and challenge such “drawbacks” in the Nigerian society and to seek for appropriate redress.

When Kambili visits Aunty Ifeoma at Nsukka with Jaja, and uses their convenience, and then reports, “Aunty, there is no water to flush the toilet” (p.121), Aunty Ifeoma seizes the opportunity to raise a voice of protest against non-availability of a vital social amenity like water on campus, even for university staff. She says,

*Our water runs only in the morning, o di egwu. So we don't flush when we urinate, only when there is actually something to flush. Or sometimes, when the water does not run for a few days, we just close the lid until everybody has gone and then we flush with one bucket. It saves water. (PH, p.121)*

Of course, Obiora says that “the university is a microcosm for Nigeria,” which also implies that the occurrences in the university are a reflection of what is happening all over the country. It does not take long before the “no light, no water” (p.131) situation on campus sparks off a

violent protest by the students of the university, resulting to massive vandalization and burning down of university properties. The vice chancellor and his wife survive the anger of the students only when they are smuggled out of the scene in the boot of a car.

Furthermore, Adichie’s representations of the ordeals of Ade Coker, the editor-in-chief of the *Standard* newspaper and a character mirroring the experiences of the historical character of Dele Giwa in the hands of the Nigerian military government of the middle eighties can be seen as a protestation against press freedom and fundamental human rights which are recklessly abused here and there by the military authorities depicted in the novel. The same can be said of the character NwankitiOgechi – a notable pro-democracy activist who like Ade is unjustly arrested, tortured and detained for no other reason than that they are canvassing for the enthronement of democratic ideas in the country as opposed to military dictatorship. To borrow the word of Eugene Achike, Big Oga’s “Godlessness” (p.43) reaches a crescendo when upon the refusal of the two men to back down from opposing and criticizing his military government he decides to nail them once and for all. While NwankitiOgechi a character mirroring the experiences of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni environmental and pro-democracy activist, is kidnapped and murdered by soldiers “in a bush in Minna” (p.198), Ade is wasted in his own house with a letter bomb “when he opened the package – a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yawande had not said that Ade looked at the envelope and said “It has the State House Seal before he opened it” (p.202).

*In Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie continues to criticize and challenge the actions and inactions of men in positions of power, and how such contribute to the ills of society hence the need for positive change. Her portrayal of the character of Chief Okonji, Nigeria’s Finance Minister, and her desperation and offers to have Olanna as his mistress is a serious indictment to the political class. Chief Okonji’s amorous proclivities in the novel does not seem to have any control or limit whatsoever, despite the high office he occupies. Of course, such form of behavior does not speak well of a public office holder in the exalted capacity of a Finance Minister. In order to have just one lady as a mistress, the Chief throws dignity, caution and principles to the wind and is prepared to use the influences of his exalted office to do anything that can please her in order for her to succumb to his amorous advances. This is why in reference to some expatriates who are looking for landed property to acquire in the country, perhaps for industrialization or any other form of economic development which, of course, will be of benefit to the country, the minister in his determined effort to lure Olanna to become his mistress says, “...I can arrange for them to buy from your father at five or six times the price” (p.33). When Olanna gives the excuse that she will not be at the “cocktail party at Ikoyi hotel” where she is supposed to meet the expatriates because she will be busy doing her “St. Vincent de Paul charity drive” (p.33) same day, the Chief insists, “I just can’t keep you out of my mind” (p.33). Then he goes on to make some other mouthwatering offers in order to have the lady for himself at all costs: “Look, you don’t have to work at the ministry. I can appoint you to a board, any board you want, and I will furnish a flat for you wherever you want” (p.33). With the level of Chief Okonji’s desperation to have Olanna as his mistress, one really wonders if he will not accept to walk naked in the streets of “Ikoyi” if Olanna demands for such as a way of settling



her to acquiescence. Adichie uses this portrayal to indict and to suggest that such a form of behaviour is quite condemnable for a high-ranking public office holder of Chief Okonji's status. It is also a revelation of some of the shoddy deals which some highly placed individuals in society, with the influences of their mighty and exalted offices, are usually willing to commit themselves to. These are things that do not really worth it, at least not for the people on whose behalf they occupy such important offices.

Adichie also presents tribalism as a huge retrogressive factor in the Nigerian nation when the narrator reveals some of the issues at stake in the nation, even from the early sixties, on the occasion of Olanna's visit to his relatives, the Mbaezis, in Kano. "Or he would tell her about politics: what the Igbo Union was...protesting, discussing... She still remembered the meeting where irritated men and women talked about the northern schools not admitting Igbo Children" (p.38). It is a situation whereby the politics of ethnicity, sectionalism and tribalism degenerates to the point that some schools are tagged "northern schools" and meant to be attended exclusively by pupils and students from that region of the country. There is no cogent reason advanced in the novel on why "northern schools" refuses to admit Igbo children residing in the north other than the unhealthy sentiments associated with tribalism and sectionalism. Adichie's representation of this factor in the novel is a vociferous protestation and criticism of a vice which has contributed in no small measure in enthroning mediocrity as opposed to merit and excellence in various sectors of the economy of the nation till today. In Nigeria today, people are still being rated not on the basis of the content of their character or merit, rather, acceptance or rejection is largely based on the tribe an individual comes from. This is why tribe and tongue, which certainly differ, seem to, sometimes, unfortunately be the fundamental determinants of what one gets or does not get in terms of critical and sensitive positions in the Nigerian state. This is the kind of situation being protested against and portrayed in the novel as a road that leads to nowhere else other than chaos and acrimony. Adichie highlights ethnic prejudice or tribalism as a strong precursory factor that contributed in no small measure in plunging the nation into the furnace called the Nigerian Civil War.

Again, although Olanna "knew how much" mohammed "loved her" (p.45) and she of course also loves him, the major barriers that stand against their passionate desire to marry each other are tribe and religion. Arize voices out the sentiment when she tells Olanna, "If only Mohammed was an Igbo man, I have never seen a more handsome man" (P.42). Mohammed's mother in turn is afraid that her beloved son will marry an "Igbo woman... who would taint the lineage with infidel blood" (P.46) and so she discourages the relationship by all means. Mohammed's assertions to Olanna, "I would have married you anyhow, and she knew it. Her preference did not matter" (P.46) become inconsequential in the end. Tribalism is so conspicuous and palpable in the entire nation to the extent that some expatriates such as Richard, Susan and other "ex-colonial administrators, and business people from John Holt and Kingsway and GB Olivant and Shell-BP and United African Company" (p.53) during discussions in their "all-expatriate parties" will often wonder "how tribal Nigeria politics was, and perhaps these chaps were not quite so ready to rule themselves after all" (P.53).

There is also a vehement protest against the politically-motivated killings of the Tiv people just because their political leaders, even in reality, opted to identify with a political party in opposition to the central parliamentary government of Prime Minister Balewa, the party that was equally in control of the Northern Regional Government at the historical time. It is during the usually heated debates of some Nsukka University intellectuals at Odenigbo’s house that Odenigbo says, “... but to send the army to kill in the name of order? There are Tiv people lying dead for nothing. For nothing! Balewa has lost his mind!” (p.91). Adichie, by this protestation, believes that the Prime Minister’s action of giving arbitrary order to the nation’s military to silence opposition in that manner is a dangerous kind of politicking and is, therefore, condemnable.

Adichie also reminisces on different forms of racial segregation and subjugation as acts of injustices which the global community needs to redress and possibly make those implicated in the oppression to make some reparations when Odenigbo says, “They are dehumanizing blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia, they fermented what happened in the Congo, they won’t let American blacks vote, they won’t let Australian Aborigines vote...” (p.110). But before the plural pronoun “they” is introduced into the sentence, Odenigbo has clearly identified the perpetrators of the oppression when he says, “We are living in a time of great white evil” (p.110). Although apartheid seemed to have reduced in intensity in those nations, the scars and wounds they inflicted on their victims are still very fresh even in contemporary times and might really need a more decisive and sincere conciliatory approach by government as well as the identified oppressors for a lasting healing to take place.

The verbatim intertextual representation of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu’s historic coup speech (p.123-124) is an obvious protestation against certain vices that, like canker-worm, have eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria’s political leadership over the years, and a clarion call for national political renewal. Such vices as identifiable in the speech include corruption, internal strife, bribery, tribalism, nepotism, etc. Nzeogwu’s tone in the speech signifies a clarion call for pragmatic and revolutionary changes in all facets of national life; a call for responsible and accountable leaderships at all strata of national existence. This signification is in conformity with one of the aims of protest literature which is to seek redress. Nzeogwu has, in the speech, indicted the Nigerian political class and squarely placed culpability for the various issues plaguing the nation on their shoulders, blaming them for their lack of sincerity, patriotism and altruism, which is why they brazenly manifest all manners of corrupt practices. Thus, as far as the character of Nzeogwu is concerned, the travails of the nation are on account of failure of leadership.

When Adichie’s literary searchlight turns to issues that relate to the pogrom and massacre of South-easterners in Northern and Western Nigeria soon after the July 29, 1966 counter coup spearheaded by the character Gowon, just as it is equally true in historical reality, one perceives the author’s lamentation and condemnation of those mindless killings. In Kano, Olanna shockingly observes the massacre of the entire family members of her maternal uncle, Mbaezi (p.147), the very family she has visited in the ancient city. Her escape from the destruction is

on account of her stepping out from the Mbaezi's compound to visit her friend, Mohammed, completely unaware that death would visit her uncle, aunt and cousins in such a gruesome manner. Her survival from the massacre is owed to Mohammed's benevolence and determination to shield and drive her to safety "until he parked at the train station and shoved her onto a crowded train" (p.148). But while Olanna nurses her pains, the assailants gloat over the killings thus: "We finished the whole family. It was Allah's will!" (p.48). Mohammed, however, maintains that "Allah does not allow this. Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this. Allah will never forgive this" (p.48). The assailants equally storm the Kano Airport demanding for more blood: "*Ina nyamiri!* Where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?" (p.152). It is in this situation that Nnaemeka is identified and "the rifle went off and Nnaemeka's chest blew open, a splattering red mass" (p.153). Then there are "more shots, more shouts of 'Nyamiri' and 'Araba, araba!'" (p.153). The shots and killings continued unabated and culminated in a thirty-months fratricidal civil war vividly represented in the novel as its main thematic pre-occupation. In conformity with typical portrayals in protest literature, Adichie names, implicates and indicts most of the notable actors in the war for their ignoble roles and contributions to the monumental loss of lives of innocent children, women and men throughout the period. While the character Gowon is indicted for being the principal beneficiary of the July counter coup which enthrones him as Head of State, a development which triggers off the pogroms and massacres, and for reneging on the historical Aburi Accord (p.159) which could have ultimately halted the civil war, Ojukwu is implicated in his declaration of a Biafran State he is ill-prepared, ill-equipped to defend (p.161-162). In the same vein, Colonel Madu, a Biafran officer, indicts foreign powers which collaborates in various forms to suppress and silence Biafra when he speaks to Richard, a British writer and researcher thus:

*The world has to know the truth of what is happening, because they simply cannot remain silent while we die. You can tell them...even though Nigerian MiG-Seventeens, 11-Twenty-eights, and L-Twenty-nine Delfins flown by Russians and Egyptians are bombing us everyday, and how some of them are using transport planes and just crudely rolling out bombs to kill women and children, and how the British and the Soviets are in an unholy alliance giving more and more arms to Nigeria, and how our relief flights come in at night with no lights because the Nigerians will shoot them down during the day. (Half, p.305)*

Colonel Madu's protestation comes on the heels of massive and indiscriminate bombings of both military and civilian targets in the Biafran enclave during the civil war. Although he does not consider targeting the Biafran Armed Forces as being abnormal in such a war situation, he considers the indiscriminate bombings of innocent civilians, particularly women and children by Nigerian military forces, as completely absurd and unconventional, hence the outcry for international attention and redress. When Richard eventually accedes to write about the various atrocities being committed against civilians in the Biafran enclave, "he described the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, where soldiers of the Nigerian Second Division first defecated on the alter before killing two hundred civilians" (p.305). Then he quotes "a calm eyewitness" who observes that "the vandals are people who shit on God" (p.305). The war crimes being

committed against defenseless worshipers at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church is comparable in scale to what happened at Asaba. A man who hails from the town narrates the horrendous occurrence thus:

*I am from Asaba and I got word from our hometown this morning. The vandals took our town many weeks ago and they announced that all the indigenes should come out and say ‘One Nigeria’ and they would give them rice. So people came out of hiding and said ‘One Nigeria’ and the vandals shot them, men, women and children. Everyone. There is nobody left in the Njokamma family. Nobody left. (Half, p.384)*

On narrating the matter to Alice who hails from the same Asaba and to other refugees in their camp at Umuahia, just before Umuahia equally falls into the hands of Federal forces, Alice

*...threw herself on the ground. Rolling this way and that... Alice was lying on her back, rubbing her head frantically against the ground, mourning. Clumps of sand were in her hair. She jumped up and ran towards the road... She jerked away and threw herself down again, her lips pulled back, her teeth bared... She rolled on the ground with such force that the stones cut her skin in tiny red gashes. (Half, p.384)*

The kind of anguish expressed by Alice upon the receipt of the news of the massacre of her kinsmen and women is still being felt in Asaba till today on account of that horrendous historical incident which is said to have claimed the lives of over seven hundred Asaba indigenes (SaharaReporters, 2020). Reminiscing on the incident in their report titled “Nigerian Army Promotes 81 Division Commander, Ahmed Taiwo, who claimed No Killing Occurred At Lekki Toll Gate Despite Evidence,” the news agency states:

*Despite video evidence that so many protesters were killed, Brigadier-General Taiwo, who has been representing the army at the sitting of the Judicial Panel of Inquiry set up by the Lagos State Government to unravel the mystery behind the incident, claimed no one was killed. The Nigerian Army Council has approved the promotion of 421 senior officers from various ranks to the next higher rank... Among the Brigadier-Generals promoted to the rank of Major-General is Ahmed Ibrahim Taiwo, Commander of 81 Division of the Nigerian Army, the unit of the army that sent troops to Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos on the evening of October 20, 2020 to disperse peaceful protesters... Taiwo is son of a former military governor of Kwara State, Colonel Ibrahim Taiwo, famous for the massacre of over 700 persons in Asaba, Delta State, during the civil war. (SaharaReporters, 2020)*

The historic massacre which started on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1967 is equally attested to by Wikipedia which avers:

*The Asaba Massacre occurred in early October 1967, during the Biafran war, fought over the secession of Biafra (predominantly Igbo, former Eastern Region of Nigeria). The Federal troops entered Asaba around 5 October, and began ransacking houses and killing civilians, claiming they were Biafran*

*sympathizers. Several hundreds may have been killed individually and in groups at various locations in the town. Leaders summoned the towns people to assemble on the morning of 7 October, hoping to end the violence through a show of support for “One Nigeria.” Hundreds of men, women and children, men wearing the ceremonial akwaocha (white) attire paraded along the main street, singing, dancing and chanting “One Nigeria” ...and gathered in an open square at Ogbe-Osowa village. Federal troops revealed machine guns, and orders were given ...by Second-in-command, Major Ibrahim Taiwo, to open fire. It is estimated that more than 700 men and boys were killed, some as young as 12 years old, in addition to many more killed in the preceding days. (“Asaba Massacre”)*

For Silverman (2020),

*Federal Government troops...entered the town and, over three days, massacred at least a thousand people. The town was left in ruins and the survivors traumatised. The events of the terrible time remain close to people’s hearts. The massacre is still little acknowledged and a highly sensitive issue... The Asaba massacre was the single worst atrocity of the civil war. It is part of local folk memory. Campaigners believe it is time that the massacre was officially memorialized.*

One of the major actors implicated by historical evidence in the Asaba massacre was Major Ibrahim Taiwo who purportedly gave the order for the killings when Federal troops gained entrance to the town. Taiwo was the second-in-command of Nigeria’s Second Division at the material time. Coincidentally, in 2020, fifty-three years later, in the same month of October, Taiwo's son, Ahmed Ibrahim Taiwo is the commander of Nigeria’s 81 Division, the unit that purportedly sent troops involved in the massacre of peaceful #EndSARS protesters at Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos.

Adichie intertextually represents the horrendous Asaba Massacre as a historic injustice seeking for redress in contemporary Nigeria. Just as the man who narrates the incident in a refugee camp at Umuahia during the civil war states that “there is nobody left in the Njokamma family. Nobody left” (p.384), several families and lineages in historical reality were completely wiped out in that incident. Hearts are still bleeding in Asaba on account of the occurrence till today, yet there does not seem to be any form of significant national effort for any kind of placation, redress or reparation hence the protestation in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. At the climax of Alice’s grief on the incident, she says, “What am I doing still alive? They should come and kill me now! I said they should come and kill me!” (p.384). This is the kind of nightmare many persons and families are still having till today on account of the loss of their fathers, breadwinners, mothers, brothers, sisters, children, uncles, aunties, neighbours, kinsmen and women in the historic Asaba massacre. In a just society, there would have been a kind of significant reparation or the perpetrators would have faced charges of war crimes.

## Conclusion

Adichie deploys the veritable instrumentality of her creative endeavours as vehement protestations and calls for redress on a myriad of perceived injustices perpetrated in history against certain individuals, groups and nations, particularly in Africa where several unpalatable narratives on ethnic conflicts, colonialism and neocolonialism still subsist. Her dutiful and creative interrogation and interpretations of certain historical circumstances in the fictions reveal that certain societies even in contemporary times have not really made significant progress or triumphed over some unsavoury situations that characterised them in the past. The author believes that such situations revolving around human rights abuses, bad governance, corruption, ethnic and religious prejudices and many more which still prevails in the society should be resolutely addressed if a meaningful level of sustainable development must be attained. The study recommends that all wrong values that give rise to disunity, violence, agitations and tensions of all kinds within the Nigerian State and other cited domains be resolutely addressed by the relevant governments.

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