

## Dynamics of Postcoloniality in African Literature

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### Abstract

*This paper examines postcolonialism by analyzing Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The research shows postcolonialism a set of theories in philosophy and different approaches to literary analysis concerned with literature written in English in countries. Indeed, postcolonial theorists inspect what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other. The paper explores how different dynamics of colonialism started to disappear by the early twentieth century. Political, social, economic, and ideological domination of England began to disappear, and the very process can be termed as decolonization. The article sheds light on the literature of Nigeria, a colonized country. After Nigeria became independent from the British colonization, the Biafra war began. Consequently, a great crack at the ethnic level took place in Nigeria. The paper investigates the ethnic conflict as portrayed in the novel. The novel embodies characters of both colonizing and colonized notions to reveal how the racial conflict retains in society. The article demonstrates the theoretical perspective of Homi Bhabha who questions the practice of generalizing and essentializing third world countries with homogeneity. Overall, the paper finds that education is the weapon for the colonized to fight back against the colonizers.*

**Key Words:** postcolonial, colonialism, independence, culture, race

### Introduction

This research paper demonstrates that the reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun* has the impact of postcolonial elements. The study explores that postcolonial studies excludes literature that “represents either British or American viewpoints and concentrates on writings from colonized or formerly colonized cultures in Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Africa, South America, and other places that were once dominated by, but remained outside of, the white, male, European cultural, political, and philosophical tradition” (Guevara 199-200).

The reading shows that postcolonial theorists have investigated what happens when two cultures clash and one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other. “Rooted in colonial power and prejudice, post colonialism develops from a four-thousand-year of strained cultural relations between colonies in Africa and Asia and the Western world. Throughout this long history, the West became the colonizers, and many African and Asian countries and their peoples became the colonized” (Guevara 200). Hence postcolonialism lies its foundation on the unequal relationship between the colonizer and the colonized that is much severely inflicted with the dominating effect of the colonial discourse.

### Analysis

The paper investigates into the portrayal of characters such as Ugwu, Olanna and Richard in the novel dangling in the realm of dual identity, and their confusion about cultural, and class belonging. Along with their ambivalent stance, the normative pattern of hybridity propounded by Homi Bhabha is interrogated in the sense that other byproducts such as intra-ethnic and class conflict be important

to be analyzed in the postcolonial Nigeria as well. The novel traces all the multifaceted stories about Nigeria that Adichie offers as a counterpart. In the speech with the same name, the writer highlights different problems that the people in Nigeria suffer in the aftermath of the Postcolonial Independence situation. There are distinct sorts of hazards emerged in the lives of the people from all lifestyles in Nigeria regardless to ethnicity, class and race.

The quagmire that results in destroying many types of properties in Nigeria is the point that Adichie stresses more. The remnants of the colonial rule in Nigeria seem to have been much effective in inviting class and ethnic conflicts in the postcolonial Nigeria. The sense of *othering* in terms of race and ethnicity is the lingering feature in the postcolonial Nigeria. Homi Bhabha describes a “separate” place, a space of separation [...] which has been systematically denied by both colonialists and nationalists who have sought authority in the authenticity of ‘origins.’ It is precisely as a separation from origins and essences that this colonial space is constructed” (1181). This “space of separation” arises through “Entstellung,” which is the “process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, [and] repetition;” this process may occur by the colonial powers as they seek to cement their power in colonized lands, or it may occur as the post-colonial people try to separate themselves from their colonizers (Bhabha 1169). Thus, in order to effectively illustrate a new and emerging African postcoloniality, it becomes necessary to write in a new method to properly communicate to colonial and post-colonial citizens.

The narrator in the novel gives voice to marginal identities, raising gender issues and breaking taboos; giving a new, contemporary interpretation to longstanding themes; engaging with hybridization and multiculturalism; challenging social and literary conventions; presenting a multi-layered, hybrid personality; and reflecting national and political engagement. However, she seems to trigger the slumbering Nigerian consciousness in the Post Independence Nigeria. How people do not seem integrated in terms of their identity. Rather they are in the flux of adaptability to suit their status. The narrator highlights the issue of hybrid personality as well as their dilemma in the transitional phase of Nigeria.

The reading shows the “other Africa” about people belonging to the empowered, middle-class: two twin sisters, daughters of a wealthy businessperson and a university professor as portrayed in the novel. The narrator feels strong about the fact that Africans must write their own stories and not let the West do the naming and labeling for them. The key character, Ugwu, a houseboy from a poor village emerges as the conscience of the novel and finally gets to be the one to write at the end a book on the war, rather than Richard, the Englishman who has been taking notes throughout the conflict.

The narrator imparts the message that the country declared independent a bit earlier encounters the secession that results in the loss of many innocent people. The conflict in terms of religion really seems to have caused Nigeria to face disintegration. The Biafran cause is just the ethnic difference that turns disastrous to both of the divided communities. The Great Divide is the mission of the colonizers as well. The colonial mission has implanted the seed of religious conflict in Nigeria that has triggered the people to fight against each other.

Guevara terms *postcolonial* and *postcolonialism* first appear in scholarly journals in the mid-1980s and as subtitles in texts such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s previously mentioned powerful work and in 1990 in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin’s *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. “By the early and mid-1990s, both terms had become firmly established in academic and popular discourse” (201). When spelled without the hyphen (post colonialism), the term refers “to writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives,” both before and after the period of colonization” (Guevara 202).

Guevara further extends the horizon of knowledge about post colonialism and its intrinsic features. As he says there are many of post colonialism's adherents who suggest two branches of postcolonialism: The first views post colonialism as a set of diverse methodologies that possess no unitary quality, as argued by Homi K. Bhaba and Arjun P. Murkherjee. The second branch includes those critics such as Edward Said, Barbara Harlow, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who view post colonialism as a set of cultural strategies centered in history. This latter group can also be subdivided into those who believe post colonialism refers to that period after the colonized countries have gained their independence as opposed to those who regard postcolonialism as referring to all the characteristics of a society or culture from the time of colonization to the present. Guevara notes that postcolonial theory is born out of the colonized peoples' frustrations, their direct and personal cultural clashes with the conquering culture, and their fears, hopes, and dreams about the future and their own identities.

Different cultures that have been subverted, conquered, and often removed from history respond to the conquering culture in diverse ways; no single approach to postcolonial theory and practice is possible or even preferable. As Nicholas Harrison asserts in *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory, and the Work of Fiction* (2003): "Postcolonial theory is not an identifiable 'type' of theory in the same sense as deconstruction, Marxism, psychoanalysis or feminism" (Guevara 203). Like many critical theorists, Harrison sees no point in taking as if consensus about what postcolonial studies are might eventually emerge.

A postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon provides post colonialism with two influential texts: *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In these and other works, Fanon uses psychoanalytic theory to examine the condition of blacks under French colonial rule. Because of colonialism, Fanon asserts that both the colonized (e. g, the *other*-that is, any person defined as "different from") and the colonizer suffer "psychic warping," oftentimes causing what Fanon describes as "a collapse of the ego." Fanon believes that "as soon as the colonized (the blacks living in Martinique) were forced to speak the language of the colonizer (French), the colonized either accepted or were coerced into accepting the collective consciousness of the French, thereby identifying blackness with evil and sin and whiteness with purity and righteousness" (qtd. in Guevara 203-4).

Fanon develops in *The Wretched of the Earth* one of his major concerns: the problem of the "native bourgeoisie" who assume power after the colonial powers have either departed or been driven out. When such a situation occurs, the native proletariat, "the wretched of the earth," are left on their own, often in a worse situation than before the conquerors arrived. The concept of native bourgeoisie can be contextualized in the novel. Olanna and Kainene are the typical characters of the native bourgeoisie who are dangling in the realm of ambivalence in the sense that they have the class consciousness and love to be present different in the society. In this regard, the narrator says, "Don't waste your time asking Odenigbo about High Life. He's never understood it," Olanna said, laughing. "He's a classical music person but loath to admit it in public because it's such a Western taste" (109). Indirectly Olanna is dominating Odenigbo who is a staunch supporter of the native lifestyle. He is an anti- colonialist whose every effort is to enhance the image of the Igbo community. Contrary to his stance, Olanna advocates the western music and taste. She stresses that she is distinct and loves to be different from the common Nigerians.

How Olanna elucidates that she is from the elite family can be clear when Adichie presents the former's attitude towards the common Nigerian children. The narrator points out, "Olanna did not want Baby to touch those children in their torn clothes, milky mucus trailing from their noses, but

she didn't say so; it shamed her that she felt that way" (128). Olanna's class-consciousness counts in the context of highlighting her ambivalent thought that is affected by the British pattern of lifestyle.

Edward Wadie Said in *Orientalism* chastises the literary world for not investigating and taking seriously the study of colonization or imperialism. He develops several concepts that are central to postcolonial theory. According to Said, nineteenth-century Europeans tried to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called Orientalism:

The creation of non-European stereotypes that suggested so-called Orientals were indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. The European conquerors, Said notes, believed that they were accurately describing the inhabitants of their newly acquired lands in "the East." What they failed to realize, argues Said, is that all human knowledge can be viewed only through one's political, cultural and ideological framework. No theory, either political or literary, can be totally objective. In effect, what the colonizers were revealing was their unconscious desires for power, wealth, and domination, not the nature of the colonized subjects. (qtd. in Guevara 204)

The colonizers seem to have been imparting their biased perception through different media of expression such as travelogue, anthropology, geography and sociological and cultural research dissertations. The images of the East as captured by the journalists, researchers and reporters from the West are to be interrogated in respect of their validity and reliability.

The novel embodies a non-Nigerian character, Richard who represents the West especially the colonizers. He is engaged in preparing to write about the aftermath of the Biafra war. He is willing to write about the Igbo community and the people of Nigeria in general. He is presumably associated with the colonial mission of presenting the Africans through the colonizer's perspective. In this regard, the narrator presents Richard, "Richard did, not only because of the prospect of writing in a university, but also because he would be in the southeast, in the land of Igbo-Ukwu art, the land of the magnificent roped pot. That, after all, was why he had come to Nigeria" (56). The cause of Richard's arrival to Nigeria is the research at University of Nigeria on the surface but at the deeper level, it gets clear that he is much interested in the Igbo-Ukwu art. The magnificence the African land is endowed with has been the point of attraction on the part of colonizers like Richard. His aim of writing about the world that is silent is associated with the colonial mission in the sense that he wants to create truth about Nigeria through the Eurocentric lens. Said's *Orientalism*'s core thesis is closer to the intention Richard has got.

Homi K. Bhabha, one of the leading postcolonial theorists and critics, builds on Said's concept of the Other and Orientalism. In his works such as *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha emphasizes the concerns of the colonized:

On the one hand, the colonized observe two somewhat distinct views of the world: that of the colonizer (conqueror) and that of himself or herself, the colonized (the one who has been conquered). To what culture does this person belong? Seemingly, neither culture feels like home. This feeling of homelessness, of being caught between two clashing cultures, Bhabha calls unhomeliness, a concept referred to as double consciousness by some postcolonial theorists. This feeling or perception of abandonment by both cultures causes the colonial subject (the colonized) to become a psychological refugee. Because each psychological refugee uniquely blends his or her two cultures, no two writers who have been colonial subjects will interpret their culture(s) exactly alike. (qtd. in Guevara 205)

Bhabha argues against the tendency to essentialize third-world countries into a homogenous identity. One of Bhabha's major contributions to postcolonial studies is his belief that there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance. When two cultures commingle, the nature and the characteristics of the newly created culture change each of the cultures. This dynamic, interactive, and tension-packed process Bhabha names hybridity. Bhabha himself says that "hybridization is a discursive, enunciatory, cultural, subjective process having to do with the struggle around authority, authorization, deauthorization, and the revision of authority. It's a social process. It's not about persons of diverse cultural tastes and fashions. As a result, says Bhabha, a feeling of unhomeliness develops in the colonized" (qtd. in Guevara 205-6).

The writer creates a new discourse by "rejecting all the established transcendental signifieds created by the colonizers. Such a writer must also embrace pluralism, believing that no single truth and no metatheory of history exist" (Guevara 206). No doubt how true and valid the colonizers make sure to make their writing about the colonized, it seems almost impossible. The perception and vintage point of the colonizer differ in the course of looking at objects around being in the colonized country due to having the sense of superiority complex.

Adichie's non-Nigerian character, Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is much curious to write about the Biafran cause along with the Nigerian art and current happenings. However, he fails to do so. There is Ugwu a boy from the village gradually grows at his master's home in all necessary ways such as mentally, socially, physically and psychologically. As a result he gets to write about the world that is silent. In this regard, Adichie carves out his character, "Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves" (410). This grown boy does not write something of less importance. He is in one sense creating the history of the Biafra war and its cause. He is colonized and therefore, it is sure that his writing holds validity and truth. There is no colonial mission. How vicissitudes the people in Nigeria encountered during the Biafra war are getting expressed in the form of writing. This writing is purposeful and does impart prominent message to the concerned. His writing unveils truth as it has been.

Post-colonial literature is "a synthesis of protest and imitation. It blends revolt and conciliation" (Kwaku Asante-Darko 2). This duality saturates its stratagem, its style, and its themes in a manner that is not always readily traceable to critics. This has practical didactic implications for the contemporary literary endeavor in Africa. "The African colonial experience has dominated the origin and nature of contemporary African protest literature and rendered it opposed to Western standards of aesthetics" (Kwaku Asante-Darko 2).

The narrator mentions how Africans resist to the lingering colonial domination, "The white man is the only master Balewa knows, Odenigbo said. "Didn't he say that Africans are not ready to rule themselves in Rhodesia? If the British tell him to call himself a castrated monkey, he will" (110). The consciousness among the common Nigerians reflected in the mentioned lines further conveys information that they are not interrogating the activities and intentions of the British people. Rather they keenly perceive the distance extant in terms of colonizer and colonized. Implicitly it is a sort of resistance to the colonial rule in the sense that the Nigerians feel they deserve to rule themselves. They do not need the British to express concern regarding how the Nigerians live in their nation. Likewise, Adichie elucidates the Africans' revolting spirit:

'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, they won't let American blacks vote, they won't let the Australian Aborigines vote, but the worst of all is what they are

doing here. This defence pact is worse than apartheid and segregation, but we don't realize it. They are controlling us from behind drawn curtains. It is very dangerous!' (110)

Even in the postcolonial independence situation, the Nigerians are fighting against their own sisters and brothers. The seed of conflict in terms of ethnicity has, of course, been implanted by the colonizers whose evil intention has ever been to push the colonized country to the stage of domestic war that turns heinous to them even if they left the colonized nation. Now the Nigerians do realize that they are living in a time overwhelmingly inflicted with the evil left deliberately by the British. Hence, the characters who are black in the text, *Half of a Yellow Sun* are analyzing the position of their black sisters and brothers in many other countries. How brutally they are being treated in America, Congo. Australia and so on is rendering around them. Adichie creates such characters whose zeal for further knowledge and interaction regarding their plight is tremendous. Kwaku Asante-Darko discusses the African literature in association with the postcoloniality. Thus, he says:

The distinction between imitation and imposition in the evolution of modern African literary discourse is pertinent to the question of responsibility for the contemporary crisis of post-colonial Africa--a continent which is believed to have taken its destiny into its own hands. This is because imitation presupposes choice, and choice implies responsibility for the consequences thereof. (3)

African countries, which were previously colonized, are independent to rule themselves. Hence, the feature of post colonialism that is of high prominence is to be discussed as advocated by African writers is the issue of imitation and hybridization in post-colonial African literature that is closely connected to language. How people express the sense of superiority and distinction by using the language of the colonizer in the postcolonial situation is remarkable in this context. The narrator describes characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun*:

'Perhaps it would be a better idea to speak to her gently instead of raising your voice,' Olanna said in English. She sounded very formal, clipped. Ugwu had not heard her speak to Master like that, except during the months before Baby was born.

Master's mother was looking at them suspiciously, as if she was sure that Olanna had just insulted her in English. (196)

When the sender/speaker speaks the language in order to express the sense of distinction among the listeners, whereby none of them can make any sense out of that becomes problematic. Olanna uses English while communicating with Odeingbo in the presence of the latter's mother who is from a Nigerian village and cannot understand English. Olanna deliberately uses the language of power through which she strives to prove that she is different and superior to Odenigbo's mother. It happens in the postcolonial situation in the sense that the elites from the colonized nations imitate the culture and language of the colonizers in order for illuminating their social status among the common people of their own country.

The narrator mentions different stance regarding language and education. A revolutionary character Odenigbo speaks, "Your father should have borrowed!" Master snapped, and then, in English, 'Education is a priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?' (11). Education plays a vital role in empowering colonized to fight against the colonizers. To understand the essence and nature of exploitation, language of the exploiter should be understood. Hence, Odenigbo stresses the prominence of English that he thinks can equip the colonized to understand oppression and domination. He advocates the priority of language through which knowledge is obtained. No doubt what the language it is.

The rejection of European values as advocated by post-colonial African critics and writer has meant the imposition of prohibitions and inhibitions which tend to coerce individuals into sticking to limited choices in matters of cultural values and language. It, therefore, has implications for marriage, profession, migration, food, and dress. It might close the door to profitable hybridization and universalism. Again, Mphahlele, for instance, indicates the inevitability of imitation and hybridization in these terms:

I personally cannot think of the future of my people in South Africa as something in which the white man does not feature. Whether he likes it or not, our destinies are inseparable. I have seen too much that is good in western culture -- for example, its music, literature and theater – to want to repudiate it. (qtd. in Kwaku Asante-Darko 6)

The choice to imitate foreign languages and cultures in African literature continues to provide a unifying center for the myriad of African languages and cultures for which the political and legal implications of a return to pre-colonial multilingualism and culture diversity are neither desirable nor possible.

### **Conclusion**

This research article has analyzed Chimamanda Adhie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the light of diverse perspectives of the postcolonial theorists. The examination of postcolonialism in the light of African literature has demonstrated that different dynamics of colonialism had started to disappear by the early twentieth century. The political, social, economic, and ideological domination of England had also begun to disappear immediately in the colonized nations. Nigeria has had tremendous experience of colonization. The paper has investigated that the essentializing the colonized nations particularly, Nigeria with a single ethnicity has been interrogated by the postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha. Nigeria has had ethnic divide at societal level as portrayed in the novel. The study has also found out that education and linguistic competence among the colonized are the weapons to counter the colonizers as demonstrated in the novel. Eventually, the prominence of language and education is at its paramount in the colonized nations.

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