

Ethnic Conflicts in Half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Abstract: In post-colonial and independent Africa, countries ruling is very often subject to frequent political instabilities fueled by the monopolization of the power by a group of people from a region. This act often generates great misunderstanding within other regions of countries. The present research paper has investigated on ethnic conflicts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It aims to find out causes, the manifestations and consequences of ethnic conflicts in the novel and then suggest some practical solutions to prevent them. Through a qualitative research method, this study reveals that ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are most of the time caused by struggles for political power; natural resources, social inequality, the system of exclusion and ethnic hatred. These lead to social and economic consequences. Thus, this article concludes that ethnic conflicts has never produced peace in our world; but rather violence. So, some prevention or conflict management strategies like good governance, cooperation and crisis management are suggested.

Keywords: Ethnic conflicts, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, to social and economic consequences.

1. INTRODUCTION

People who have common name that identifies them as a group, who believe in common ancestry, who have some degree of shared culture generally passed on through a combination of language, religion, laws, customs, institutions, dress, music, crafts, architecture and even food, constitute an ethnic group and have a sense of attachment to a specific territory. Sometimes, such groups of people consider themselves superior to others, or raise some kind of misunderstandings which most of time lead to conflicts. In some regions, ethnic conflicts are solved before they have caused any fatalities or lead to the death of only a few people. However, in other regions, these conflicts become very violent and dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people are killed, and this type of collective violence is often a trigger of civil war. Typically, ethnicity has built a huge barrier around African societies, which makes it difficult for the future leaders of the nation not to get to their door of future prospect in their future endeavor, due to some barriers created by ethnicity. Particularly, Nigeria is a country with diverse multi ethnics and religious identities which have come to play significant roles in persistent ethnic conflicts. These identities or nationalities find expression in divide and rule politics in Nigeria coupled with the fact that political elites manipulations of ethnic or tribal and religious sentiments as a means to achieve political power so easily. Before Colonialism, there have been the existence of many types of traditional state societies and independent political entities operating at different levels of development, civilization and local administration. These local or indigenous political entities existed as caliphate, kingdoms, empires chiefdoms, city-states and local communities.

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* tries to explore the colonial paradigm with the retelling of Nigeria's history after its freedom from Britain's rule and the subsequent Biafran War. The main purpose of this article is to better understand the causes of Ethnic conflicts by building a theory that explains why ethnic misunderstandings turn violent in some regions but not in others. Moreover, this work presents how Adichie narrates the erasure of a nation and its people through the African art of storytelling and the text which Ugwu, a houseboy in the novel writes, and to see how his writing makes a strong political statement as who should be writing the stories of the marginalized.

The present research work is guided by a set of questions that help me reach my goal:

1. What are the causes and manifestations of ethnic conflict in *Half of a Yellow Sun*?
2. What are the consequences of ethnic Conflict in *Half of a Yellow Sun*?
3. What are the managements of these ethnic conflicts in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts as used in modern studies are so elusive and often according to Okwudiba Nnoli, “ethnicity is a very complex phenomenon. It is always closely associated with political, economic, social, religious and other social views and interactions. Hence ethnicity finds expression in political domination, economic exploitation, psychological oppression and class manipulation (Okwudiba 78).” Perhaps the commonest explanation of what an ethnic group means is that which says that it comprises people with a common ancestry. In other words, this refers to people who can trace their pedigrees to one ancestor. Apparently, most definitions and explanations on the term, by social scientists, seem to draw from this perspective. According to Kaufman, the ethnic group is “a body of individuals who purportedly share cultural or racial characteristics, especially common ancestry or territorial origin, which distinguish them from members of other groups” (Kaufman, 138). Further, Kaufman adds that “... opposing communication in ethnic civil conflict hold irreconcilable visions of the identity, borders, and citizenship of the state” (Kaufman 138).

Huntington S. (1993) observes that “conflicts of the future will happen along cultural lines separating civilizations. Huntington also explains that ethnic conflicts are results of globalization bringing multiple cultures in contact and contrast with each other and can cause clash of civilization”, he further goes on to assert that “the increase of global communication will lead to more interactions between people of different cultures, norms, values and traditions, which resulted to civilization consciousness” (Huntington 18). Therefore, the increased civilization consciousness makes difference between civilization more glaring and will increase violent conflicts. Differences in culture seem to be a more reasonable cause of violent ethnic conflicts. For example, “Boko Haram” conflicts in North East Nigeria, is a byproduct clash of western civilization, culture, values, norms and traditions and indigenous, local, traditional (Islamic) cultural heritage of Northern Nigeria. In 2019, Mulunesh Dessie Admassu explores the multi-dimensional causes of ethnic conflict, and its effect on development in Amhara and Gumuz communities in Ethiopia. Their works intend to depart from simplistic explanations of ethnic conflicts and provide a basis for a more comprehensive approach to peace building and post-conflict development strategies in ethnically divided societies. Similarly, in 2004, Egwu explains that ethnic conflicts are persisting in Nigeria because ethnic loyalty serves as the pillar of ethnic conflicts. In Nigerian context, ethnic loyalty is a feeling of attachment to one’s ethnic group. This loyalty provokes the willingness to support and act negatively or positively on behalf of the ethnic group having an elective attitude towards those regarded as “outsiders”. Moreover, Edlyne E. Anugwon has investigated on the issue of ethnic conflicts and their implications for democracy in Nigeria in 2000. She examines the ways in which ethnic problems may be resolved in Nigeria through the creation of a realistic and workable federal model largely based on the American’s. The researcher finds that the issues of marginalization and agitations by ethnic minorities has been disturbing new dimensions. In the context of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, democratic tradition cannot blossom. Marginalization breeds suspicion, distrust, heightens ethnic tensions and may eventually lead to conflict over the sharing and allocation of power and national resources. Then, marginalization, whether apparent or real, has potential for disrupting the drive towards democracy. With cries for marginalization so rife among ethnic groups, a need arises to address the issue squarely. She concludes that ethnic conflicts in whatever form need to be resolved in order to allow for democracy to thrive.

3. CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

Ethnic conflicts emerge as a result of economic and political competition. Ethnicity is the major conflict in Nigeria but what is proven not totally true. Actually, most of the conflicts may partially relate to ethnicity but not all occur because the parties belong to different ethnic groups. Factors such as religion, population and struggling for scarce resources or compete for all state power could lead to conflicts. Those conflicts are not only between ethnic groups, they may also be within a single ethnic. In other words, conflicts may be inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic. Indeed, intra ethnic conflict is a kind of conflicts between the same ethnic or sub-ethnic group within the same or different border. As far as inter-ethnic conflict is concerned, it is a conflict between, among, or involving two or more ethnic groups living inside the same geopolitical boundaries. Citing of local government headquarters, religion, land disputes and marginalization could bring about such clashes. Examples of such inter-ethnic conflict in Nigeria are the conflicts between the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa (north), Igbo (southeast) and the Yoruba(southwest) viewed through Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Or inter-ethnic dispute between Bachama and Hausa Youths, which since the present location of mosque close vicinity

of Bachama Chiefdom, has become a source of bloodshed in Numan, Adamawa State. The land disputes between the Jukuns in the former Wukari Federation, Taraba State and Tivs from Taraba/Benue States in Nigeria can also be viewed as inter-ethnic conflicts.

In the majority of African countries, politicians make discrimination between ethnics. They favor a group of persons to the detriment of the others. This brings them to injustice. Indeed, injustice is a quality related to unfairness or undeserved outcomes. It occurs when an innocent person is sent to jail for a crime he has not committed. Situations such as persecution, torture, forced labor, discrimination, segregation, ill-treatment or stigmatization are some examples of social injustice in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Inequalities are the consequence of social injustice. They create situations in which privileged ethnics control, monopolize or limit the basic rights of other ethnic groups: access to education, work, services, health care or other social opportunities.

The cause of ethnic conflict in Nigeria from another dimension is that, the perpetrators or culprits go unpunished and escape unhurt, the Nigerian government paid lip service and fail to bring the perpetrators to book by not implementing the recommendations/report of various committees and panels set up at post conflict areas. Sanctions have not been proportional. In other words, some ethnic groups were privileged to the others. Privilege here means the particular right granted to a particular ethnic group. Ethnic inequality concerns the imbalances in the distribution of power, economic resources, and opportunities. Moreover, government bias upsets local power balances, and disrupts traditional conflict management devices. Accordingly, injured people have to resort to arms in their self-defense where peaceful negotiations fail. It must be noted that his following statements deserve particular attention: "we are no exception. We took up arms because of the sense of insecurity generated in our people by the massacres. We have fought in defense of that cause" (Adichie: 411). Furthermore, traditional local elites who hold a negative view of the government have been stripped of their power. Leaders in possession of extensive local knowledge have repeatedly been replaced with individuals who are pro-government but who often lack an understanding of local contexts. Hence, local leaders with the required understanding to settle disputes were prevented from having any influence. This undermined peaceful management of conflicts between the ethnics and this contributed to the violent ethnic conflicts.

4. MANIFESTATIONS OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

One of the most troubling parts of the war is the indifference of most of the foreigners. Unlike Richard, most of the foreign reporters busy themselves criticizing the indigenous people and feasting on the government budget. This is evident from the statement of one of the foreign reporters; *People are dying in Sudan and Palestine and Vietnam. People are dying everywhere* (Adichie: 386). The privileged American reporters have the audacity to judge and criticize starving poor Biafran children who were roasting a rat; *Oh, my God... Niggers are never choosy about what they eat, they are eating everything, the plump one said, shaking his head. Every fucking green leaf has become a vegetable* (Adichie: 382-383). The biased American reporters are more concerned with the death of one white Italian worker who is shot by Biafrans than the thousands of Biafrans who are dying. Although the murder of the Italian worker has already been covered in a report, they want to write a longer piece. The bitter truth is that nothing matters in war, everyone is inconsequential, people are just mere members participating willingly or unwillingly in war, dying like houseflies. Olanna realizes: *If she had died, if Odenigbo and Baby and Ugwu had died, the bunker would still smell like a freshly tilled farm and the sun would still rise, and the crickets would still hop around. The war would continue without them* (Adichie: 293).

War is cruel, war is ugly. The cruelest part of it is that the Nigerian soldiers search every village there are Igbo people and massacre them. For example, Olanna experiences a traumatic event when she visits her Kano and learns about the massacres of Igbo people. During that visit Olanna finds out that her family has been killed, including a pregnant relative named Arize. That event haunts her for months.

The novel also explores the widespread anarchy caused by the war. The powerful exploit the powerless. The soldiers harass the civilians. Ugwu's platoon forcefully hijacks a family's car that is going to look for their son. But the violence doesn't stop there. After overtaking Biafra, the Nigerian soldiers keep harassing innocent people, beating men, forcing them to do manual labor, torturing intellectuals and searching houses for Biafran currency. It must be noted that his following extract deserves particular attention: *Ugwu had heard that the Nigerian soldiers had promised to kill five per cent of Nsukka academics, and nobody had heard of Professor Ezeka since he was arrested in Enugu, but it was*

suddenly real to him, seeing the professor next door dragged off (Adichie: 432). The commander exploits soldiers. The soldiers are starving and are excited at the thought of getting a good meal when a civilian donates a goat. As soon as they roasted it, the commander ordered all the meat to be brought to his quarters along with two women from the local village. In a crucial war situation, the commander; *spent long minutes checking through the basin to make sure the goat was complete: the legs, the head, the balls* (Adichie: 378).

5. CONSEQUENCES OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN ADICHIE'S HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

Violent ethnic conflicts result to heavy loss of revenue to the private individuals and the government, ethnic conflicts in Nigeria destroy the economy and the imposition of curfew which will affect the economic activities of the conflictual areas. As a result of the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, the situation has deterred away foreign investors, damaged the reputation of Nigerians abroad and the image of the country at the international community, foreign investors relocate to other African Countries. And, this led to unemployment. The lack of employment is a threat that justifies the rate of poverty within black families. In many families, few try to get work but with low income and in unfair working conditions. They use the little they earn to solve the problems of their families and the needs of each member. Either the money earned is used to pay for the uncomfortable accommodations they live in, or it is for food. This way, they fail in taking care of their health. Odenigbo works for the Manpower Directorate, Kainene opens a refugee camp and Olanna starts teaching to children. But the war turns schools to refugee camps and she has to teach them at home. In roofless classrooms, she has taught them what the colors and the symbols on the Biafra flag meant. "Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally the *half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future*. (Adichie: 281).

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is an emblem of the Biafra Republic which appears on both its military uniforms and its flag. The novel follows the Nigerian-Biafran civil war from the perspectives of Igbo people Olanna, Odenigbo, Kainene and Ugwu. It portrays the meaningless of endless bloodshed caused by war. The account of Ikejide's death in front of Richard, Kainene, and Harrison as he was trying to run away from an enemy air raid is harrowing:

Then came the cold whistle of a mortar in the air and the crash as it landed and the boom as it exploded... A piece of shrapnel, the size of a fist, wheezed past. Ikejide was still running and, in the moment that Richard glanced away and back, Ikejide's head was gone. The body was running, arched slightly forwards, arms flying around, but there was no head. There was only a bloodied neck. The body crashed down near her long American car... (Adichie: 329)

Even a joyful and memorable event such as a wedding was ruined by air raids. A day which is supposed to be the best day of a person's life was spent lying down on the ground, tearing off the wedding dress to avoid being spotted by the bombing planes; *Okeoma yanked off his uniform shirt, buttons flying off, and wrapped it around Olanna* (Adichie 352). A woman who was just going about her day was bombed and died in an instant. The silence was penetrated by the heart-rending cries of a baby buried under the rubble.

There were air raids where "*planes, gliding low beneath the blue sky like two birds of prey... spurted hundreds of scattered bullets before dark balls rolled out from underneath... leaving behind rubble, the smell of burning and charred bodies* (Adichie: 202). Ikejide was hit by shrapnel that whizzed past slicing his head so quickly that his headless body ran for a while before falling. In the long drawn war *nobody talked about the things left behind. Instead, they talked about the win-the-war effort. A teacher had donated his bicycle to the soldiers, cobblers were making soldiers' boots for free, and farmers were giving away yams*" (Adichie: 185).

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper has investigated on ethnic conflicts in Chimamanda N'gozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It aims to find out the causes, the manifestations and some consequences. Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are most of the time caused by struggle for political power, lack of visionary leadership and accountability, lack of good governance and transparency, non-adherence to the principle of human rights, poverty, inequitable allocation of national wealth and resources, social inequality and the system of exclusion and ethnic hatred. Add to choose causes, indifference of foreigners and the widespread anarchy could bring about such clash. The use of violence to settle some ethnic dispute most of the time

results in bloodshed an unnecessary loss of innocent lives and property. Ethnic conflict in Nigeria encourages use of illegal arms and ammunitions and also proliferation of bombs, dangerous weapons and explosives by the conflicting ethnic groups. Thus, violent ethnic conflict result to heavy loss of revenue to the private individuals and the government, ethnic conflict in Nigeria destroy the economy and the imposition of curfew which will affect the economic activities of the conflict areas. As economic consequence, this article put emphasis on unemployment and poverty and concludes that violence has never produced peace in our world. It may force a semblance of peace, but violence will eventually erupt again.

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