



Social Identities and Social Conflict Eruption in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

Over the past decades, the nature of war has transformed from inter-state wars to intra-state conflicts. By the end of colonialism, many African countries, including Nigeria, were plagued by violent uprisings and civil wars. Among the literary works that tackle the preconditions of the Nigerian Civil War is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Although the novel has been extensively analyzed, the correlation between social identities and conflict eruption almost remains absent. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this paper delves into Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory and John Turner's Self-Categorization Theory, social psychological theories that examine the interplay of social identity, group identification and social categorization in conflict eruption. The paper aims to show the significant role that social identity, when taken to the extreme, plays in triggering conflict, highlighting the impact of British colonialism in intensifying group identities in Nigeria as presented in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Moreover, it sheds light on the terrible consequences of conflict escalation.

Keywords: *civil war; social identity; social categorization; colonialism; Half of a Yellow Sun.*

Social Identities and Social Conflict Eruption in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Introduction

Half of a Yellow Sun, set against the backdrop of the Biafran War (1967-1970), is one of Adichie's most praised novels. It won several awards, the top of which is the Orange Prize for fiction in 2007; it was also shortlisted for other awards including, "the 2007 Commonwealth Writer's Prize". It has gained much popularity, especially after its adaptation into a film in 2013 (Coffey, 2014). Since today's Nigerian population is mainly comprised of youths, as nearly half of the population are teenagers under fifteen years old, Adichie revisited the history of the Nigerian Civil War to educate Nigerians who did not witness the war of that period of history when the country was divided politically and culturally (Hawley, 2008). Though she did not witness the civil war herself as she was born years after the war, the trauma of the war has been transmitted to her through her parents. She declares that "the war is not mere history for me; it is also a memory, for I grow up in the shadow of Biafra" (Adichie, 2008, p.50). The shadow of war keeps haunting her as she lost her grandfathers during the war in addition to the loss of her parents of their assets and belongings. Thus, she feels the urge to reflect on the implications and the repercussions of the Biafran war in her novel.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie gives a vivid objective image that offers multifaceted implications for Nigerian society before and during the Nigerian Civil War. The novel focuses on the correlation between identities and conflict eruption: how group identities can cause intractable conflicts, how group identities can be manipulated, and how British colonialism intensified group identities in Nigeria. Thus, before presenting the theoretical framework and analyzing the novel, a brief historical background of the Nigerian-Biafran war is presented to better understand the formation of group identities in Nigeria.

Nigerian Civil War Historical Background

Before 1914, there was no Nigeria with its present borders. It is a colonial creation that was formed through two stages: firstly, by welding together the Protectorate of Lagos and the Niger Coast Protectorate to be a unified Southern Protectorate in 1906 and secondly by amalgamating the Southern and Northern

Protectorates in 1914. In fact, the amalgamation was designed to facilitate administrative work, avoid conflicts between various colonial governments and cut down expenses (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Hence, the colonial decision of amalgamation did not consider the cultural, ethnic and religious disparities between the North and the South.

The disparities among the communal content of Nigeria were even aggravated by the divide-and-rule colonial policy that introduced “asymmetric developments educationally, politically, socially between the northern and southern regions in order to deepen the already existing differences” (Adedji, 2016, p.324). Moreover, the colonial 1950s constitutions aroused the rivalry between Nigerian ethnic groups as they divided the country into three regional structures: Northern, Western and Eastern entities that were inhabited by over 250 ethnic groups but led by three major dominant groups. The Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba dominated the Northern, Eastern and Western regions respectively (Gabra and Gabra, 2005; Adedji, 2016). At independence, Nigeria adopted a federal system in which representation in the national government was based on the population of each of the three regions. Therefore, political parties fought to maintain control of the national government. Since the North according to the colonial division was the largest region, it “could dominate the veto policies approved by the other regions” (Spalding, 2000, p.54).

Northerners were worried about possible “domination” by the well-educated Southerners; likewise, Southerners feared being dominated by the unskilled Northerners. These fears resulted in “flawed elections and fraud census in 1964 and 1965”. The gloomy atmosphere of corruption and mistrust ended up with a military coup, in January 1966, led by a group of army officers to bring change (Falola and Heaton, 2008, p.159). Several leaders, mostly Northerners, were left dead in the coup including Federal Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa. Meanwhile, General John Aguiyi-Ironsi took control of the government. Attempting to eradicate regionalism, Ironsi dismantled the federal system creating a unitary government. While the Southerners welcomed Ironsi’s measures, the Northerners viewed the coup and Ironsi’s policy as an Igbo conspiracy designed to dominate the North. What raised the Northerners’ doubts were several matters at the top of which was the ethnic nature of those who led the coup and those who were killed during the coup: four out of the five majors who led the coup were Igbo and most of the political leaders that were killed were Northerners. Consequently, in July 1966, a bloody counter-coup led by Northern officers occurred whereupon

General Ironsi was killed and Lieutenant Yakubu Gowon took control of the government (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Thus, Nigeria was driven into a protracted conflict that lasted for almost three years.

Perceived as threats, Igbos were attacked, and riots broke out targeting Igbo residents in the North leaving almost 80,000 dead. Such a massacre led Okjukwu, the Igbo military governor of the Eastern region, to announce the secession of the Eastern region calling it the independent Republic of Biafra in 1967 (Falola and Heaton, 2008). In response, Gowon, the head of the Federal Military Government, did not recognize the new Republic, and, in July 1967, a bloody war was launched against Biafra to get it back. What made the matter worse was the blockade imposed on Biafra during the war, a matter that led to a severe shortage of food and supplies. After three years of war, Biafra surrendered and the war ended in January 1970 leaving from one to two million dead mostly from starvation (Aremu and Buhari, 2017). In fact, the role that social identity plays in war eruption and escalation is significant, so it would be illuminating to study the dynamics of social identities and how they can alter individuals' perceptions.

Social Identity Theory and The Dynamic of Inter–Group Relations

Social identity theory (SIT) was first pioneered by Henri Tajfel and then further developed by John Turner, in the 1970s and the 1980s, to examine “the group in the individual” and hence inter–group behaviour (Hogg and Abrams, 1998, p.3). SIT refers to the way individuals define themselves in terms of a certain social group. According to Henri Tajfel, social identity is defined as “that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (1982, p.24). Hence, social identity theory revolves around the correlation between group membership and self-enhancement.

For Tajfel, social identity is the result of the process of social categorization, social comparison and the motivation of self-enhancement. He shows that people categorize themselves into groups to better understand their surroundings; people categorize others in terms of nationality, religion, race, color, gender, club membership, university unions and so on. People can belong to more than one category at the same time; however, when group membership is prioritized, i.e., becomes more salient than others, group behaviour is initiated because an

emotional significance is added to this particular group membership. The next mental process that appears immediately after categorization and social identification is social comparison. Hence, people start to evaluate their group by comparing it to another relevant group (1982). For example, if the Blacks are to evaluate the social standing of their group, they compare their status against that of the Whites, not against males or Christians. The end result of social comparison determines the individual's positive or negative social identity and hence his self-esteem.

One of the major contributions of the theory is the 'minimal group paradigm', a series of experiments through which Tajfel proves the correlation of social categorization and inter-group behaviour that could trigger out-group discrimination. In his minimal group experiment, Tajfel divides a number of students with no prior interaction or conflict into groups. Surprisingly, in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination are easily triggered by their interaction (Turner et al, 1987). The mere awareness of the division into "we" and "them" is enough to "provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory response" (Tajfel and Turner, 1986, p.279). It is worth mentioning that in-group bias is not based on objective measurements; it is rather subjective and sometimes "unjustifiable" (Turner et al, 1979, p.187). Hence, group members constantly seek to achieve positive inter-group distinctiveness, to feel that their group is positively distinctive in comparison to out-groups. The main motivation behind seeking positive distinctiveness is to enhance the self-esteem motive because identifications to social categories become part of the self-concept and the definition of self.

While SIT focuses mainly on intergroup relations, John Turner develops SIT and presents his theory of self-categorization to focus on intragroup relations. Turner postulates that the process of categorization is the cognitive base of group behaviour. The core concept of his theory is the process of *depersonalization*, "the process of 'self-stereotyping' whereby people come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual difference from others" (Turner et al, 1987, p.50). It is this transformation of self-perception that produces the group phenomena. Eventually, the group member internalizes his group "prototype": the attitudes and the characteristics that differentiate a group from another (Hogg and Terry,

2000). Such internalization of the in-group prototype entails that a person may behave as an individual in a way that is different from the way he/she behaves as a group member. Depersonalization is the process that opens the door to group solidarity and group polarization. It should be noted that social identities are inevitable and beneficial as they shape individuals' sense of self, provide them with a sense of belonging and foster social cohesion. However, when social identities are taken to the extreme, inter-group tensions may erupt. Therefore, social identities are often manipulated, whether by internal or external factors, to serve some political ends. Thus, the dynamics of social identity construction offered by the theories of both Tajfel and Turner are illuminating tools that help better understand the war narrative trope presented in Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun*.

Social Identities and The Eruption of Conflict in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun is a war narrative that traces the life of Ozobia's extended family: his twin daughters Olanna and Kainene, and their partners Odenigbo and Richard respectively. The novel follows the epistemological journey of Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy who transforms from a village boy to a teacher and then an author. The novel weaves the pre-war life of individuals with the political course of events by its division into four parts alternating between the early sixties—that portray the love affair of both Olanna and Kainene and their partners, the betrayals that happened in their relations, Ugwu's naivety and the academic circle held in Odenigbo's house—and the late sixties that present the political turmoil leading to the Nigerian-Biafran War. Throughout the novel, the disharmonious nature of Nigeria's ethnic groups—Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba—is highlighted. Nancy Spalding (2000) reveals that in the wake of independence, the Muslim Hausa remained insulated from the cultural influence of colonialism; they were not exposed to British missionaries or to Western education in return for their loyalty to the British rule. They value order and hierarchy and are keen on keeping social integrity. On the contrary, the Igbo were well-educated and exposed to the modern Western lifestyle. Unlike the conservative nature of the Hausa, the Igbo were dynamic, rebellious and individualistic. As for the Yoruba, though well-educated as the Igbo, they seek a way between the "individualism" of the Igbo and the

“hierarchy” of the Hausa (p.71). Thus, such a different communal content is a fertile ground for conflict eruption

From the very beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to the different ethnic communal content of Nigeria. On her visit to Uncle Mbaezi in Kano in the North, Olanna meets her uncle’s Hausa friend, Abdulmalik, who sells leather slippers. The dichotomy between the educated South and the uneducated North is evident when Abdulmalik is highly impressed by Olanna’s success in gaining her master’s degree from London; “he had that expression of people who marvelled at education with certainty that it would never be theirs” (Adichie 2006, p.50). The novel, also, gives a glimpse of the different outfits of the Hausa and Igbo people. When Olanna visits her Hausa ex-lover, Mohammed, he is in “a white caftan” and his mother is wearing “silk scarves around her head” (p.57). The traditional outfit of Mohammed is juxtaposed with the modern style of Olanna’s Igbo partner, Odenigbo, who is portrayed at the very beginning of the novel as wearing “a print shirt and a pair of trousers” while heading to a club to play tennis (p.7).

Adichie is keen on showing the saliency of social identity and its subsequent inter-group behaviour in the Nigerian society. The gap between each group is subtly highlighted through the reference to the impossibility of inter-group marriage. This is apparent when Arize, Olanna’s cousin, redeems Olanna’s separation from the handsome Mohammed telling Olanna, “if only Mohammed was an Igbo man, I would eat my hair if you did marry him” (p.52). When Olanna, mockingly, shows that she can help her to get married to one of Mohammed’s friends, Arize’s reply reveals how such an offer is not an option, “papa will kill me first of all if he knows I was ever looking at Hausa man like that” (p.52). Such a conversation denotes the existence of group polarization, culminating in discriminatory responses.

Hence, the novel reiterates that the inherent cultural difference between Nigeria’s ethnic groups is even intensified by the divide-and-rule policy of colonialism. The link between the colonial rule and the antagonism brought up between different ethnic groups is captured through Richard’s article in which he comments on the massacre of the Igbo in the North saying:

If this is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial exercise. These policies manipulated the differences between the tribes and

ensured that unity would not exist, thereby making the easy governance of such a large country. (Adichie, 2006, p.209)

The above quotation negates the Western single story of the violence in Nigeria that depicts Africans as uncivilized barbaric creatures who are prone to violence by nature. Rather, the novel presents the other part of the story by “connecting the violence in post-independence Nigeria with the centuries of colonial rule” (Novak, 2008). Hence, the novel not only refutes the Western perspective of Africans as inherently violent but highlights the role that colonialism played in forming group identities in Nigeria.

Group identities are, thus, polarized due to the British tendency to favour the Northerners bestowing them access to political power, a matter that threatens other group identities. This idea is revealed, in the novel, in the subtext, “The World Was Silent When We Died” which shows in its second extract that the British may favour Northerners because they are “perfect for indirect rule” (Adichie, 2006, p.146). Moreover, the ethnic imbalanced colonial structure is highlighted when Colonel Madu, an Igbo army officer, comments on the violent nature of the counter-coup telling Kainene the following:

The problem was the ethnic balance policy. I was part of the commission that told our GOC that we should scrap it, that it was polarizing that army, that they should stop promoting Northerners who were not qualified. But our GOC said no, our *British* GOC. (p.178)

The imbalance of ethnic structure in Nigeria is aggravated especially after the Northerners’ dominance of the central government according to the colonial constitution. Adichie portrays the fragile status of Nigeria at independence through *The Book* as follows:

To propitiate the North, [The British] fixed the pre-independence elections in favour of the North and wrote a new constitution that gave the North control of the central government ... At independence in 1960, Nigeria was a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp. (p.195)

Such a gloomy atmosphere invokes mistrust and misconceptions among different ethnic groups as each group feels threatened by the other. Thus, these feelings of mistrust and fear are reflected through Olanna’s coincident meeting

with a Hausa Man on the plane heading to Lagos. In the beginning, the man admires Olanna treating her with decency and gentleness. Mistakenly thinking her a Hausa woman, he offers her *The New Nigeria Magazine* which deals with anti-Igbo news. During the conversation, the man reveals his worries from the Igbo, “the problem with Igbo people is that they want to control everything in this country. Everything. Why can’t they stay in their East?” (pp.283-4). Surprisingly, the man is stunned when he knows that the beautiful gentle Olanna is Igbo, so he immediately cuts his conversation with her and remains silent. Indeed, the man’s prejudice against Igbo reflects the widespread hatred and fear at that period of time. His prejudice leads him to treat Igbo individuals as exemplars of their social group. His gentle attitude towards Olanna at the beginning is turned upside down when treating her according to her social identity. Moreover, the anti-Igbo sentiment is also evoked early in the novel when Olanna knows on her first visit to Kano that Northerners segregate Igbo and Hausa children in schools. Despite the Igbo’s attempt to dissuade the Northerners from applying the policy of school segregation, the Northerners refuse to let their children mingle with Igbo children.

One of the preconditions of social conflict is the weak state that leaves a space for corruption and unfair distribution of resources among its communal groups (Azar, 1990). In fact, any unfair distribution of sources accentuates social comparison, thereby triggering in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination. Therefore, Adichie is keen on disclosing the acts of corrupt politicians and elites in post-independence Nigeria to shed light on the factors that intensified group identities. Through the character of Olanna’s father, chief Ozobia, Adichie presents the corrupt elites. He is a materialistic illiterate person who is known for his malpractices in business for the sake of gaining more money and assets. The reader realizes the degree of his corruption when Suzan, a British expatriate, tells Richard that, “Chief Ozobia owns half of Lagos...He doesn’t have much of a formal education, you see, and neither was his wife” (p.74). However, Ozobia could not have been corrupted alone; he needs the assistance of corrupt politicians as well. This is evident in the dinner Ozobia arranges with Okonji, the minister of finance. Throughout the dinner, Okonji keeps flirting with Olanna despite her hatred of him. What made the matter worse is the hidden agreement between Okonji and Ozobia according to which the former facilitates a building contract with the latter in exchange for an affair with Olanna. Indeed, such kind of agreement shows the meanness and the corruption of both politicians and elites. In his “Corruption in Post-Independence Politics: *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a

Reflection of *A Man of the People*” (2017), Chikwendu Paschalkizito Anyanwu notices how Adichie’s physical depiction of Okonji as a man who “salivates when he smiles” reflects his sordid actions and suggests “an unpolished fellow” (p.143).

Ironically enough is Mrs. Ozobia’s attitude towards her servant when he steals a small amount of rice. She is enraged and about to fire him, but Olanna interferes and gives him another chance. Speaking to Odenigbo about the incidents, Olanna links the servant’s act of stealing with her father’s corruption:

My father and his politician friends steal money with their contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness. And they build houses with their stolen money and rent them out to people like this man and charge inflated rents that make it impossible to buy food. (Adichie, 2006, p.276)

The above quotation alludes to the corruption prevalent in Nigeria at the time and to the disparities of resource distribution among different groups.

The Dynamics of Conflict Escalation

All the above-mentioned premises, that sharpen group identities, lead to the eruption of a protracted conflict and a long-term cycle of violence. Since personal and group identities are threatened, self-categorization becomes salient as the individuals’ sense of belonging to his/her group has been a priority. The division into “we” and “they” is enough to trigger in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel and Turner, 1986, p.279). Indeed, Adichie is keen on portraying the dynamics of conflict escalation and its socio-political implications. Riots have erupted in the North targeting the Igbo after the coup and counter-coup. Olanna witnesses the massacre in the North on her second visit to her Uncle. She sees the campaign launched against the Igbo as the Hausa men are shouting, “The Igbo must go. The infidels must go.” (p.85) The word “the infidels” shows how they devalue the out-group, the Igbo, thereby delegitimizing them of any human right and excluding them from “acceptability” (Bar-Tal, 1990, p.65). Amid this chaos, Olanna hurries to rescue her family from the ongoing bloodbath, but upon her arrival at her Uncle’s house, she finds her aunt, uncle and cousin slaughtered at the hands of their Hausa neighbours:

She stopped when she saw the bodies. Uncle Mbaezi lay facedown...Something creamy-white oozed through the large gash on the back of his head. Auntie Ifeka lay on the veranda. The cuts on

her naked body were smaller, dotting her arms and legs like slightly parted red lips. (Adichie, 2006, p.186)

Surprisingly, the one who brutally murders Olanna's relatives is Abdulmalik, Uncle Mbaezi's old friend. What turns their friendship into animosity is the process of delegitimizing the other which leads to dehumanization. Therefore, it is noticed, throughout the novel, that each group describes the other as transgressors; for instance, the Hausa calls the Igbo "the rebels" and the Igbo calls the Hausa "the vandals". To keep the cycle of violence running, each group has to constantly give a rationalization of violence (Bar-Tal et al, 2012). Thus, it is seen that Abdulmalik justifies his murder of his friend's family by claiming that he meets Allah's will, "we finished the whole family. It was Allah's will" (Adichie, 2006, p.186). His act of justifying violence is considered, indeed, as an intra-psychic coping strategy (Breakwell, 1986). Being unable to assimilate and accommodate the act of violence into his identity structure, Abdulmalik changes the criteria of evaluating violence by giving it a positive value to be able to assimilate the new element into his identity.

A transformation in Abdulmalik's self-perception has occurred as he does not behave with Uncle Mbaezi on an individual level as he used to do. Instead, he perceives himself and Uncle Mbaezi as just exemplars of two different groups in a conflict. This transformation of self-concept is called *depersonalization*, "the process of 'self-stereotyping' whereby people come to perceive themselves more as interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual difference from others" (Turner et al 1987, p.50). Adichie draws the reader's attention to the seriousness of perceiving the other only as an exemplar or prototype of a particular group, thereby failing to see the individual as a human being. It is this shift in perception that causes dehumanization and hence genocides. Many innocent civilians lose their lives just for their extreme adherence to a certain group. On the train Olanna takes to escape from Kano, she is exposed to a terrifying scene, a head of a murdered little girl in a calabash. Carrying her daughter's head in the calabash, the woman furiously invites the passengers to take a look at her daughter's head. Shockingly, Olanna "saw the little girl's head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth" (Adichie, 2006, p.188). The woman challenges the political dimension of the conflict by referring to a very minute domestic aspect regarding the hair of her daughter as she says, "Do you know it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair" (p.188). The Juxtaposition of the violent

murder of the innocent girl with the domestic suffering of braiding the girl's hair counteracts any rationalization of blind violence. In *The Post Colonial Historical Novel: Realism, Allegory and the Representation of the Contested Past*, Hamish Dalley (2004) sees that the woman's decision to keep a physical piece of her daughter's body "defies the murderers' attempt to reduce her daughter to a sociopolitical category (Igbo, infidel)" (p.132). In the end, civilians are those who pay the price of the war in spite of the fact that they pay no attention to politics as they are only concerned with their domestic sphere.

Since the Igbo soldiers and civilians are dehumanized and seen only as exemplars of a threatening group, desensitization of violence is licensed. Upon the counter-coup led by the Northerners, Igbo soldiers are targeted and many of them are slaughtered. Kainene depicts the dehumanizing murder of one of the Igbo colonels to Richard saying, "Northern soldiers put him in a cell in the barracks and feed him his own shit...Then they beat him senselessly and tied him to an iron cross and threw him back in his cell. He died tied to an iron cross" (Adichie 2006, p.174). The desensitization of violence is also highlighted when one of the Igbo men who has managed to escape from the massacre says to Odenigbo and Olanna, "they are killing us like ants. Did you hear what I said? Ants" (p.181). The man's stress on the word "ants" shows how the Hausa dehumanize and de-abstract the Igbo; they no longer perceive the Igbo as individuals who have human traits.

Indeed, the process of delegitimization and dehumanization is not one-sided; likewise, the Igbo dehumanize the Hausa and perceive the Hausa individuals as exemplars of their social group. Upon the occurrence of the first military coup, Odenigbo and his friends discuss the killing of Northerners' politicians with a sense of amusement. They herald the murders of the Sardauna, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, and the finance minister justifying their attitude by linking the end of corruption to their murder. Their amusement is captured in the following conversation:

There was excitement in their voice even when they talked about the people who were killed.

"They said the Sardauna hid behind his wives."

"They said the finance minister shit in his trousers before they shot him"

Some guests chuckled and so did Ugwu. (Adichie, 2006, p.158)

The humanity of the Sardauna and the finance minister is overlooked; they are just seen as prototypes of the category of corrupt politicians. Therefore, they feel no sympathy for their murder; instead, they are glad for their pain and humiliation. To stop feeling guilty for showing no sympathy for their death, Ugwu justifies his happiness by saying, “but politicians were not like normal people, they were *politicians*” (Adichie, 2006, p.160). His stress on the word “politicians” suggests that typification prevents human sympathy. Likewise, the same excitement is seen when Aunt Ifeka tells Olanna about the murder of the Sardauna. She laughs at his humiliation, sarcastically telling Olanna the following:

They say the Sardauna sounded like that when he was begging them not to kill him. When the soldiers fired a mortar into his house, he crouched behind his wives and bleated, ‘*Mmee-mmee-mmee*, please don’t kill me, *mmee-mmee-mmee*’. (Adichie, 2006, p.164)

However, since Adichie is against the practice of dehumanizing the other by any means, she presents a balanced view through Olanna’s attitude towards violence. Countering the excitement of Aunt Ifeka regarding the murder of the Sardauna, Olanna rejects the humiliating way of his murder by saying, “they should not have killed him...they should have put him in prison” (Adichie, 2006, p.164). Thus, she offers a more humane alternative that does not deny punishment or revenge but denies the dehumanizing way of revenge. Similarly, Olanna opposes the amusement of Odenigbo and his friends towards the murder of the finance minister by speaking about him not on the political abstract level but on the individual level, “I know Okonji. He was a friend of my father’s. She sounded subdued” (p.158). It is only because Olanna still perceives him on the individual level that she could show sympathy for his murder, while the others fail to do so because they treat him only as a reflection of his political affiliation.

Since Adichie resists blind judgements and acute categorization, she does not present the single story of the out-group members. Thus, she presents the positive examples of the Hausa people who manage to humanize the other even at times of conflict so that she would not fall into the trap of depicting all the Hausa men as devils. In the novel, the reader sees an objective representation of the violent scenes. Although Olanna’s relatives are massacred at the hands of Hausa men, it is Mohammed, Olanna’s Muslim friend, who rescued her life. Amid the chaos in the North, Mohammed brings Olanna a long scarf to hide her identity as an Igbo

woman to protect her from any potential harm. He is also the one who drives her to the train station and does not leave her until he is sure that she is safe. Opposing Abdulmalik's rationalization of the murder of Olanna's relatives, Mohammed asserts the false claim of Abdulmalik by telling Olanna:

Allah does not allow this. He was shaking; his entire body was shaking. Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this. Allah will *never* forgive this. (Adichie, 2006, p.187)

Mohammed's quotation is a call for reviving moderation and elevating humanity to counter violence and chaos. His 'humanity' transcends the political identity of his group; he denies any rationalization in the name of the God he believes in for inflicting harm on innocent people. His repetition of phrases stresses his refusal of violent mass killing. The murder of disarmed civilians cannot be viewed except as a crime from Mohammed's point of view.

Similarly, the one who saves Colonel Madu's life, Kainene's friend, is a Hausa man. When Kainene and Richard are surprised that Madu is still alive because there were rumours that Madu was killed with other Igbo soldiers, Madu gives the credit for his safety to his friend Ibrahim, "Ibrahim saved my life. He told me about the coup that morning" (Adichie, 2006, p.176). Not only does Ibrahim notify him of the coup, but also he hides Madu in his cousin's house, gives him caftans to disguise and gives him money to escape. Thus, both Mohammed and Ibrahim are ideal examples intentionally drawn by Adichie of human beings who retains a balanced view that enables them to make sound judgements in spite of group identity. Such attitude is what Adichie aims at spreading to prevent potential upcoming genocide.

Adichie is keen on showing the multi-dimensional sphere of the repercussions of violence. Not only does the curse of violence plague victims and insiders, but it also extends to plague victimizers and outsiders. Violence begets violence and once it erupts, its catastrophic impact cannot be controlled. Olanna, representing the insider victim of war, is plagued by war atrocities. Unable to assimilate the violence she has witnessed in Kano, Olanna suffers from physical and psychological symptoms of trauma. Upon her arrival at Odenigbo's house, Olanna suffers from "dark swoops" and her legs are paralyzed. When she later restored her ability to move, she could not escape the haunting memories of her massacred relatives. When Odenigbo hugs her when he sees her walking, "she thought about

Arize's pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry" (Adichie, 2006, p.201). The past creeps to intrude into her present and it is recalled through small triggers. Amidst Olanna, Odenigbo and Ugwu's celebration of the secession announcement and the birth of Biafra, Olanna's memories spoil her happiness as she remembers Auntie Ifeka's corpus:

Odenigbo raised his arms as he spoke, and Olanna thought how awkwardly twisted Auntie Ifeka's arm had looked, as she lay on the ground, how the blood had pooled so thick that it looked like glue, not red but close to black...Olanna shook her head, to shake away the thoughts. (Adichie, 2006, p.205).

Even at the end of the novel, the memory of the plaited hair of the little girl's head in the calabash is recalled when she combs Baby's hair. She puts the comb down and tells Ugwu about the little girl's head, her open eyes and her hairstyle. The thematic repetition of trauma symptoms is reflected on the structural level of writing the novel through the incorporation of the fragmented extracts of the Book, "The World was Silent When We Died" since it repeats the story of the head in the calabash and stresses political affairs that are mentioned in the storytelling of the novel. In this respect, Senayon Olaoluwa states:

As a text-within-a-text, it underscores the agency of repetition in foregrounding the suffering of the Igbo in *The Half of a Yellow Sun*.... Such repetitions in the end validate the assumption that gaining access to extreme experiences of traumas instigated by violent histories can be facilitated through the repetition of suffering. (Adichie, 2006, p.25)

The threads of violence, also, entangle victimizers into the fabric of trauma. In the novel, Ugwu is turned into a victimizer when he participates in the rape of the bar girl after he is enforced to be a Biafran child soldier. Finishing one of the war operations, Ugwu and his child soldier colleagues enter a bar to have a drink. When the bar girl tells them that there is no drink available in the bar, they rape the girl one after the other. At first, Ugwu refuses to participate, but when his masculine identity is threatened by his colleague's remark, "aren't you a man", he takes part in the rape (Adichie, 2006, p.458). At this moment, he is depersonalized into the attributes of his group. However, there is a conflict between his new act and his previous components of identity. He could modify neither the process of assimilation/accommodation nor the process of evaluation

as he cannot find justification for his act. Therefore, he could not cope with his threatening position, and he is plagued by his violent act. Being traumatized, he could not escape the memory of the girl's disgusting look as it kept haunting him. In his dreams and daydreams, he relives his traumatic experience again and again until he "woke up hating the image and hating himself" (Adichie, 2006, p.497). Hence, the reader is taken into the minds of the victimizer "to show how the perpetrators themselves are victims of oppression and their own violence" (Ngwira, 2012).

No longer are the insiders the only sufferers of social conflicts; the outsiders are also plagued by the ongoing violence. Richard, representing the outside west, does not remain safe during the conflict. In the airport in Kano, Richard meets a young Igbo customer service agent called Nnaemeka with whom he talks for a short while. Suddenly, their conversation is cut when Northern soldiers start shouting at the people at the airport, "where are the Igbo people? Who is Igbo here? Where are the infidels?" (Adichie, 2006, p.192). Identified as Igbo, Nnaemeka is shot in front of Richard's eyes. He could not grasp the horrifying sudden scene that he had witnessed. His suffering is revealed through his focalization, "there was a painful ringing in his ears...he stood aside, vomiting" (p.193). Moreover, he is haunted by the image of Nnaemeka's murder to the extent that he wishes that what he has seen did not happen and that it is just an image out of his imagination. However, being sure that it has really happened, "he began to cry" (p.195). Hence, Richard's psychological agony is significant as it shows that the range of the repercussions of violence is unlimited and uncontrollable. It is not confined to a local sphere; rather, it can reach the outside community as well. Once an inter-state conflict erupts, other ramifications come to the surface like the issue of refugees who perceive the outside community as the only resort while the outside community perceives their presence as a heavy burden. Thus, foreign countries, though geopolitically far from the conflict, are affected by the countries' inter-state conflicts in one way or another. Thus, violence is a burning hell that does not distinguish one from another.

Conclusion

Highlighting the intersection of public and private spheres, the novel sheds light on the correlation between social identities and conflict eruption. While social identities play a significant role in providing individuals with a sense of belonging and fostering social cohesion and cooperation among group members,

extreme adherence to rigid social identities that dehumanize members of the out-group can lead to undesirable outcomes, including violence. The cognitive process entailed in the formation of social identity that postulates the derivation of one's self-esteem from his/her group membership can alter the individual perception, thereby acquiring the attributes of his/her group. Once the individual turns to be only an exemplar of his/her group, group polarization comes to the surface and violence can erupt. Thus, the novel shows how group polarization, in Nigeria, resulting from the disharmonious ethnic formation and the long history of colonial rule, has played a vital role in conflict eruption and escalation. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader witnesses that the curse of violence is inescapable; once it erupts, its plague extends to include victims and victimizers, insiders and outsiders. Hence, it's indispensable to highlight the importance of the agency of individuals and the role it plays in mitigating the negative consequences of extreme adherence to social identities and balancing between group identity and human values. Thus, the novel underscores the importance of having a balanced view towards the out-group and avoiding blind social categorization to have cohesive communities able to withstand outside pressures that can lead to violence.

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