UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND WAR IN AFRICA THROUGH AFRICAN LITERATURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

Violence, conflict and war can easily form the tripod on which everything that is against human progress rests. They are seriously implicated in Africa's lack of development and constant crises. The Nigeria-Biafra experience serves as an empirical illustration of this problem. To address this problem it is necessary to understand both its latent and obvious causes. Getting behind an issue to understand its root causes as well as its evident manifestations can best be handled by disciplines that are equipped to study phenomena from a comprehensive outlook. This study identifies philosophy and African literature as having such capacity and as such employs them as its methodological tools. The study also explores how understanding conflict, violence and war in Africa, through African literature, on the one hand, and the philosophical interrogation of that understanding on the other hand, can be mutually rewarding. This study's specific interest is on a novel, Half of a Yellow Sun, by a Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie could be of essence in peaceful coexistence. The book is based on the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-70. This study finds that the war has become an intractable event and an essential key to understanding developments and socio-political events in Nigeria. It concludes that until the difficult question of the place the Igbo people occupy in Nigeria's national psyche is addressed with the seriousness, commitment, justice and equity it demands, Nigeria will continue to be susceptible to violence, conflict and (although it should never be allowed to repeat again) the possibility of another war.

Key words: Conflict, Violence, War, African Literature, Philosophy

Introduction

In this introduction, two matters will be considered. First, what is the importance of employing African literature in understanding African experience, even, complex and perplexing issues such as violence, conflict and war? African literature (here taken as imaginative African literature) reflects all the experiences and environment of Africans through invented sayings and doings. That is, in its character African literature reflects and refracts any type of African experience be it political, historical, sociological, religious, psychological, among others. For this reason, African literature has been at the vanguard of protest against colonialism and analysis of the social evils in various African societies. Such literary works through the lives and daily activities of characters help to portray issues that cause violence, conflict and war, their emotional and psychological toll and how these impact on a nation's socio-political life. Indeed, African writers, especially beginning with Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, see themselves as involved in the task of re-education and re-generation of the African community. Gikandi (1991:7) submits that the writer is implicated in the building and reconstruction of the new nation, in the quest for a new discursive field in which the integrity of the African people can be asserted.

Second, what is the importance of a philosophical reflection on African literature in understanding African experience? This is two-fold: general and specific. On the general note, the fictional character of literature necessitates that its ideas should be exposed to critical analysis. Philosophy as the discipline with the mandate to investigate all knowledge claims fits this bill. On a specific concern, philosophy is used to analyze the issues contained in the literary work under study, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, hereafter referred to as *Half*. The purpose of the interrogation is to distill the ideas contained in the work and subject them to critical evaluation to show the extent the issues contribute to the

understanding of African experience which in this context is violence, conflict and war. The critical reflection will also extend to extracting creative solutions from the novel that will help to address the problems. To this end, this study is divided into six parts, the first is this introduction. The others are: Understanding Conflicts, Violence and War; Brief on Nigeria-Biafra war; Synopsis of *Half of a Yellow Sun;* Analysis: Causes of Conflict, Violence and War in Africa as portrayed in *Half;* and Conclusion. These parts, separately and together, attest to the relevance of a philosophical reflection on African literature in understanding conflict, violence and war in Africa.

Understanding Conflicts, Violence and War

Violence, conflicts and war are interrelated issues and one of the most central concerns demanding attention in Africa today. Violence refers to an act of physical force that inflicts or is intended to cause harm to other people. Conflict is a situation of disagreement in values, interest, attitudes, needs, understanding, opinions, ideas, ideologies, thought processes and even perceptions between individuals, countries, ethnicities among others. War combines all the destructive elements in conflict and violence on a grand scale and even extends them to areas where even the architects of the war never imagined or anticipated. For instance, both Nigerian government belief that a quick police action will bring back the recalcitrant Biafrans and Biafrans' belief and their passion and conviction that justice on their side will win them the war reckoned without the default character of war to follow its own logic or illogic and to take on its own life. In the end, the war not only lasted for 30 months but 'the cost in human lives made it one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history' (Achebe 2012:227).

In spite of the horrifying magnitude of war when compared to the others, they all share some common attributes. Two are most relevant here. First they disturb societal development on a large scale. It is impossible for society to record progress whether in terms of human development or infrastructural advancement in a

time of violence, conflict or war. School activities were suspended in Eastern Nigeria during the Nigeria-Biafra war as Biafrans struggled to stay alive. Countless industries, factories, organizations both private and public and even schools and churches were destroyed. Nigeria, especially the Eastern part, is yet to recover from the damages – material, emotional and psychological - of that war. Indeed, Kassim (2005:188) insists that it 'is obvious that conflicts and its attendant refugee problems retard the process of nation building, as societies are dislocated and people generally disorganized.' The second point connects to the first, they create insecurity. Egbekpalu (2021:5-6) submits that insecurity 'points to the general sense of vulnerability that threatens human life; socially, psychologically, emotionally, physically, educationally, religiously, etc.' In such a situation daily existence is governed and dominated by fear. It is impossible for fear-controlled individuals to accomplish any great feat. Cowardice and courage do not inhabit the same ontological sphere; the former withers away at the sight of difficult situations; the latter confronts and surmounts it. A nation of terrified individuals can never make any meaningful progress, the best they can hope for will be stunted, haphazard, stumbling growth.

The causes of conflict, violence and war in Africa, especially Nigeria, has been linked to ethno-religious rivalries, bad politics, injustice, corruption, marginalization, among others (Smith 2015, Ejegbavwo and Osita 2021, Aigbonoga and Okolie 2021). It is, in fact, difficult to understand the perennial crises that have become a feature of Nigeria's existence without relating them to the ethno-religious differences among the different entities that were forced to form the country. Achebe (2012:2) sees the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates as what 'inextricably complicated Nigeria's destiny.' This doomed union was at the centre of what caused the Nigeria-Biafra war and has continued to dominate the socio-political life of the country to the point that Nigeria is teetering on the edge of collapse except urgent measures are taken to save it (Okolo 2021). Achebe's book *There was a*

Country may prove prophetic if concrete and committed measures are not taken.

Brief on Nigeria-Biafra War

The Nigeria-Biafra war (July 6, 1967-January 15, 1970) started as a result of Nigeria's decision to use police action to force Biafra back into the Nigerian fold following Biafra's secession on May 30, 1967. In Gowon's estimation the police action should not last more than a few months. Biafra's doggedness, however, extended the war to thirty months. Apart from the immediate cause of the war, there are other causes which are, perhaps, more significant. The ill-fated coup of January 15, 1966, the massacre of the Igbos following the coup on the mischievous excuse that the coup was an Igbo coup based on the ethnicity of some of the coup plotters, the July 1966 counter coup by Northern Nigerian officers in which most Igbo army officers were eliminated and countless Igbo people killed, Gowon's refusal to honor the Aburi January 4-5 1967 accord to broker peace between Nigeria and Igbo people, the dividing of the nation into twelve states by Gowon on May 27, 1967, all played critical roles in setting the stage for the war. Underlying all these, however, is the composition of Nigeria. The amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914 by the British to form the country resulted in a forced union of over 250 ethnic groups with distinct languages, diverse and often irreconcilable cultures and religions. It was these differences and lack of mental space to accommodate each other that was manipulated most in the events that led to the war. Unfortunately, not much has changed in the way different ethnicities in Nigeria perceive each other. Indeed, it 'is impossible to understand Nigeria's political landscape without being aware of the nature and consequences of Nigeria-Biafra war and the ideas of brittle peace and impending war that emerged from these experiences' (Okolo 2017[a]:206).

Synopsis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half is Adichie's fictional reconstruction of events that preceded the Nigeria-Biafra war, the war itself, and its aftermath

especially as it relates to defining and understanding Nigeria's socio-political life. Through the lives and daily activities of characters like intellectuals at the University of Nigeria led by Odenigbo, wealthy elites like the Ozobia's – Olanna and her twin sister Kainene and their parents, expatriates like the British writer and journalist Richard, Igbo soldiers like Colonel Madu, commoners like Ugwu and his family, *Half* in sensitive registers of words, thought and mood capture the salient issues causing violence, conflicts, and wars in Africa while retaining its main focus on Nigeria. Odenigbo sees these in a combination of foist identity, misrepresentation of history and foreign interference among others. He insists, for example, that the 'only authentic identity for the African is the tribe' (20). He sees himself as an Igbo person and not a Nigerian which the white man who created Nigeria imposed on him (20). This awareness of differences in ethnicity will prove fatal for Odenigbo and his fellow Igbos. It became the basis for the massacre of the Igbos' following the ill-fated coup of January 1966 that was baptized Igbo coup based on the ethnic origin of some of the coup plotters. This is not fiction. Indeed, fiction ends with the few fictional characters introduced as a canvas to frame the dialectical relationship and tension between despair and hope, and emotional and psychological trauma that characterizes daily existence in time of war. The rest: the war lords Ojukwu (161-) and Gowon (158,173-), Balewa (110), the oil (180), Nyerere (295), kwashiorkor (303), Ogbunigwe (198), the Asaba massacre (384), Uli Airport (309), the senseless killings of Igbo both in the North (138, 147-) and the West (132), the complicity of Britain in the war (305), and even Count Von Rosen (310) among others are true accounts. The poet character, Okeoma, who died in the war, is easily ascribed to Christopher Okigbo. Odenigbo refers to him as 'The voice of our generation!' (19). Achebe (1988:80) eulogized Okigbo as the finest Nigerian poet of his generation. Even the massacre got to the point that a 'Sierra Leonean living in Northern Nigeria at the time wrote in horror: The killing of the Ibos (sic) has become a state industry in Nigeria' (Achebe 1975:83). In his view on the massacre of thousands of innocent

Eastern Nigerians Achebe (1975:83) writes 'thousands of citizens were slaughtered, hundreds of thousands were wounded and maimed and violated, their homes and property looted and burned, and no one asked any questions.'

The novel also brings to fore some vexing issues surrounding the war for the reader to reflect on. Two are particularly pertinent. The first is the notion that the main reason for the war is to keep Nigeria one. That is to say that the countless bloodshed that occurred during the war is a good price for the unity of Nigeria. Achebe (1983:12) labeled such thinking as 'nonsense.' For him the pertinent issue to consider is 'Unity to what end?' This calls for a serious introspection and interrogation. What should form the basis of unity for a country founded on diverse and often antagonistic cultures, ethnicities, values, languages, religion and even perception? What elements can be pulled together to create an enabling and sustainable mental and psychological disposition to accommodate differences in a way to make room for meaningful cooperation? These are not issues any forced unity, not even the one imposed through war, can ever achieve. Indeed, Smith (2015:60) wonders 'whether even the best intentioned leaders could have overcome the daunting challenge left behind by colonialism: a country in name only, with … hundreds of different ethnic groups thrown together under one nation state.' The second is Gowon's declaration at the end of the war that there is 'no victor and no vanquished.' Yet for the ex-Biafrans some of their properties were taken in the name of abandoned property (426), some lost all the money in their accounts (432), some of their soldiers were detained and then dismissed from the Nigerian army (427), while most are daily harassed and humiliated both in public and even in their homes (416-, 424). Fiction aside, Achebe (2012) and Ezeani (2013) record these and more as the experiences the Igbos went through (and are still going through) at the end of the war. Such events suggest that Gowon's mantra is a mere phrase divested of content, a package without substance, an excuse to say nothing.

Whether contemplating the devastating impact of the war on an intellectual like Odenigbo or a house help like Ugwu, Adichie maintains an unromantized vision of an African humanity founded on imperfections and vagaries of real living. Following the many losses he suffered in the war – the death of his mother and the crippling powerlessness of not being allowed to bury her, the death of his friends especially the poet Okeoma, the daily struggle to stay alive especially during air raids and the squalor of his family's living condition – Odenigbo begins the slow descending from the high pedestal of an intellectual, a university teacher invested with the right and authority to conduct research, generate ideas, shape opinions, guide perceptions and mold lives, to a man who hoards his thoughts and delivers them through drinking. Ugwu went from being a protected houseboy to a Biafran army recruit who participated in gang raping a girl.

Piecing their lives together at the end of the war, the main characters, Ugwu, Odenigbo and Olanna, who embraced the war from different perspectives, find a common bond in their different experiences during the war. They are united in the knowledge that war is not a single monster but a conglomerate of such creatures and as such should be avoided at all cost. Ugwu is left with the huge guilt of participating in a rape he was propelled into more by circumstance than conviction especially when he finds out that his sister Anulika has suffered a similar fate. Anulika's loss of an eye (421) from the incident will always condemn him for the rest of his life. Odenigbo is burdened by a sense of an irreparable loss made worse by a sense of having failed in his last duty to his mother and his hopelessness of not knowing where to begin to put together the pieces of his career due to the senseless burning of his library including the papers he was putting together for his promotion to the rank of a professor by Nigerian soldiers. But it is his inability to bury his mother that will question all his achievements and haunt him for the rest of his life. Olanna has to deal with a fate worse than death – the ceaseless agony of not knowing whether Kainene is alive or dead and how to continue to be a good wife to a man she no longer recognizes. In spite of all these, they are

fortified in the knowledge that Biafra existed, however briefly, to point to the Igbo the possibility of what they can achieve as a nation - the invention of *Ogbunigwe*, the refining of kerosene and palm oil as fuel, building an armored car from scrap (304) - and to help them regain their sense of dignity and worth that colonialism all but destroyed and Nigeria attempted to complete following the 1966 coup. In Achebe's (1975:84) view 'Biafra stands for true independence in Africa, for an end to the 400 years of shame and humiliation which we have suffered in our association with Europe.' He insists that 'Britain knows this and is using Nigeria to destroy Biafra.' The characters are aware of this. In their different ways they will learn how best to synthesize the war experiences to make room to approach the future with hope and courage.

As devastating as the war is and as unsettling as the post-war events that followed, Adichie makes the telling point that Nigeria's future lies in reinventing a new sense of community anchored on an amalgam of hope, courage and determined self-scrutiny. As such whatever the white man's input, negative or positive, may have been in creating African societies, the burden of remaking Africa lies with Africans. No matter how well-intentioned Richard's sentiment towards Biafra is, Biafra's story and recreation of its world is not for him to tell. Achebe in an interview he granted Moyers (1989:337) reminds that 'it is the storyteller, in fact, who makes us what we are, who creates history. The storyteller creates the memory that the survivors must have – otherwise their surviving would have no meaning.' Surely such an important assignment must be handled by the owner who is in the position to understand the real issues at stake and not a foreigner who may begin the origin of River Niger with its discovery by Mungo Park. *Half* assigns this crucial role to Ugwu. It is a signature statement of the role the youths should play in the re-ordering of the African society. It is also an eloquent acknowledgment of their role as the most active participant in conflict, violence and war situations in Africa.

Analysis: Causes of Conflict, Violence and War in Africa as portrayed in *Half*

The issues causing conflict, violence and war in Africa in *Half* are many. Due to space constraint this study will focus on six:

The first is the colonial reconstruction of social reality and identity in Africa as a major issue fuelling conflict, violence and war in Africa. Most African countries emerged as a result of colonial contraption of combining vastly different cultures, religions, traditions and ethnicities under one nation. Nigeria, the setting of *Half*, is both a typical example of such nation and the disastrous consequences of such arrangement. This is manifested in two major ways. The first concerns the identity of 'one Nigeria' which is seen as a sham. Odenigbo, the intellectual and revolutionary, sees the only authentic identity for the African as tribe. He insists that 'I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity' and that he 'was Igbo before the white man came' (20). He sees 'the nationalism that means we should aspire to indifference about our own individual cultures' as 'stupid' (109). It was this identity-consciousness on the part of different tribes that make up Nigeria that was misused in the events that led to the Nigeria-Biafra war. The Igbos' were singled out and massacred based on the spurious labeling of the 1966 coup as an Igbo coup. Perhaps most significant is the second issue – the impact of this reconstruction of social reality and identity on education in Africa. Education embraces 'variety of assumptions implied by words such as teaching, learning, character molding, development and research' (Okolo 2017[b]:150). Education is key to how knowledge, information, ideas, ideologies, and even perceptions are received and assessed. It is through education that 'children are instructed in the knowledge, values, attitude, skills, ideology and beliefs sanctioned by society' (Okolo 2017[b]:150). Clearly education can go a long way in defining a peoples' identity, how they perceive themselves, how others perceive them, their rate of development and their contribution to knowledge. In a situation where education content is packaged in a way to either mis-educate a people or to restrict the knowledge available to

them, the society may suffer from identity crises, identity inferiority, lack of development both mentally and materially or at best will attain dwarf-development. *Half* points to the type of education that helps to distort Africa's identity. In counseling Ugwu about school and what to expect, Odenigbo tells him '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 exams, write that it was Mungo Park!' (11). Ugwu may know the difference and the importance of interrogating knowledge claims because of his association with an intellectual like Odenigbo, what happens to the millions of Africans who do not have such advantage? The novel suggests that there is need to review Africa's education curriculum to reflect the truth, challenges, and how best to resolve its problems. Odenigbo insists that 'It is *now* that we have to begin to decolonize our education! ... Teach them our history' (75). In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi (1986:ix) notes that '[p]rescription of the correct cure is dependent on a rigorous analysis of the reality.' The reality is that 'Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its language and all its patriotic writers' because 'Imperialism and its comprador alliances in Africa can never never develop the continent' (xii). The way education is handled in Africa is critical to the correct interrogation of social reality and identity in Africa. The dismantling of apartheid in South Africa will be of little significance without the jettisoning of Bantu education policy that severely narrowed the potential of black South Africans during the apartheid regime.

The second point connects to the first. Colonial reconstruction of social reality and identity provided enabling platform for most African societies to operate multi-layered system of citizenship. The rights, privileges and responsibilities due to a citizen for legally belonging to a country are often subsumed under different categories. The most pertinent here is the ethnic-based political identities introduced and encouraged by the colonial masters which have continued till date. All meaningful political interactions, social rights and even rules set by the state derive

their interpretation from ethnic-consciousness. That is 'ethnic identity as opposed to citizenship identity determines who gets what, when, how, and how much in the state. Issues of employment, public appointments, education grants, scholarships, etc, are subjected to ethnic arithmetic by the central state' (Adejumobi 2005:29). This convoluted sense of citizenship is a reason to decimate a group and to even take away from a citizen what he/she has achieved through merit. This was what was relied on in the events that led to the war. *Half* records instances where Igbos' are singled out – we are counting the Igbo people (132); the killings were organized…the alarm for a battalion muster parade was sounded…and after everyone assembled, the Northerners picked out all the Igbo soldiers and took them away and shot them (138) – based on ethnicity. Indeed a character points to the ethnic balance policy engineered by the British as reason the Igbo soldiers were brutally murdered by their Northern counterparts. The policy gave an edge to the Northerners to the point of 'promoting Northerners who were not qualified' (141). This practice of subverting citizenship is entrenched in the Nigerian constitution as the 'federal character principle.' The purpose is to act as a political response to Nigeria's federal system by providing equal opportunities to all ethnic groups. The practice is diametrically opposed to the theory. In practice Adejumobi's (2005: 29) observation offers an adequate explanation: It places ethnic identity as the primary identity for state entitlements and social rights. It de-individualizes citizenship and makes it more of a group phenomenon. As such, in gaining access to state institutions, the individual does not relate with the state directly as citizen, but relates with it as a member/representative of an ethnic group. The result is that the central state becomes an arena of ethnic contest with the more powerful ethnic groups excluding and submerging the lesser ones and denying their people the benefits of citizenship.

In such situation the principle of meritocracy which is a fundamental value for the development of any society is sacrificed. The vice chancellor of the University of Lagos is removed because

he is an Igbo man (227). A character questions: 'Why should an Igbo man be the vice chancellor in Lagos?' (227). This kind of thinking apart from being capable of igniting conflict, violence, and, even, war if unchecked ends up working even against itself. The opposition by some indigenes of Ile-Ife over the appointment of a non-indigene (who is, in fact, a Yoruba person from the same Osun state) as the vice chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife in March 2022 is a good instance of ethnicity destroying itself. Achebe (1983:21) warns that 'the denial of merit is a form of social injustice which can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society.' Commenting on the OAU saga in an interview he granted Edema (2022) Toyin Falola submits that such practice will lead to the sacrifice of meritocracy, threaten peaceful relationships between the people of the favoured religion and ethnicity and the disfavoured ones which may eventually lead to ethno-religious conflicts and ethnic mistrust. Adejumobi (2005:20) insists that 'inter-group or identity-based conflicts and civil wars are manifestations of deep-seated problem of citizenship in different national contexts.' In sum, 'a country built on ethnic foundations and disdain for meritocracy is inherently weak and unstable' (Okolo 2021:56).

The third theme underscored by *Half* as a serious issue causing conflicts, violence and war in Africa is foreign interference. From the dethroning of traditional priest and elders and replacing them with warrant chiefs (71) to the labeling of the 1966 coup as an Igbo coup by BBC (125) to the defence pact that enabled Britain to continue to control Nigeria from behind drawn curtains (110) to the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise that was used to manipulate the differences between the tribes and ensured that unity would not exist among the different tribes (166-167) the role of foreign interference in fuelling disharmony in Africa is underscored. This role has often led to very serious revolts and even tragic consequences. Two instances will suffice. First, Boahen (1991:179) links the Aba women rebellion of 1929 to the introduction of new local courts and especially the warrant chiefs.

Second, the secession of Biafra from Nigeria may not have resulted in war but for the discovery of oil in the Eastern part of Nigeria and Britain's interest in it. It is also unlikely that the war would have lasted up to thirty months without the support of Britain and Russia to Nigeria (199). Soyinka (2009:121) while acknowledging the moral justice of Igbo to secede based on the brutal way they were murdered by their fellow Nigerians however submits that such an action will be militarily unwise due to the inevitable military support that Nigeria will get from Britain. Even the support that Biafra might have received from other countries did not happen because most countries were afraid of reprisal attack from America. A character notes that 'Nyerere will go down in history as a man of truth… many other countries want to recognize us but they won't because of America. America is the stumbling block' (295). According to Mangu (2008:87) the Western world uses its 'divide-and-rule' principle to maintain African countries under its control to the point that it 'plays the role of prompter or even director in several plays involving conflicts in Africa….but for its intervention, many conflicts would not have erupted or would have easily and quickly been settled.' America and other world powers need to be reminded that 'power comes with responsibility' (374). The self-serving attitude of world powers like America can never promote peaceful co-operation and existence. It is naïve to assume that Africa is so marginal to world affairs that it does not matter if the continent is engulfed in turmoil. If COVID-19 teaches anything it is that the borders between continents and the relationship between the powerful and the powerless nations is a mirage because when the chips are down every nation shares a common fate. It will be wise for the West to pay heed to Achebe's (2012:2) advice that they should assume serious responsibility for what is happening in Africa and provide meaningful solution.

The fourth theme that received attention in *Half* as causing conflict, violence and war in Africa is poor leadership. The role of a leader is cardinal to the socio-political life of any nation. A good leader through his actions can bring development, inspire his/her

citizens to greatness, all of which are necessary conditions for peace and security. Mandela has gone down in history for his leadership acumen in bringing South Africa from the brink of collapse caused by the intense acrimony and intolerance between the black and white during apartheid to a society where differences can be accommodated and managed in a way that allows the citizens to approach the future with hope and courage (Okolo 2015). Indeed, Achebe (2012:258) sees Mandela as the leader both 'present and future African leaders must all go for sustenance and inspiration.' Conversely a bad leader can through what he/she does or fails to do cause serious disunity among the citizens especially in an ethnic-based society. Such disagreement can find expression through violence, conflict and even war. Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's president from 2015 to May 29, 2023, has often been blamed for the numerous conflicts and violence that has engulfed the country since the beginning of his leadership and his inept ability to manage the crises (Sobowale 2019, Nwakanma 2019, Soyinka 2020, Ayodele 2022). Nwakanma (2019:32), in fact, describes Buhari as 'a president with the narrowest, most provincial, and most ethnocentric and bigoted worldview of any Nigerian leader to serve as president…', while in Ayodele's view 'Buhari will go down in history as the most insensitive, incurably deaf, pathologically dumb and pitiably unexciting' president since Nigeria came into being in 1914. For Anele (2019:27) the one factor that stands out in prominent relief that is making it impossible to institute good democratic practice and culture since the Biafran conflict ended is 'the steady political ascendency of individuals lacking the requisite intellectual skills and moral qualities for good leadership…' Indeed Achebe (1983:1) blames the entire problem of Nigeria's inability to achieve its full potential on the 'failure of leadership.' He submits that the 'Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.' *Half* points to this inability or unwillingness of Nigerian leaders to handle their responsibility as the major cause of the war. The Balewa government that came into

power at Nigeria's independence in 1960 knows only the white man as its master (110). This portrays a leader who is only so in name; for his actions he has to take dictation from Britain. A leader who cannot act independently will not be able to take initiative and utilize opportunities as they present themselves. Instead of taking advantage of the country's agricultural resources and encouraging irrigation technology that will help Nigeria to feed itself, the government is happy to go on with its colonial dependence on imports (88). Ojukwu (1969:18) sees this role of primary producer as one of the strategies used by advanced countries to keep developing countries' economy fragile and at the mercy of the industrialized countries. Indeed, one cardinal goal of Biafra was to achieve self-reliance so as to break the vicious circle of the aggressive policies of rich industrialized countries (Ojukwu 1969:18). Also the inability of Balewa government to conduct credible census (89), manage conflict (91) and check corruption (123) led to the first coup, while Gowon's (158) disastrous handling of its after-effects ultimately culminated in the war.

The fifth theme points to the inability to achieve real reconciliation at the end of the war as a potential seed of conflict awaiting its manifestation. At the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war Gowon declared that there is 'no victor and no vanquished' (428). Yet on his way back to Nsukka at the end of the war Odenigbo was stopped by Nigerian soldiers who not only made him carry wood to demonstrate how he can help a united Nigeria but was slapped…so violently, so unexpectedly, that he fell against his car (416-417). His experience is not unique. Other Igbo people returning to their former places after the war were equally humiliated and harassed. The harassment even extends to their homes. The soldiers who came to Odenigbo's house ordered 'everybody…[to] lie down flat' (423) then placing gun on Odenigbo's head demanded to know if he is hiding Biafran money (424). According to them 'We are searching for any materials that will threaten the unity of Nigeria' (424). After which they 'went to the kitchen and came out with two plates heaped with…*jollof* rice' (424). Of course, they do not require permission to take something

from their subjects. Even Kainene's house in Port Harcourt was taken over as an 'abandoned property' (426); and the Ozobia's had to re-buy their house in Lagos (427). Colonel Madu served a long detention at Alagbon Close, then was later dismissed from the Nigerian Army and given fifty pounds for all the money he had before and during the war (427). Olanna lost all the money in her bank account in Lagos, it no longer existed (432). Adichie's fictional truth is anchored on firm reality. The indignities suffered by the Igbo as a result of losing the war is subject that has been extensively covered by scholars (Bryne 199, Gould 2013, Achebe 2012, Ezeani 2013, Alabi-Isama 2013, Okolo 2021, Okolo 2022) and pointed out the main cause for Igbo peoples' political exclusion from Nigeria's political life and one of the root causes driving the agitations in the country. Okolo (2022), in fact, sees Gowon's 'no victor no vanquished' mantra as an ontological absurdity because they two do not share any semblance of ontological equivalence. A victor is a victor and a vanquished is a vanquished. To attempt to equate them is to cheapen a very tragic event or to allow the painful conclusion that the brutality and horrors of the war are meaningless (Okolo 2022:108). This crass mishandling of a very serious issue is behind the continuous demand for Biafra by some pro-Biafra groups, notably represented by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The leader of IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu, has been imprisoned since 2021 by the Buhari-led government for alleged treason based on his agitation for the restoration of Biafra. Unfortunately, this action has achieved nothing in terms of calming the restive atmosphere in the country. If anything the activities of the Boko Haram, kidnappers, bandits, herdsmen continue to threaten the existence of the country even as other regions clamour for self-determination. *Penpushing* of August 15, 2022 reports that the Yoruba Self-Determination Movement (YSDM) wrote to President Buhari demanding a self-determination and peaceful break away of Yoruba from Nigeria because of their worsening and painful plight in the country. What this points to is that a badly settled case,

especially war, will come back to haunt both the beneficiaries and the disadvantaged and, especially, the country. Achebe (1983:24) reminds that without 'peace no meaningful social programme can be undertaken; without justice social order is constantly threatened.' Indeed, no 'government, black or white, has the right to stigmatize and destroy groups of its own citizens without undermining the basis of its own existence' (Achebe 1975:83).

That said, it is important to acknowledge two vital points. The first is that 'the move from war to peace is a long-term process of political, economic, and social transformation' (World Bank 2000:62). This, however, cannot be achieved without sincerity of purpose. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, the demonstration of this has to do with how the Igbos' are reintegrated into the Nigerian family. Gould (2013) points to the exclusion of the Igbos' from all key areas - education, politics, economics – relevant to a country's successful development and sustainability since the end of the war. The second is that 'long wars and ethnic and religious conflicts are more difficult to end through peace settlements' (World Bank 2000:62). The ethnic rivalry and distrust that played key roles in Nigeria-Biafra war are still dominating Nigeria's political landscape. In fact, it is safe to assume that the greatest attribute that will be required of who wins the 2023 presidential election will be ethnic origin. The Igbos long denied the exalted position are clamoring for their turn, the Yoruba believe they should have another go, while Northern Nigerians see no reason to relinquish power. Depending on how this is managed, it will go a long way in determining post-election peace in Nigeria. These two points share a common interest. To engender peace in Africa, African governments must appreciate the scope of the problems posed especially by ethnicity and how best to handle them. In this they can look for direction from Nelson Mandela's creative integrative political efforts. In handling post-apartheid South Africa Mandela shunned recriminations and focused on building bridges across the blacks and white South Africans deeply polarized by the obnoxious apartheid regime.

The theme of distrust is the sixth point highlighted in *Half* as a perennial issue fuelling violence, conflict and war in Africa. Without trust there cannot be any meaningful relationship, co-operation or team-spirit. Where these are lacking, progress and development, if they take place at all, will be fragmented. Where there is fragmented effort society will continuously be starting from the scratch instead of having pool of efforts and achievements from which to draw from to leap to the next stage of development. In such situation, society will be locked in perpetual infancy without prospects of proceeding to advanced stage of maturity. The inability of Nigeria to make meaningful progress in the area of technological advancement is linked to Nigeria's inability to harness the incredible technological feat recorded by Biafra during the war (Achebe 2012, Ezeani 2013, Okolo 2017[a]) which no doubt resulted from the deep distrust with which other Nigerians held the Igbos (Achebe 1983, Achebe 2012). In *Half* this distrust finds itself in every area of life: northern schools refusal to admit Igbo children living in the north (38), Mohammed mother's objection to his marriage to Olanna because she is an Igbo woman and an infidel (46), the Northerners preference to hire foreigners and pay them twice more rather than hire a Southerner who is qualified (154). A character complains that 'the problem with Igbo people is that they want to control everything in this country' (227). The problem with distrust is that it replicates itself. Mohammed's concern for Olanna during the war is dismissed by Odenigbo. As far as he is concerned Mohammed is complicit in everything that happened to Igbo people because he is 'a bloody Muslim Hausa man' (191). Such blanket analysis overlooks the plight of sensitive and unbiased people in a conflict situation. More importantly it forecloses opportunities for people to come together and pull their resources, talents, skills, creativity in a cooperative endeavor for the benefit of humanity and society.

The emphasis throughout is on trying to analyze and understand what is happening in all of these issues, and to try and forecast their implications for a workable and sustainable solution. Together, then, the six themes point to two critical implications

and how they affect sustainable development in Africa: one is that African countries with high prevalence of inter-ethnic rivalry are vulnerable to conflicts, violence, civil wars and even state collapse. As such there is need to avoid a zero-sum solution in conflict resolution. Two, there is urgent need to institute and promote channel for knowledge, dialogue, learning, participation and understanding that does not adhere to a particular ideological leaning, recognizes the multi-composition of the country and does not serve the interest of a single ethnicity or a special group.

Conclusion

This study sets out to demonstrate how African literature can help in understanding the causes of conflict, violence and war in Africa. To achieve this, the study exposes Adichie's *Half* to a philosophical reflection. *Half* helps to understand the causes of Africa's post-independence war, conflict and violence as well as ways of resolving them, building and sustaining peace and social cooperation and promoting development in the 21st century. Specifically, the novel depicts a sense of severe displacement, both psychological and physical that became a feature of Nigeria-Biafra war years and its post years. It projects the war as an intractable event and an essential key to understanding developments and political events in Nigeria. In all, the novel helps to articulate a pertinent and difficult question which can be posed in two different ways: What is the Igbo peoples' place in post-civil war Nigeria? Or which place do the Igbo people occupy in Nigeria's national psyche? The novel suggests that until this question is confronted and dealt with the seriousness, commitment, justice and equity it demands and deserves Nigeria will continue to be susceptible to violence, conflict and (although it should never be allowed to repeat again) the possibility of another war.

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