

## GLOBALIZATION AND NIGERIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE NOVELS OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

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### ABSTRACT



Literature has always been seen as part, as well as a mirror of life and society because literature is not known to exist in a vacuum; rather it reflects all aspects of life of the environment in which a literary work is emanating or set. The paper is a study of the global and national outlook of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first two novels. In her two novels examined in this paper, *Purple Hibiscus (PH)* and *Half of a Yellow Sun (HYS)*, the socio-political history of Nigeria, as seen in an era of globalization, is treated especially as this affects multi-ethnic Nigeria and Nigerians. The paper identifies national issues that have affected Nigeria's socio-cultural, political, economic and historical landscape especially in this era of globalization. Such issues as children upbringing, business and economy and their tolls on the family, leading to rebellion and breakdown in family ties, as seen in *(PH)*; the delicate issue of the Nigerian civil war with the attendant tribal distrust and ethnic rivalries are all given fearless treatment by Adichie in *(HYS)*, showing how these have impacted on Nigeria as a major player in the global economy. The paper concludes that although Adichie may not have proffered any solution to Nigeria's myriad of problems as enunciated in the two novels examined here; she, however, succeeds like many other contemporary Nigerian writers to employ history and contemporary social issues to chronicle societal as well as global problems.

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### INTRODUCTION

Literature is life and the experience man goes through in life has always been the subject matter of literature. In the words of Mary Modupe Kolawole, "from the beginning, literature...was often a recreation of cultural histories with political and ideological undertones" (2). Literature, right from the beginning, has been written on a people's myth, legends, history and cosmological experience. The myth of Oedipus for instance has always existed with the people of Greece long before Sophocles carved out a story for the theatre out of it. In the same vein, some of the historical tragedies of William Shakespeare are written from the monarchical history of the English as found in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of*

*England, Ireland and Wales* which contains historical facts about the past kings and queens of those countries. One historical event in Nigeria which has generated and continues to produce a considerable amount of creative works is the Nigerian Civil War.

The Nigerian civil war may have come and gone but its memories continue to reverberate and linger in the 'united' Nigeria that any chronicler of Nigerian history, whenever it comes to discussing the civil war, cannot but come to the same conclusion as that of Adichie's father: *agha ajoke* literally translated 'war is very ugly' by Adichie (*HYS*, 434). The civil war over which many books have been written and will still continue to be written has

taken its toll on the Nigerian unity. This is acknowledged by Adichie at the end of *HYS* where she gave a long list of authors from which the novel derived its robustness. Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe also admit that the "Nigeria-Biafra war has generated so impressive a body of literature that literary critics have come to regard that historical event as important in both the periodization and the aesthetic development of Nigerian literature" (178). Onukaogu and Onyerionwu also confirm the fact that "up to the present time, the Nigerian civil war has not ceased to generate literature and in all genres, too" (64). Adichie has now joined the long list of Nigerian writers who have documented that historical event in the Nigerian nation; not as mere history, but as a creative artist skillfully using existing facts to construct a readable and engaging novel in *HYS*. In *PH* the subject matter revolves around topical issues that have telling effects on the Nigerian society and in fact on any African society in this era of globalization. This is also expressed in a manner that engages the reader. From whatever angle the works of Adichie are considered, the purpose of literature can be seen to be achieved. Whether her works are looked at "as a mode or method of expression" (Egudu, 1) which stresses the beauty of language in a literary composition, or the communication of thoughts or ideas or the experiences giving rise to them (Egudu, 13), Adichie is seen as a leading light in modern Nigerian literature as she has, no doubt, proved herself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century star of the Nigerian novel, brilliantly deploying her literary and creative skills to reflect Nigeria and portray her as she was and is to the rest of the world. Through thorough research, Adichie digs up those issues that have continued to dog Nigeria's footsteps in her bid to develop in an era of globalization. This is the literary platform, that is historical criticism, from which Adichie's second novel, *HYS* is considered in this paper. This is a worthwhile platform for the present study because the exponents of historical criticism believe it

... could illuminate works of literature by studying what gave birth to them: the intellectual and cultural environment from which they came, their sources and antecedents, authors' lives, authors' intentions, and authors' language. They believed that their approach was "scientific" because they were dealing with objective reality-historically verifiable facts... (Griffith, 129-130).

Adichie's resort to history in *HYS* and to the cultural and social environments in *PH* throws illuminating lights on the Nigerian nation; to inform the world of what was and what still is in the Nigerian society especially in the world that is fast becoming a global village. This may be necessary in this era of globalization where the history of nations is fast fading away and particularly in Nigeria where the study of history and civic education is becoming anachronistic.

In this era of globalization, where the whole world is fast becoming closely knit together, there is the growing tendency to rubbish a nation's past and, where there is no history, not much lesson is learnt. History helps situate the present in the light of lessons learnt in the past and such lessons are useful in planning for the future. A common Western-Nigeria Yoruba proverb puts it more succinctly as "a child tripped and fell looked forward; an elder tripped and fell looked back". Globalization is forward looking, no doubt, but to the detriment of the past which is capable of shaping the present as well as the future because past mistakes will guide us away from errors of the present.

Globalization is a multifaceted phenomenon conceptualized by various people based on their backgrounds. While some focus on the economic aspect and emphasize the global economic outlook, others concern themselves with the global cultural aspect, or how it has affected their socio-cultural patterns (Mahfouz Adedimeji). It is "...the process by which regions of the world become linked, at various levels of society, through an expanding network of exchange of peoples, goods, services, ideas, traditions, etc across vast distances" (Ali Mazrui, 1). The global economy, through globalization, is taking its toll on our culture and psyche to the extent that only a sense of history can bring us back on the path of rectitude. Bodley says globalization has affected many world cultures to the extent that:

...local culture and social structure are now shaped by large and powerful commercial interest in ways that earlier anthropologists could not have imagined. Early anthropologists thought of societies and their cultures as fully independent systems. But today, many nations are multicultural societies composed of numerous smaller subcultures.

Moreover, Adebayo Lawal, paraphrasing Jean sums up globalization as the integration and democratization of

the world's culture, economy and infrastructure through transnational investment, rapid proliferation of communication and information technologies and the impact of free-market forces on local, national and regional economies. All these are from the West and they continue to diminish the worth of our values. In the words of Akachi Ezeigbo "our values are getting terribly eroded...we tend to jettison our values and take what is negative from the West". If globalization is corroding cultural values, literature can be a very veritable vehicle for cultural transmission and preservation as observed by Mary Kolawole when she says "literature is one of the best transmitters of cultural values and a tool for nurturing it as it tends and carries it from one generation to another" (19).

#### Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Life and Works

Adichie, born in Nigeria in 1977, has proved herself worthy of telling Nigeria's history as well as documenting the present for posterity and preserving our Nigerianness. This she does in the two novels under consideration, notwithstanding her relative youthfulness. Through thorough research, she succeeds in documenting a major historical event in Nigeria in *HYS* to the admiration of all who have read the novel. For example, the master storyteller himself, Chinua Achebe, says this of Adichie:

We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it. She is fearless, or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war. Adichie came almost fully made (*HYS*, front cover page).

Other people's opinions of Adichie point to her fearless delivery of lessons on Nigeria's history in a literary form and these lessons are not "dryly recited; rather they are felt through the medium of lived lives, of actual aching sensitive experiences" (Edmund White,). One captivating device adopted in the novel is the mixture of fiction and real facts in a genre that is fast becoming popular as "faction", where "the veil of fiction is becoming thin" (Kolawole, 20). In the author's note at the end of *HYS*, Adichie admits the setting of the novel, both temporal and spatial, to be Nigeria in the civil war years of 1967-70 and with characters "based on actual persons, their portrayals are fictitious as are the events surrounding them" (434). This device helps capture precision and

verisimilitude, making it possible for anyone conversant with Nigeria's past to identify with the events in the story and the personalities involved in them. In like manner, it launches a neophyte in Nigeria's past into a thorough understanding of those events that have become part of Nigeria's history. As a writer of Nigerian literature and chronicler of her history, Adichie provides "a mirror through which the Nigerian society can possibly reassess itself" (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 95). To give vent to the fact-fiction method adopted in the novels, real names of prominent figures in one of the major events in Nigeria's checkered history are mingled with imaginary names, one of which is the fictional creation of Okeoma, the poet, who is not far from our own Christopher Okigbo, the poet, who plunged into the Nigeria-Biafran civil war and died for the Biafran cause. Like Henrik Ibsen, Adichie's characters are recognizable people whose problems are familiar to the Nigerian audience and those familiar with Nigeria.

In the two novels under consideration in this paper Adichie's preoccupations include those issues that have come to plague Nigeria, arising mainly from globalization. As Onukaogu and Onyerionwu have noted:

Socially and culturally, Nigerians continue to approach a globalized agenda, increasingly being influenced by the West. Motivated by an ever-increasing accessibility to the media of popular culture, traditional ways are on the brink of suffering a knock-out from theramping and rampant elements of the imported cultural format (97).

In *HYS*, it is the horrifying Nigeria's civil war and its attendant difficulties and ethnic prejudices and mistrust. Although occurring earlier, its effects keep reverberating by the present global realities. In *PH* topical issues in modern Nigerian society form the fulcrum on which the novel's subject matter rests. Generally, Adichie's two novels border on Nigeria and Nigerians' myriad of problems to help the world have a more realistic view of the Nigerian situation. This may make the world have more sympathy with Nigeria as Yerima's *Hardground* may probably have produced the ground for the amnesty exercise today in the Niger Delta region. These two novels of Adichie can be said to be a representation of current Nigerian literature in English, which Rebecca Okon Usoro describes as "...the literary piece written by Nigerians in English language, but with the reflection of

the life pattern of the Nigerian people...though written in English, has over the years relayed the different stages of developmental strides of Nigerian survival as a viable nation in the world polity" (161-162).

#### Adichie and Nigeria's Socio-Political Landscape

Adichie, in these two novels, emphasizes events rather than character, from sociological and historical perspectives. From the sociological point of view, the social and economic issues of present Nigeria are emphasized in *PH*, while *HYS* addresses issues in Nigeria from the historical angle as the author takes her setting, events and even some of the characters from history and specifically, the Nigerian civil war period. Events that have impacted seriously on Nigeria either in the past or in our contemporary period are given serious attention in both *PH* and *HYS*. These events are social problems and the civil war. These are events that have left indelible marks on the psyche of Nigerians; a psyche that has been brutalized by the unwholesome social vices in Nigeria's past and present and especially the horrors of war which have left us traumatized, making a sense of real patriotism a mirage, especially as depicted by Biafran soldiers who see Nigerian soldiers as vandals, which all Biafrans call their former compatriots.

In *PH*, Adichie shows how family relationship can easily break down making family members traumatized and leaving with it sorrow, tears and blood. A disorganized family set up is a bad signal for any society. This may be why some societies are set up to look into how to prevent domestic scuffles capable of disrupting the larger society. Leaving such matters unattended to may not augur well for the larger society as this may leave the nation battered, putting it always on the throes of death and preventing it from growing in a world where other nations are striving to move forward in a globalized economy. Azumurana notes, too, that in *Purple Hibiscus*, it is implied that "internalized family problems are usually inextricably connected with public actions" (137). The recent dethronement and banishment of a first class traditional Oba from his domain in southwest Nigeria due to the unwholesome manner with which he handled a domestic problem is an indication of how a minor domestic issue, if not addressed early enough, can impact negatively on the larger society. Eugene's detachment from his traditional African root, his domestic behavior as well as his filial ingratitude as seen in his attitude to his father who is a symbol of African tradition, falls short of expectation leaving serious strain on family ties. The

resultant effect is the eventual tragedy at the end of the novel. This is a symbol of societal tragedy arising from breakdown in communication, poor management of domestic affairs and the modern man's disconnect from his progenitors.

The major conflict in the novel (*PH*) is the struggle against society, seen in both Kambili and Jaja in their desire to be free from the clutches of their father's overbearing attitude. This is not far from one of the negative aspects of globalization, which Tabb identifies as "rapid spread of diseases, illicit drugs, crime, terrorism and uncontrolled migration". Most often, when the idea of globalization is discussed, it is only in positive terms of "sharing of basic knowledge, technology, investments, resources and ethical values" ( ). The instances of rebellion in *PH*: Eugene against traditionalism, symbolized by Pa, Nnokwu; Jaja and Amaka against Western religion, among other instances can be traced to globalization. Anyokwu says *Purple Hibiscus*

is a very sensitive and touching tale of violence, terror, abuse and psychopathology, operating both at the interpersonal and social level, thus intimating a rather globalised, pan-human psycho-moral collapse ( ).

Some of the negative effects of globalization as evident in *PH* are as summarized by Tabb when he says:

Although most people continue to live as citizens of a single nation, they are culturally, materially, and psychologically engaged with the lives of people in other countries as never before. Distant events often have an immediate and significant impact, blurring the boundaries of our personal worlds (*Encarta Premium Suite*).

The above can be seen in the lives of many of the characters in *PH*, especially Ifeoma who has been influenced by the university environment in which she lives. This also accounts for Jaja's changed behavior after visiting Enugu. The universal nature of the university environment impacts on him as it has impacted on Ifeoma. In this era of globalization, a lot of patriotism is required for any nation to have any value of itself. This may be the kind of patriotism exhibited by Mrs. Muokelu who would not touch anything from Nigeria, sent by Nigerians (*HYS*, 379). The Igbo, during the war, managed

their own economy and manufactured their own lethal 'ogbunike'.

Adichie's bold treatment of sex and sexuality is not unconnected with the modern Nigerian writers' exposure to the multimedia with their attendant corruption of the youths. She is one of those modern Nigerian novelists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that have been accused of exhibiting astonishing liberties in the area of the blatant depiction of sexuality. Adichie is described as one of the worst culprits who are simply responding to a generational fad that is possibly the influence of the West and globalization.

No history of Nigeria is complete without the reign of the military which has ruled Nigeria for the better part of her existence as a sovereign nation. Those inglorious interventions in the politics of Nigeria have left many bruised. The Nigerian press can tell the story better with the arrest, detention and killing of journalists and harassment of their family members. This is part of the disillusionment evident in post-colonial African literature especially from the mid-sixties as writers appear to be unanimous in acknowledging the fact that "independence had brought new problems which Africans could not blame on colonization" (Gogura, 96). Although the issue of military intervention may not have been given detailed treatment in either of the novels under study as Achebe does in *Anthills of the Savannah*, their influence is still not unfelt in the two novels.

Another significant aspect of Nigeria's socio-political history that is given elaborate attention by Adichie is the civil war which claimed lives in millions. War, with its attendant problems, is a global issue and Adichie has treated the Nigeria-Biafra war from a global perspective of the evil effects of war which include human degradation, economic paralysis and mutual distrust among others. This is done in a fact-fiction manner to let readers know what the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-70 was like. Although Adichie was not born at the time of the war, she tows the path of many other writers who have written on the subject of Nigeria-Biafra War to join

...the many fictional texts about the war [which] are quite reminiscent, even in particular details, of the experiences of particular individuals on both sides of the conflict. Biafran war literature is therefore striking in its revelation of the fluid interplay of between fact and fiction (Killam & Rowe, 178).

Nigeria, being part of a global society where economic, political, environmental, and cultural events in one part of the world quickly come to have significance for people in other parts, is shown to the world in the war years in *HYS*. The novel reveals the heavy collateral damage in the three-year fratricidal war. Like Clark-Bekederemo's civil war poems which recount the horrors of these historical events and Eddie Iroh's concern "with the immediate effect (of the war) on the people who lived through it" especially in *Toads for War* (1976) which "traces the fortunes of former soldiers as they try to survive in the bleak last days of the secessionist Republic of Biafra" (Simon Gikandi, 242), Adichie recounts the gory details of the war. Nigeria is still smarting from the attendant consequence of the war, which has left Nigerians polarised along ethnic divides.

Another globalizing factor, which is not usually given attention, is religion. Although there are many religions, each faith unites its adherents in a way that makes them believe in one thing or the other globally to the extent that some are so fanatical about it that they are prepared to die for it. For example in *PH*, Adichie shows how religious fanaticism can lead to family disintegration. This is the type demonstrated by a wealthy Nigerian businessman who is so callous by catholic fanaticism to the extent that things fall apart among family members. This is symbolized by the shattered figurines when Kambili says:

Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère (11).

After that demonstration of blind catholic fanaticism that makes Eugene more catholic than the Pope, peace takes a flight from the family. Kambili, the narrator, confirms this later in the novel when she says:

May be Mama had realized that she would not need the figurines anymore; that when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything. I was only now realizing it, only just letting myself think it (23).

Nigeria is supposed to be a secular nation, but religious intolerance remains one of the major problems that have

blemished the country's image in the global community. This is demonstrated in *PH* at a micro level. Eugene would go to any length including beating his wife and children on issues that border on religion.

No writer writes in a vacuum, and hardly does any literary work exist independent of the society, especially if it is a literature of commitment. As noted by Akachi Ezeigbo (4) "writers are often motivated by things happening around them" (91). One of the functions of literature is presenting the happenings in the environment. The two novels of Adichie under study present various situations in Nigeria, especially our recurrent problems without, however, proffering any solution. This excludes Adichie from the class of Africa's revolutionary novelists. Although Adichie may not be in the class of revolutionary African novelists, the two novels nonetheless expose the Nigerian situation like the revolutionary African novel "which... exposes the bitterness, and woes of oppression on one hand. On the other hand, it expresses the attempt made by the revolutionary African novelists to dethrone oppression, its practitioners and enthrone equity and an egalitarian society" (Balogun, 230). Adichie appears to fall short of the latter as her two novels under consideration end on a note of pessimism. This confirms Gakwandi's position that:

African writing has been growing progressively more pessimistic; angry artists if they cannot give solutions to the problems which face the continent today, have at least attacked the errors and villainy of the politicians and the people (85)

Nigerian writers such as Wole Soyinka in *Season of Anomy* and *A Dance of the Forests* and Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* in the same class with Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* point to the disillusionment that followed many African nation's independence as it had not improved the lot of the people. This disillusionment, as time goes on, seems to have tended towards pessimism which is very evident in Adichie's two novels under study. She fails to engender hope in the audience after painting a lurid picture of past and existing realities without providing how human society can rise above the adversity. She does not seem to have any solution to the problems raised and some of these are problems that are fundamental to the Nigerian

nation. This confirms Onukaogu and Onyerionwu's (111) submission that:

The new school of Nigerian novelists has given ample evidence that they recognize the entertainment role our literature should play in the present time by going the extra mile in an effort to establish themselves much more fundamentally as gifted storytellers than as die-hard advocates of sociopolitical change (111).

Adichie fits into this category but she has also distinguished herself as one of the contemporary Nigerian writers "enchanted with the reconstruction of history to suit the demands of contemporary content messages...where the novelist...innovatively recreates known motifs and materials in a manner that recommends his or her craftsmanship" (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 106). This characteristic qualifies this category of writers and their writings for the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* definition of literature as "writing which has claimed to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect" ( ). In these regards, Adichie succeeds, just as her success is not in doubt as regards the fact that "literature should and does instruct as well as entertain "(Jerome Beaty, et al. xxxi).

New Nigerian writers cannot be categorized as revolutionary African novelists who not only expose the African problem, but also "make moves artistically and creatively to provide pragmatic solutions" (Balogun, 230), they "appear more interested in getting the audience to appreciate them for what they are – artists, and not as social crusaders" (Onukaogu & Onyerionwu, 106). Thus, Adichie, like Soyinka, Awoonor, Achebe and others in their group has merely exposed problems inherent in the Nigerian nation without proffering any solution. For example, what should Biafra do after the "sun set" in *HYS*? Towards the end of the novel, for instance, Richard is seen traumatized:

Richard dabbled at his nose. Darkness descended on him, and when it lifted, he knew that he would never see Kainene again and that his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadow, only in half glimpses (430).

In *PH*, although the novel seems to end on a hopeful note, it is tainted.

Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. *The new rains will come down soon* (310). (Emphasis mine).

This hopeful note is not without a tinge of despair that almost borders on hoping against hope, as the novel ends on a non-revolutionary tone to propel the needed change that will usher in the hope. It is still the same elusive hope as:

Silence hangs over us but it is a different kind of silence, one that lets me breathe. I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive (309).

This is the Nigerian situation as, year in and out, we keep hoping against hope as our leaders get more and more desperate leaving the citizenry worsted. Adichie provides no definable solution to the myriad of problems that plague the Nigerian nation, especially those raised in her novels. Jaja ends up in prison without any hint as to whether that experience will purge him of his rebellious attitude. Richard, a voice of reason, in *HYS* ends up with a bruised nose and a descending darkness with no definite hope of abatement. Providing no direct solution may be in the manner of Onukaogu and Onyerionowu's description of the average Nigerian 21<sup>st</sup> century novelist because of the dearth of "big issues" as "a little bit more indifferent, a little bit more conscious of artistic restraint, a little bit less angry and a little bit more detached from his/her subject matter" (112). S. M. Gogura captures the picture most pungently when he says:

The period immediately after independence in the early 60's inspired the birth of literary works expressing disillusionment and disenchantment with the new order in various countries. In their bid to vent this profound feeling of being let down by the new African leaders, some of the writers have failed to keep faith with the social contract between the writer and his society; that is to correct the ills of the society without inspiring the feeling of hopelessness in the reader (107).

#### CONCLUSION

Adichie may not have proffered any solution to Nigeria's myriad of problems as enunciated in her two novels here;

she has, however, succeeded as an artist, like many other contemporary Nigerian writers of different genres to employ the use of history and contemporary social issues to chronicle societal and global problems. This helps to present the country's problems before the world so that we can be better known for what and who we are and thus elicit the needed attention from the rest of the world. Whether Adichie had this in mind is another thing. She may just as well have written to chronicle Nigeria's socio-political scene and not necessarily to effect any change in the society, as has been noted that there is a limit to what art can do. According to Akachi Ezeigbo:

Some people believe that writers can change society while others believe that they cannot. Some theorists believe that writing should only be for aesthetics. Others hold the art-for art view. Some believe in the utilitarianism of art. Most African writers believe that it should be functional...There is a limit to what you can expect art to do. My own stand is that literature can change Society...It can transform society as Achebe tries to show in *Anthills of the Savannah*...Since we don't have a reading culture, literature can only do very little ( ).

It has been observed, however, that it is not only in Nigeria that people no longer read, it is becoming a global problem as a result of the visual culture which has taken over. As noted by Hyginus Ekwuazi "if you want anybody to read anything put it in film put it on television. This is all over the world; people are losing that ability to sit down and read" (31). Adichie may not have written to change the society; she has, however, succeeded in documenting Nigeria's socio-cultural milieu.

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