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**The Indigenous Structures of Narrative in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

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**Abstract**

The influence of the Igbo indigenous culture is of structural significance to the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an African female novelist from the Igbo tribe of Nigeria. The present article studies the effects and reflections of the Igbo oral heritage in the language and narrative structure of Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a significant cultural phenomenon at the hand of the Igbo female novelist to create a discourse of counter-identification with that of the colonial and/or patriarchal discourse. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, 'the epistemic violence' of colonialism has long silenced the voices of the subaltern women. Her postcolonial feminist theory of the cultural difference, which calls for a self-conscious un-learning of the Eurocentric theories and focusing on the cultural specificities of the Third World women, serves as the backbone of the present study. The textual strategies of recursion and revision, as defined by Karla F.C. Holloway, are employed in this novel to re-read the palimpsest of the non-recognized history of the subaltern African woman. This novel provides a space where these silenced voices can be heard throughout using the strategies mentioned above. Adichie emphasizes the indigenous Igbo cultural factors informing the self-image and development of the identity of the subaltern woman in post-independent Nigeria under violent militarism, civil war, and ethnic fanaticism. The study of the novel reveals the significant influence of the Igbo oral heritage not only in the language but also in the narrative structure of the novel.

**Keywords:** African feminism; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; Igbo; Indigenous culture; Oral culture; Spivak; Subaltern woman

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important debates among African writers and critics has been for and against the justification of creating African literature in the colonizers' language. Ngugi wa Thiong'O is one of the significant authors who criticises the use of English, French, and other European languages as the language of African literary creations. "In Writing against Neo-Colonialism" drawing an overall historical context to African novel, he argues that the responsibility of African writers is to do for their mother tongues what Spenser, Milton, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and other European writers did for English and other European languages. He demands for writers' awareness of the urgency of anti-neo-colonial currents in Africa. In his opinion, the African writer has no choice but to align with the struggles of his people towards democracy and absolute independence:

Such a writer will have to *rediscover* the *real* language of struggle in the actions of speeches of his people, learn from their great heritage of orature, and above all, learn from their great optimism and faith in the capacity of human beings to remake their world and renew themselves. (Wa Thiong'O, 2007, 164)

On the other hand, Chinua Achebe expresses a more flexible attitude towards the issue of language. He believes that by writing in English, he sends his voice out of Africa and more people worldwide become familiar with

the culture and conditions of African people. His use of relexification that is the grafting of the Igbo words, riddles, expressions, and anecdotes onto the English text of the novel, was widely applauded by an immense number of readers all over the world. He writes in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, "The writer should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (Achebe, 1975, 100). At the same time, Achebe agrees with many of his fellow African writers, like Wa Thiong'O, that the African writer must write for a social purpose. He calls for a literature that revives the indigenous cultures of Africa through the creation of texts that "re-educate" and "regenerate", as he asserts in "The Novelist as Teacher":

Here then is an adequate revolution to espouse – to help my society to regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement... Here I think my aims and the most profound aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. (Achebe, 2007, 105)

Although Achebe promotes the African novel written in English, he inaugurates the unique genre of the multiple African ethno-text by integrating Igbo language and culture in the novel written in English. The result is not British English but Igbo English. An English that is modified and twisted through relexification represents the culture of the tribal

Igbo life. Chimamanda Adichie as Achebe's descendant has equally retained both the awareness of her responsibility towards her society and her art of using English as the medium to communicate with the world and her people.

Chimamanda Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* inscribes textual strategies that are deeply rooted in their rich indigenous culture of oracy to subversive ends not only of the traditional but also the colonial discourse. In fact, not only the African oral heritage and the Igbo language have provided her with a rich resource of cultural memories and histories, but also, they have inspired her to employ linguistic and orature strategies in the written text. Holloway calls this species of novel "the written talk" and marks them as texts with "persistence of speech" which shows that they not only come from basically oral cultures, but also, they are created by women (Holloway, 1991, 15).

In the present article, firstly, major specificities of oral cultures as significant cultural differences between the Western and Igbo methods of narration, are explained and then these specificities will be traced as textual strategies of recursion and revision in the black woman's novel. By recursion and revision, we have Holloway's theory in mind that specifies these texts as being deeply rooted in the African culture of storytelling. She supports Spivak's claim that in order to communicate with the subaltern women we should go beyond holding conferences for ourselves and lecturing each other. Instead, as Third World feminists, we need the "mingling historic-political specificity

with sexual differential in a literary discourse" to start to efface the false image of the Third World woman in the Western and international viewpoint. She argues that it is the language of the black women's novels that is the most significant part of an original theory about these texts:

When criticism of these texts acknowledges the activity of speech as its challenge, both in its direct engagement of a victimizing silence and in the specific (re)membrance of a tradition that has been socially and politically devalued in a modern world, then speech itself— the discrete (albeit fragmented) units, its patterns, structures and ways of making and (re)membering sense— becomes a critical part of a theory that speaks, not only to "the women out there", but to a tradition in literature that has waited for its own voice to emerge from the text. (Holloway, 1991, 83)

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is an articulation of the subaltern voices that have been silenced for centuries by patriarchal, colonial, and neo-colonial systems. Adichie has created a recursive discourse through which these voices are heard. The following shows that the indigenous Igbo culture of oracy in general and the Igbo tradition of story-telling in particular have deeply influenced the narrative structures of *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

## METHODS

### **Igbo Oracy and the Nigerian Woman's Novel**

The theoretical backbone of the present study is Spivak's theory of the cultural difference between Western and the Third World women. The literary texts created by the African female writers provide them with a space where this cultural difference can be demonstrated and recognized to re-write the long-silenced histories of African women. Therefore, all formalist references to Adichie's novel here must be read in the light of Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory.

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong has distinguished the mentality of people in oral illiterate cultures from that of literate people. In addition, he has listed the main features of oral literature and storytelling as different from written texts (Ong, 2002, 12). As far as our study is concerned, Ong's specifications are significantly relevant to the textual strategies Adichie has employed in her novel. He also asserts that his list is neither exclusive nor conclusive; however, it supports Holloway's theory of the African woman's text as a recursive discourse that continually revises and (re)members her oral heritage of storytelling and cultural specificities. Although all of the features enumerated by Ong can be seen in the works of Adichie, the researcher found several of them more relevant to the studied novel. In addition, the novel will be studied not only in the light of Ong's features, but also Holloway's

theory of recursion and revision, as techniques used by the African female authors. Thus, in the present paper, Spivak's theory of cultural differences of the Third World women from the Western women and her emphasis on the cultural specificities of the Third World women serves as the framework to study the oral heritage of the Igbo tribe as cultural specificity in Adichie's novel. Also Walter Ong's study of the oral cultures and Holloway's theory of textual strategies are applied to trace the narrative strategies applied by Adichie in this novel. The writer attempts to demonstrate that the central narrative techniques applied by Adichie are not derived from Western narrative techniques of the novel but rooted in the Igbo oral culture.

One of the essential features of African women's novels is their circularity of structure and repetitive nature of thematic and metaphoric systems. This feature has been specified, as an essential feature of all orally based cultures, as being redundant or 'copious' rather than linear and analytic (Ong, 2002, 40). From Chinua Achebe's first achievements in inscribing the Igbo oral culture into the Western genre of the novel, this redundancy and circularity has been a distinctive feature of the Igbo novel Adichie as Achebe's descendant is no less faithful to her cultural heritage of oral literature. This circularity and repetitive nature appears at all textual levels including diction, syntax, metaphors, and narrative structure, yet each author has his/her own stylistic strategies in employing these features that will be discussed in the following pages. Closely

related to the first feature is the feature of being traditionalist in both form and content. The text keeps its dependence on the indigenous Igbo language and culture by retaining traditional formulaic structures of storytelling in which the modern political, social, and personal situations are embedded. As Ong writes: "Praise poems of chiefs invite entrepreneurship, as the old formulas and themes have to be made to interact with new and often complicated political situations" (ibid, 41).

Another significant feature of oral languages and their poetry is their empathetic and participatory rather than objective tone towards their subject matter and characters (Ong, 2002, 45). In the literary creations of Igbo women, the same features are conspicuously recognized. In Adichie's novel, for example, there are passages where the narrator, the character, and the reader are so bound together that the diegetic, extra-diegetic, homo-diegetic, and the hetero-diegetic levels of narrative are practically merged. This feature in Ong's view is rooted in the performative nature of oracy and oral tradition of storytelling which abounds in the participation of the audience in the process of narrative, as well as the frequent alteration of the narrator and character's roles (ibid).

The last specificity of the orally based narrative style is its being situational rather than abstract and philosophical. In fact, critics frequently align African woman's novels within the tradition of Western realism for their closeness to life-world and their sheer involvement with the material lives of their

characters. However, this realistic approach is further rooted in their situational oral tradition rather than in modern Western articulations of the emergence and turbulences of the middle class. Besides, this situational characteristic provides these novels with a shifting capacity from past to present and vice versa. In consequence, the personal stories merge in tribal histories and metaphorically deepen and widen their scopes of interpretation. In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* we see how Olanna's personal traumatic experience of the Igbo massacre is merged into her people's history of slavery and suffering throughout the colonial and post-independence eras.

Adichie belongs to the third generation of Nigerian writers whose work is marked by the liminality of their situation as postcolonial writers. This liminality is conveyed through numerous stylistic and linguistic techniques. Through the multiple layered text of this novel, she has managed to create a unique type of literature that reflects her (and characters') multiple identity and marginal situation. The 'textual strategies', as Holloway calls them, are mainly rooted in her indigenous culture of oracy. As an African woman, she is a 'bearer of culture' whose foremothers have created and re-created the elements of this heritage and have transmitted it through the power of 'the word'. It is argued that oracy and oral literature in Africa was dominated by women, be it young dancing girls singing in praise of Idemili, 'the Pillar of Water', to help them bear healthy children and make progress in their trade, or older women at moonlight sessions relating

tales of animals or heroic narratives to younger generations (Holloway, 1991, 63).

In addition to the rich oral heritage that affects the novel, the direct insertion of Igbo words, phrases, sentences, proverbs, and sometimes longer extracts of poetry into the dominating English text decentralizes the text. The episodic structure together with diversified point of view and the oscillating narrative voice which merges the narrator, the character, the author, and even the reader into one, all have roots in indigenous oracy and further the effect of 'plurisignance' throughout the text. The Igbo of Nigeria, very similar to other sub-Saharan indigenities, possess a rich oral culture from poetic dialogues, praise songs, and initiation songs, to riddles, anecdotes, and parables. According to Holloway, Igbo women's art, employing the form of the novel to express their life stories and experiences of their people, grafts this treasure of oral heritage to the European genre of the novel creating a unique amalgam of all voices of pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras in Africa.

Moreover, postcolonial critics believe that the history of African people has been twisted and represented in a wrong and distorted way by Arab and European visitors, of course to the latter's own profit. Adichie's novel is analysed to trace the textual strategies that give voice to the complicated situation that the African woman is facing today. These strategies are divided into two main parts: linguistic tropes and narrative tropes. The Igbo language as grafted on to English is interpreted as a solid trope to create the hybrid text. In the second part

the overarching plurality of the narrative structure is discussed to develop a text that reflects the multiple nature of a postcolonial novel and best represents the Third World woman's minimal stance at the crossroads of diversified and mostly contradictory forces that affect her life. Adichie's novel is deeply informed by and makes use of indigenous oral traditions to create a discourse which gives voice or lifts the silence of the Igbo woman.

Also, Ong in his study of the oral cultures and their specific features, has mentioned several characteristics for them: "the illiterate mind in speech is more aggregative than analytic, additive rather than subordinative, redundant, traditionalist, close to human life world, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory, homeostatic, situational rather than abstract" (Ong, 2002, 58). These features are also seen in the literary productions of such cultures. That is, oral literature possesses similar characteristics of being close to the human 'life-world', situational, and so on.

Austin Bukanya also makes a distinction between orality and oracy which is relevant here. She recognizes oracy as the literary production of an oral culture and orality as the everyday use of that language:

oracy implies not only the ability to speak, but also to manage, marshal, and deploy the spoken word efficiently, for specific purposes, in specific contexts. Command of the spoken word means just that: power. Productive oracy would entail self-definition, self-assertion,

negotiation of relationships, resolution of conflicts, claiming of rights and indictment of their violation. (Bukanya, 2001, 33)

On the other hand, the tradition of the African novel by male authors has generally excluded women's voices. Women are portrayed in men's novels as obedient, gentle, and loyal or aggressive, rebellious, and mean. This stereotyping also includes the nationalist trend of "Mother Africa" in men's novels (Stratton, 1994, 40-45). Adichie, alongside other female African writers, has given voice and human character to the Igbo women as protagonists in their works. The heritage of oral culture has been traditionally a realm of the women: in the moonlight gatherings the narration of ancient tales involves a narrative performance by the woman storyteller, the "owner and keeper of the word" (Holloway, 1991, 21). The ancient keepers of the word, now educated in the white man's language, write novels informed by techniques and features of their ancestral heritage of storytelling. Adichie's work demonstrates great connection to the African oral culture. The fact that these oral techniques are grafted onto the novel form has resulted in a unique hybridity emerging from the combination of the Western genre of the novel on the one hand and the Igbo oral culture, on the other. Many aspects of plot and narration adopt orature strategies like repetition, symbolism, parallelism, allusion, piling and association, tonality, ideophones, digression, and imagery (Okpewho, 1992, 58). The application of the techniques of African oracy within the novel also contributes to the

subversion of the official histories and the representation of the life stories of African subaltern women. With the gradual withdrawal of women from social and cultural roles during the colonial period women's voices were silenced and ignored by both male-dominated indigeneity and the patriarchal colonial order. The histories of women's religious, familial, and social status in the past faded away under the erasing power of male historians, ethnographers, politicians, and novelists. This palimpsest of women's histories and voices has been re-inscribed in the novels written by Igbo women. Adichie integrates their oral heritage into the texture of her novel to re-inscribe the erased histories of the Igbo women.

Holloway's theorization of the textual strategies of novels written by African women shows the close connection between these textual strategies and the elements of oral mentality. As a major strategy, according to Holloway, the repetitive quality in these novels creates a discourse of plurisignance by the inscription of the past into the present and the layering of meaning. Also, recursion is the repetition in both structure and content of these novels which gives a ritual circularity to the narrative that is lacking in linear chronological narratives. In his analysis, Ong mentions some of the features of oral literature like episodic structure, lack of temporal sequence, repetition, fragmentary parts to be combined as in epic poetry, the merging of the boundaries of narrative and immediate situation as in live recitations, lack of a fixed point of view, and merging or blurring of the narrating voice with the narrator and sometimes the audience



(Ong,2002, 138-142). Therefore, it can be argued that the heritage of oral culture has conspicuously influenced Adichie's work. She has incorporated the heritage of African oracy into the texture of her novel.

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is studied to show how one of the major features of oral performance, that is the interchangeable position of the subject and object, or performer and audience informs the switching narrators and multiple point of view tactfully employed to create a various, polyphonic text that voices the Igbo female characters in a most turbulent time in the history of modern Nigeria.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Oral Culture and the Igbo strategies of Narrative in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

A critical characteristic of orally based pieces of literature and cultures is their circular rather than linear conception of time (Ong, 14). This cultural specificity is considered to influence in the indigenous 'world sense' and the way it develops and forms the illiterate people's sense of time, history, and memory (Ibid).

This very feature is also influential in the narrative style of Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Several inter-related factors work together to come up with a deeply retrospective text which, in Holloway's terms, are "signals of the linguistic recursion of the text" (Holloway, 1991, 81).

One such linguistic signal or stylistic strategy in the novel is its division based on

time retrospect. As far as the narrative structure is concerned, the novel is narrated in four chapters, each specifying the events of characters' lives during the early and late 60's in post-independence Nigeria. The chapters are arranged in a circular rather than linear order: Part One: Early 60s, Part Two: Late 60s, Part Three: Early 60s, and Part Four: Late 60s. This structure creates a rhythmic narrative style that, according to Ong is rooted in the indigenous oral tradition of narration. The novel narrates the events in Olanna Ozobia and her relatives and friends during the early and late years of a most turbulent decade in Nigerian history, the 1960s.

The events of late 60's (the Igbo massacre) are narrated between Parts One and Three that narrate the early 60's. This narrative strategy creates exactly the recursive structure Holloway sees at the core of African women's novels. The events of early 60's represent a post-independent, pre-catastrophic atmosphere when Nigerian multiple ethnicities are kept in continuous political rivalry through a successive number of coups d'état. Meanwhile, the young oil industry is bringing huge profit to the British companies as well as the corrupt Nigerian politicians and their attached businessmen, represented by Olanna's father, Chief Ozobia. The events before the civil war are narrated in two parts, before and after the narration of catastrophic war of the late 60s. This alternative back and forth movement in time creates a more effective structure because after reading the second part neither the events nor the characters seem the same as



before. Also, the reader is not the same after reading the traumatic experiences of the Igbo people during the Igbo massacres.

The oscillatory narrative, which moves back and forth between the early and late 60s eliminates the sense of time as linear and gives the reader a comprehensive and holistic perception of the events. As the diagram suggests, when events of the early 60s are narrated in the third part we already are aware of the hideous incidents of the late 60s, therefore the whole situation is tragically ironical. Odenigbo's friends gather in their house in Nsukka frequently and discuss the political and social issues. Each character has his/her views about Nigeria's situation. The reader already knows about what will happen in a few years' time. This circular conception of time, of the presence of the future in the past, and the past in the present, is rooted in the indigenous conception of time in which history is inconceivable without the events that have happened in it. In other words, history as an abstraction from reality is non-existent. The indigenous Igbo perception of time is associated with the particular events that have happened. They do not understand time or history as an entity existing *per se*.

In addition to the rhythmic circularity of primary divisions of the novel, the choice of narrator-internal focalizer in the sub-chapters further creates a multiple narrative voice which creates a panoramic view of diversified Nigerian life from different perspectives. The narrators of each sub-chapter are, alternatively Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, Ugwu, Olanna, Richard, etc. This switch of internal focalizer

on a rhythmic basis is again a feature to be traced in Igbo traditional oracy where the narrator-character frequently switches roles and tones and attitudes to immediately re-create a fictional situation. This switch of focalizer contributes to the creation of a multiplicity of tone, attitudes and voices as diverse as an illiterate house boy, a beautiful, educated young woman from the high society of Lagos, and a British researcher who is deeply touched by the Igbo traditional art and culture. The same events or situations are narrated from different points of view as well as different character's voices that are heard throughout the novel.

In addition to the multiple focalizer of the novel at the end of each set of three chapters an extract of another book is attached which is later on known to be written by Ugwu. These extracts are titled as "The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died". The extracts of the book are supposedly a re-narration of Nigerian history from the point of view of an illiterate tribal houseboy, a Biafran soldier, and now an educated writer. Although the focus of the novel is the Biafran War, colonial and pre-colonial historical events are also related:

He discusses the British soldier-merchant Taubman Goldie, how he coerced, cajoled, and killed to gain control of the palm-oil trade and how at the Berlin conference of 1884 where Europeans divided Africa, he ensured that Britain beat France to two protectorates around the river Niger: the North and the South. The British preferred the North. The heat there was pleasantly

dry... In the Southeast, the Igbo lives in small republican communities, they were non-docile and worryingly ambitious. Since they did not have the good sense to have kings, the British created the warrant chiefs, because indirect rule cost the Crown less. Missionaries were allowed in to tame the pagans, and the Christianity and education they brought flourished. In 1914, the governor-general joined the North and the South, and his wife picked a name. Nigeria was born (HYS, 2007, 115).

Infusing patches of Ugwu's novel in the circular order of chapters further merges the history of colonialism with that of the post-independence civil war and the contemporary silence of the world towards the massacres and other crimes current in Africa. By insertion of these extracts, Adichie has succeeded in aligning the pre-independent and post-independent role of the British imperialism in Nigerian history. By inserting these extracts the circularity of narrative is reaffirmed. Besides, the voice in them is dominantly the grown up educated Ugwu who differs significantly from the voice of young illiterate Ugwu of the early 60's.

Ugwu dedicates his book to Odenigbo. Spivak's theory of 'worlding' and the critique of Western epistemic violence against the subaltern histories are echoed in Odenigbo's conviction of the need for education of the subaltern and keeping them aware of their non-

history along with the official history. When he wants to send Ugwu to school, for example, he reminds him that:

There are two answers to the things they teach you about your land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books... They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park (HYS, 2007, 11).

The need to be educated in the Western educational and social system necessitates this paradoxical method of learning. One is to learn the non-history of the subaltern people or the stories that are never officially recorded, and one is to be aware of the official history that has violently removed or distorted subaltern stories in a way to ensure imperial sovereignty and interest.

The second focalizer throughout the novel is Richard Churchill, an English man who has travelled to Nigeria on a quest for the ancient Igbo metal handicraft. He wishes to be inspired in his journey to write a novel. His character is by himself a representation of the paradox of the neo-colonial world. Churchill is a British white man, from a wealthy influential family. However, his character does not fit in any conventional category of the self/other colonial

system. He lives in Nigeria and falls in love with Kainene, Olanna's sister, and tends to question more and more the pre-assumptions that are typically European about the African life and culture. Towards the end of the novel he speaks Igbo instead of English and considers himself an Igbo man not a British one. This type of character is relatively new in post-colonial novels. He represents the hybridity mentioned by Bhabha, as a possibility for resistance, to be a phenomenon in which the colonizer sees himself in the mirror of the colonized and vice versa. His is the very hybridity that Bhabha defines as a problematic of colonial representation "that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that the other denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Young, 2004, 189).

On several occasions in the novel he is said to have doubts about his identity, his position, his relation to the African people. In addition, this uncertainty is taken as a positive rather than a negative trait. His personality is contrasted to the English company his mistress, Susan, keeps in Lagos. He is a writer, in love with the Igbo-Ukwu metal art, and he has travelled to Nigeria to visit and know the 'land of the magnificent roped pot'. The other English people are of a quite different species: "they were mostly ex-colonial administrators and business people from John Holt and Kingsway and GB Ollivant and Shell-BP and United Africa Company...They chuckled about how tribal Nigerian politics was, and perhaps these chaps were not quite so ready to rule themselves after all" (HYS, 2007, 53).

Although the three focalizers are marginal characters in contrast to the more significant communities in which they are posited, Richard is the least represented in terms of the dominant discourses. Ugwu is a young illiterate tribal houseboy, Olanna. However, the daughter of Chief Ozobia, is still a black woman and unlike her twin sister holds a critical view about her father's political corruption. Richard is ironically a white European male who does not feel at home in his own country or among his countrymen. His is the most paradoxical situation of all. This choice of focalizer enables Adichie to represent the most un-represented identities in the post-colonial setting of Nigeria. The concept of the subaltern in Spivak's view depends on the degree that an individual can be represented through the dominant socio-political discourse. Tribal people and women in the Third World are for many reasons the least represented politically in both colonial and nationalist discourses. However, Richard in this novel represents a quite un-represented generation of Western intellectuals who feel as displaced as any subaltern within the discourse of neo-colonial relations of power (Spivak, 1987, 134).

When Richard discusses his solitary childhood in a 'grand' aunt's house with her sophisticated children, he mentions his attempts at running away to his kind nanny every day. Kainene asks him what he had been running to, and his doubts rise again: "Richard thought about it for a while. He knew he was running away from a house that had pictures of long-dead people on the walls breathing down on him. But he didn't know what he was running



towards” (HYS, 2007, 61).

Does the house represent Great Britain? The “pictures of the long-dead people on the walls breathing down on him” represent European parochialism, and Richard represents a generation overwhelmed by the bombastic stories of glory and victorious superiority of the British Empire seeking a far more genuine identity of a human being confronting other human beings. He feels uncomfortable in his aunt’s magnificent house and in the presence of the self-confident British politicians and businesspersons who all look down on the African people. Later on Richard is absorbed in the beauty of the magazine pictures of the ancient Igbo metal handicraft especially the famous roped pot: ‘he ran a finger over the picture and ached to touch the delicately cast metal itself’ (ibid, 62). ‘The magnificent roped pot with all delicate curves’ stands for the Africa that has never been truly explored; the Africa whose stories are kept silent and need to be excavated and touched from the beginning. Richard, therefore, is attracted to Africa in a different way from the majority of his compatriots. His approach can be seen that of Spivak’s un-learned scholar who sees the subaltern from an equal rather than superior stance. The ancient ‘roped pot’ symbolizes a whole culture still unknown to the Western mind albeit after centuries of investigation, adventure, and exploitation. As Spivak argues the subaltern histories have been long distorted, violated, or removed from the official colonial and nationalist archives. Literary creation of the of these peoples (Spivak, 1986, 67). In

Holloway’s term this is a revision of the past and a (re)membrance of the now fragmented identity of the subaltern. ‘The roped pot’ metaphorically represents the Igbo woman, Kainene, Olanna, and Africa in general.

What makes Richard’s character exclusively deconstructive is his being British. Unlike the rest of his fellow citizens and women in the novel, he is not so assured of his identity as a superior European in the position to lead and manage the backward generations on earth. Instead, he has come to Nigeria in search for himself through the investigation of the ‘Other’. For him, the binary of self/other is not as obvious as it is for many other English people. Throughout the novel his search for identity and belonging makes him get involved more and more with the Igbo views and cultural features. His love for Kainene has a great impact on his evolution. In fact, his interest in the roped pot develops into his love for a new way of life and parallels his love for Kainene. It is with Kainene that “for the first time in his life he felt to belong somewhere” (HYS, 2007, 134).

Through Richard’s observations the novel subverts many colonial pre-assumptions about the Igbos. While his fellow English men believe that the Igbo people cannot rule themselves Richard visits Pa Anozie, the ‘big father’ of the Igbo village where the Igbo-Ukwu excavations were being run. He asks Pa Anozie if the discovered bronze objects had been used by the king, and then,

Pa Anozie gave Richard a long, pained look and mumbled something for a while, looking

grieved. Emeka laughed before he translated. 'Pa said ha thought you were among the white people who know something. He said the people of Igbo land do not know what a king is. We have priests and elders. The burial place was maybe for a priest. However, the priest does not suffer people like the king. The white men gave us warrant chiefs that foolish men are calling themselves kings today'. (ibid, 74)

Later on, as Richard witnesses the massacres, the civil war, the hunger and violence, he identifies with the Igbo to the extent that he speaks Igbo and calls himself an Igbo. Even after Kainene is lost, he stays in Nigeria and lives as a member of her family. His character reflects the hybridity in a post-colonial situation. Adichie emphasizes her attitude of multiple flowing identities in a postcolonial situation through figures like Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Father Amadi in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Richard stands as an outsider who attains a neutral view of the stories of the Third World people. In fact, he manages to un-learn his knowledge about the Africans in the way Spivak asks the Western critics to do. He is critical towards the British account of the Biafran War as a war of a legitimate government against a group of tribal rebels who engender the territorial totality of Nigeria. On the contrary, Richard is aware that the only thing the English politicians are worried about is the oil resources that would be out of the Nigerian government's control if the Biafran

state succeeds in its independence claim. Moreover, he knows that what the Western media reflect about the situation is by no means an honest reflection of what is happening inside Nigeria. An English newspaper report claims that Nigerians are wild and cruel tribal people who are used to the type of massacres that were running before the Biafran War. In response, Richard writes to the newspaper:

The notion of the recent killings being the product of 'age-old' hatred is therefore misleading. The tribes of the North and the South have long had contact, at least as far back as the ninth century as some of the magnificent beads discovered at the historic Igbo-Ukwu site attest. No doubt these groups also fought wars and slave-raided each other, but they did not massacre in this manner. If this is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise (HYS, 2007, 166).

Becoming African is suggestive of the concept of mimicry as Bhabha puts forward. However, the reversed the position of the colonizer and the colonized is of significance here. By trying to speak their language, learning their cultural specificities, and loving them, he becomes one of them, in actual fact.

As the focalizer of one third of the novel, Richard's point of view gives a highly subversive quality to the novel. As Homi Bhabha asserts "hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation which provides a

possibility for resistance. It reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal so that the other denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Quoted in Young, 2004, 189). Richard's knowledge of the Igbo people, their life and culture is way different from that of the other British people in the novel. His girlfriend, Susan, for example, holds a definitely superior attitude towards the Africans. Her degrading attitude towards the African women is revealed when Richard recognizes that she feels jealous only if he talks to white women in the parties: "It was, he realized, simply that black women were not threatening to her, were not equal rivals". Also, while speaking of the Igbo she reflects the dominant stereotypes about different ethnicities in Nigeria: "She spoke with authority about Nigeria and Nigerians: 'They have a marvellous energy, really, but very little sense of hygiene, I'm afraid.' She told him the Hausa in the North were a dignified lot, the Igbo were surly and money-loving, and Yoruba were rather jolly, even if they were first-rate lickspittles" (HYS, 2007, 55). Richard, however, differs from Susan and the dominant British viewpoint to the extent that in the course of the novel learns the Igbo language and towards the end of the novel at a control stand introduces himself to the guards as Igbo. This is foreshadowed earlier in Nsukka when everyone is surprised at the ease with which he takes the hot Igbo pepper soup, "this is proof that Richard was an African in his past life", Miss Adebayo said, before blowing her nose into a napkin" (Ibid, 108).

Richard's attitude and process of identification with his Igbo friends and later relatives reminds us of Spivak's demand for an un-learning of one's privilege as Western observers of the Third World and instead trying to learn from them. Richard Churchill arrives at Nigeria in search for the origins and nature of the ancient Igbo art of metal pots, and throughout the course of the novel learns how to achieve a viewpoint beyond the usual stereotypical attitudes that the Western people hold about the Africans. In his reaction to the British newspaper report of the Igbo massacres he demonstrates this new stance.

The third character from whose perspective the story is narrated is Olanna Ozobia. A beautiful, educated young woman who is recently back from England and has fallen in love with the young Igbo university professor Odenigbo who is a stringent follower of Negritude thought which seeks to promote the traditional African culture in confrontation with the West. Olanna's father on the other hand is representative of the corrupted Igbo chiefs who get bribes to render profitable trade and oil contracts to mostly European businesspersons. Olanna's love for Odenigbo makes her leave her parents' big house in Lagos to live with him in Nsukka. As the story is narrated from her point-of-view she turns to be the main character of the novel, because the reader realizes that she is the focal character who links the two other focalizers, i.e. Ugwu and Richard. Olanna's narrative focalization starts with her personal relationships with Odenigbo, her parents, her twin sister, her aunt and uncle, her cousin Arize,



Ugwu, and Odenigbo's hostile mother. Nevertheless, with the shocking outburst of the Igbo massacres the narrative is suddenly merged in a nightmarish chaos of outrageous bloodshed, bombardment, destruction, displacement, hunger, and disease. Olanna holds the focalizing point to the world of the novel at the intervals of the narrative perspectives of an African and a British man.

As the narrative unfolds in front of our eyes, and as the gaps are filled one by one in the novel, Olanna's pivotal role is revealed more and more to the reader. She is the one figure whose experience as an African woman is neither one-dimensional nor privileged in comparison to any tribal subaltern. In fact, the novel ironically depicts Olanna and Kainene as the representative subaltern women. Her traumatic experience of facing the headless bodies of her beloved cousins, aunt, and uncle during the massacres, and the head of the little girl in the calabash, together with the upcoming plights during the Biafran war stand in contrast to the seeming peacefulness and luxury in which she and her sister were brought up suggesting the instability of peace and the horrifying unexpectedness by which cruelty and bloodshed can dominate over a whole country.

In turn, these three perspectives lead the circular narrative structure forward. Furthermore, each perspective gives voice to a less heard voice in the colonial and postcolonial world of Nigeria. In fact, the circular recursive structure of narration is a subversion of the objective linear structure of the dominant discourses of history and politics. By weaving

the personal histories of Olanna, Kainene, Richard, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and many more people into the critical moments of Nigerian history, Adichie has deconstructed the archival and seemingly objective historical records of the Nigerian civil war of the late 1960's by employing the techniques and conventions of her traditional oral story-telling in recursive and repetitive structures of telling and retelling the same events from many view points and by representing a true to life and immediate experiences of the Nigerian women during those catastrophic years.

As discussed earlier, Igbo oral heritage has been a great influence in the works of Chimamanda Adichie. The recursive structures of the novel create a discourse through which the specific histories of African women are intertwined in an intertext of biography, history, myth, and literature.

## CONCLUSION

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* applies the techniques derived and oriented from the Igbo oral heritage in the recursive circularity of the narrative structure. This recursive style which is achieved through the numerous focalizer-narrators and structural flashbacks, create a writerly text which involves the reader in the recreation of the stories and histories of the Igbo people in one of the most critical moments in their history, i.e. the Biafran war. This circular structure which subverts the subject/object relation of the writer and reader is also influenced by the very nature of the traditional oracy in which the immediate audience



necessitates their direct involvement in the process of creation.

By integration of the characteristics and elements of the Igbo oral culture and language into the texture and structure of the novel Adichie has created a unique literary text which lifts the silence of those unrepresented voices in

the history of her country during and after colonialism. The impact of the African Oral heritage in Adichie's novels is reflected in the circularity of the narrative structure that blurs the borders of time, of reality and fiction, and life and history.

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### **Biodata**

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