



Educated Women in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Possibilities, Choices or Obligations?

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1) Introduction

This essay will focus on portrayals of educated women in Nigeria and how education is shown to affect their possibilities and choices in a post-colonial environment. In the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006), the author describes several female characters whose life choices represent significant changes in the Nigerian society. My aim is to examine how women's choices are portrayed in the novel, in relation specifically to education, cultural background and gender. By analyzing how these characters lead their lives, both based on their possibilities and also through what obstacles they face, this essay explores in what ways education is shown to be an important factor in influencing the female characters' choices.

The twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, and their cousin Arize in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, were born into completely different lives in post-colonial Nigeria. The twins grow up in privileged circumstances in southern Nigeria, both with a higher education from England, while their cousin, Arize, lives in a much simpler way in Northern Kano. The novel being set at the end of the 1960s, in a time before and during the civil war, these young women navigate through environments of prosperity and poverty and from hopeful plans and dreams to devastating atrocities and war.

Adichie's home country Nigeria is specifically where her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* is set. The female characters Olanna, Kainene and Arize grow up in different class settings, but in the same politically unruly times of post-colonial Nigeria, with explicit or implicit gender expectations coming from their culture, people around them but also from themselves. It is how they handle these expectations, however, that is different from one another. This essay will examine the reasons for that, posing the question whether their level of education affects their choices or if their respective cultural upbringing as females with varied personalities in different settings of Nigeria weighs in. The fact that the novel takes place in politically troubled times, Nigeria in the time between the independence from Britain in 1960 and during the Biafran war (1967-1970), this essay will also imply the importance of key moments or situations that change people and make them follow a different course in life.

The availability of education is one of the most significant factors influencing the female characters' life choices in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. I will argue that oppositions between the educated and the uneducated is clearly displayed and are shown to affect the life choices the women make. Therefore, a background to Nigeria's educational history will form the context

to make the setting of Adichie's fiction easier to place and grasp as well as the arguments of my analysis in chapter two. Providing previous gender and feminist readings as well as an overview of African Feminism will help support my claim about women's choices regarding occupation, relationships, and motherhood in Nigeria, as they are portrayed by Adichie. Also, it will signify how education is shown to be an agent of empowerment and self-improvement for the female characters.

2) Chapter 1: Theory and Previous Research

In the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, portrayals of the female characters indicate important differences in the women's life choices. The idea is to provide context for their choices regarding occupations, relationships and motherhood. Firstly, to ground my claims regarding these choices, background information and testimonies about female education in Nigeria, where the novel is set, will be described. Secondly, as Adichie's fiction has a clear feminist vision, and while African Feminism also has another focus than Western Feminism, a brief background on African Feminism will bring some light on the analysis of the female characters. Previous readings, with ideas about dualities, gender and education will also be described in this section. Lastly, Adichie's other writings, as well as her own ideas about her fiction will be given examples from, since it is shown to be both interesting and relevant for this research.

Adichie uses Igbo words and phrases to emphasize her heritage and to deepen her portrayals of the characters in her novels. This is an example of her connection to the author Chinua Achebe. The influences that her male predecessor in Nigerian literature have on her are commonly known and there are many pieces of literary criticism written on the connections between the two. I will therefore include some examples of those influences on Adichie from an interesting literary criticism article by Ruth S Wenske, about how Adichie as well as Achebe balance dualities. Another one, by Susan Z Andrade, describes Adichie's themes of the national scenery, but in relation to her feminist approach. Thirdly, Moffat Sebola, further discusses the challenges for women in the complex cultural setting of today's Nigeria, brought up by Adichie in her feminist fiction. I will also refer to a very recent article, "The Campus as War Zone", in which Ann W Gulick explores the significance shown in the relationship between universities and war in *Half of a yellow Sun* amongst two other contemporary African novels. Some of her points will be shown relevant for my analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as Adichie's protagonist Olanna and her lover Odenigbo are closely connected to the town Nsukka and its university there, both as scholars but also as politically active in demonstrations and discussions about societal development for Nigeria.

Female Education in Nigeria

The British missionaries were the first to start schools in Nigeria in the 1850s. The first secondary school was founded in 1859 in Lagos, but it was only for boys. The first female equivalent was established ten years later and after that several girls' schools were opened, becoming a part of the southern, south-western and south-eastern part of Nigeria's school system. However, the north of Nigeria was Muslim territory, and while schools bore a western and Christian influence established by the British, the northern part of Nigeria resisted "this educational infiltration" (Williams 86), as Stella B. Williams describes in her article about female educational history in Nigeria. Traditional leaders were afraid that schools would threaten their Muslim culture and values. It was not until 1909 that the first boys, from privileged families, were sent to school in the North and in the 1930s the first girls were allowed in schools there.

Schools were early differentiated both by class and gender. There were differences between public and private schools in funding, and when income did not suffice for all their children, most families only sent their male children to schools (Williams 86). Also, the British missionaries who established schools and education "believed that women should only be educated in order to assist their husbands" (84). As a traditional society, Nigeria's social ideology was that boys were regarded as heirs and were therefore more commonly sent to schools. When girls did attend schools, they were "limited to domestic sciences" (88). This assumption, that female education should only be about home and family, she continues, also served the traditional values that girls were to be educated to be good housewives and mothers (87). Williams describes how, from the early days of modern education, "girls were discriminated due to the prevailing social ideology" in Nigeria (Williams 88). She explains how the slow pace in development for female education is therefore due to the society's attitudes, which state that women have lower status than men. Child marriages, which also deny girls their education, are common in rural areas. In addition, economic issues in the country also cause children to drop out of school to help providing for their families. According to studies, Williams informs that the highest dropout rate is for girls (89).

Women's education has improved significantly since the 1950s when Universal Primary Education, UPE, was introduced in Nigeria. In 1971, 23% of the girls were enrolled in primary education in Nigeria and by 1978 the figure was 55% (Williams 90). There were changes to the national policies on education in 1969 and in 1981, with a broadening of educational goals and curriculum development. However, there was no pronounced strategy

for female education until 1985, when the *United Nations Decade for Women Conference* in Nairobi, Kenya, made the Nigerian Government finally admit the gender imbalance of the school system and acted to analyze its the reasons. As for female adults and older women, a significant difference in the level of education was shown between the south and the north, where the higher percentage of uneducated women and illiteracy prevailed in 1985 (Williams 90).

After the Nairobi conference, the Federal Ministry of Education proposed new goals for the country, including more educational opportunities for women at all education levels and fields, to create awareness of the unequal opportunities regarding “gender, age, locality, creed or status” (Williams 91) and to raise consciousness for women of education as an important means of developing self-growth. New goals also included education for the general public, including parents, to promote change in people’s attitudes against female education programs (Williams 92).

The first university in Nigeria, in western Ibadan, was founded in 1948, under the rule of University of London, and the staff were mostly British. The main ideas for the Universities of Nigeria came from classic European ideas regarding what fields to provide for studies, such as grammar/rhetoric and arithmetic/geometry. Like in Europe, they revolved around professionals who were all men, “working primarily for their male kinship” (Williams 92). The female staff at higher education usually occupied the “female-related areas of Administration (typing and accounts), nursing and welfare services (catering and dormitory keepers) with the exception of a few female lecturers in the humanities and social sciences” (Williams 93).

In her article, Williams informs that female admission rate to higher education increased from 1:20 in 1947 to 1:6 in 1970 but that the educational inequalities throughout the country were continuously striking: By 1960, there were still no secondary schools in the north for Muslim girls, while the number of women enrolled in university in the south had increased to 196 (Williams 93). Even with gradually higher rates of female education in total, inequalities prevailed in such as the maths- and science fields. In universities there were still very few women compared to men enrolled in these fields. This was explained by the performances and generally lower grades of female students, even at the university (Williams 94). However, awareness programs from the end of the 20th Century have sought to motivate girls and women in their performance in the subjects related to science, and at the turn of the century,

Nigeria's educational leaders concluded hopefully, "educate a woman and you educate a nation" (Williams 85).

There is still today, however, some cynicism and opposition to female education in some parts of Nigeria, Williams continues, most of which are due to religious views. But generally, the status of women has changed for the better. Educated women serve as inspiration as they show how women do not have to rely on their husbands to survive, so that others see the positive outcome of a good education, in terms of providing women with economic power (Williams 95). This "element of professionalism" has now started to change minds, even in rural areas and in the north, where Williams describes how the general attitude, towards education for girls and women, for long has been that women should only be prepared for a life as a housewife and mother, due to Muslim practices (Williams 88).

In her study of six female higher education leaders from Nigeria, Dr. Margaret Ebubedike describes how they see education as enlightenment and liberation for girls and women and how education is a part of a "cultural change and women empowerment" (Ebubedike 91). These women explain how education helps you make grounded life choices and therefore creates more options for a life "they have cause to value" (Ebubedike 91). While many Nigerian women have grown up in a culture that subjugates or silences women, the narratives of the women in this study, however, show positive examples of women's opportunities for learning and bring light on important reasons for their educational journey and pursuit for a different life, as Ebubedike explains.

The women in the study all share how education made them aware of the importance of improving themselves and grow, both on a personal level but also as female role models in a traditional, patriarchal context. They agree that higher education empowers women and gives them "the voice to stand up to male dominance" (Ebubedike 88). In a country where it used to be regarded "a waste of family resources" (Ebubedike 81) to educate a female child, girls and women now have more choices to follow their own path and study both according to interest and capacity.

Ebubedike continues, that these women all "take pride in relating their academic profile" (76) and stresses the importance of education as one of the prime reasons for the development of their careers as well as how their personal lives have become. Nevertheless, they also lift their informal training at home as another important factor which has formed their personalities to being responsible, committed and strong in dealing with challenges (77).

The interviewees in Ebubedike's research also agree that education brings about a change to national cultural practices. People in general are now more informed as they have seen the positive effects of education through the younger educated people, in how they contribute to the community in more ways. As education, especially since colonization, is regarded as the main tool for social reconstruction, it "also prepares a person to be a responsible citizen" (Ebubedike 90). Education is also shown as a patriotic aspiration, since it is considered important to develop Nigeria in terms of economy and technology.

Another important reason for their opportunity to study, brought up by the women in the study, is their respective fathers' backgrounds in education; how they valued it and personally believed it should be both for men and women. Concerning women coming from the north, traditionally Muslim communities, Ebubdike shares a report from the British Council in 2014, in which similar information is shown: "The major actors in the decision to sending a girl child to school are the authoritative male figures in the household and in the community" (85), meaning fathers and religious leaders. Consequently, in these traditional patriarchal communities there were no testimonies of female parents involved in the decision to send their daughters to school, but the importance of the male attitudes towards female education were stressed to be of greater importance.

African Feminism

Reading both fiction and literary criticism about depictions of Nigeria, a former British colony until 1960, one can notice differences in how women and their place in society is regarded in relation to Western ideologies. Susan Arndt writes in her article "Perspectives on African Feminism" that the forming of African Feminism evolved out of a protest against "the White history and the White domination within feminism" (32), but also out of the need to take into consideration the cultural history and material conditions of the different African societies and find alternative ideas to feminism. Generally, "African feminism gets to the bottom of African gender relations and the problems of African Women" (Arndt 32). She describes how the Nigerian author Flora Nwapa in 1984 first "wanted nothing to do with feminism because of its anti-men stance" (Arndt 31), but that she changed her mind ten years later, after being inspired by Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo and Nigerian scholar Obioma Nnaemeka, saying "Let us not be afraid to say that we are feminists...Globally, we need one another" (Arndt 31). This reluctance to use the term, 'feminist', does not mean there was no feminism struggle or resistance to patriarchal dominance in Africa at the time of the rise of Western feminism. African feminism theories simply developed in another way and still do.

Feminism has followed a development of thoughts from the rise of feminist theories and actions in the beginning of the 20th Century and still do. So has African feminism, even though it has always had varied issues from the start that did not find their equivalent or complete understanding in those of Western feminism. The author Minna Salami examines in her article “A Historical Overview of African Feminist Strands” the different theories of African feminism and strives to place these different views in a contemporary context. She notes how the first theories, like Womanism, Motherism and Stiwanism, are still valid but have become “dated”. They are no longer sufficient to describe the present struggles for feminism throughout the African continent, as her analysis shows that today “significant numbers of Africans are comfortable with the term feminist in the ways they weren’t when these concepts were coined as substitutes” (Salami).

Minna Salami also describes in her article how the need for an African variant of feminism also came out of the reluctance of having any other people speaking for them, neither Western women nor African men (Salami). Furthermore, the different African feminist theories are all determined by patriarchy, just like Western feminism, but also by “colonization, imperialism, heteronormativity, ethnicity, race, class, as well as human rights issues such as poverty reduction, and violence protection and health and reproductive rights” (Salami).

Susan Arndt explains in her article about alternative concepts to feminism and varied African feminisms with important regional differences. Early theories that are brought up are Cultural African Feminisms, with examples like ‘Womanism’ (which has been briefly explained above), Motherism and ‘Stiwanism’, which is an acronym and stands for Social Transformations Including Women in Africa. Also, they aim at “a cooperation or complementarity with men, the affirmation of motherhood and family and ...the concern to criticize patriarchal manifestations in African societies” (Arndt 32). Minna Salami also explains this in her article, that their shared focus is mainly to “reclaim” and bring traditional African principles and values into the future (Salami).

Furthermore, Salami argues how global history before feminism is a “text of male desire” (Salami) and how women resisted, fought for equal rights and struggled against male traditions – until they started to be heard in the beginning of the 20th Century. However, as modern history writings are also “male-centered”, they are also “Eurocentric”, Salami continues, and are therefore writings of a world without African feminism. But there has been resistance to patriarchy in the African environment even before, as Salami further explains. As she describes the different eras of feminism, she also questions the Eurocentric chronology

for African history (Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial). She claims that even though colonization undoubtedly was a groundbreaker for shaping the course of African history, this chronology is very unfortunate as it insinuates that there was no history before the Europeans came to Africa. Even though British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1965 called African history before colonialism “largely darkness - ...not a subject for history”, Salami continues, we can be sure now that it is untrue. So, while history existed without European knowledge of it, and while women resisted patriarchy even before Western feminism began, African feminism also did (Salami).

Previous Readings

Several critics have noted how the fiction by Chimamanda Ngozi is closely connected to the late author Chinua Achebe, also Nigerian and of Igbo heritage like her. She described in “African ‘Authenticity’ and the Biafran Experience” that, when she first read *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe, she had “a glorious shock of discovery” because the characters in the book looked like her, ate foods like she did and had Igbo names like her family. The books she had read before were novels with British setting and so were the first stories she had written (Adichie, “African Authenticity”, 42). *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe was one of the novels that made her realize “that [her] world was worthy of literature” (42). Seen in this light it is no wonder one can draw some parallels between the two authors, even though Adichie also confesses that the world of Achebe’s characters also was very different from hers: “Their world was also incredibly exotic because they [the characters] lived without the things that I saw as the norm in my life...they lived a life that my great-grandfather might have lived” (Adichie 42).

In the article “Balancing Dualities in *Half of a Yellow Sun*”, Ruth S. Wenske examines the links between the two authors through dualities, such as individualism/collectivism, natural/supernatural, tradition/change and African/Western to name a few. As dualities at a first look seem very contrasting in their opposite positions, she argues that through balancing these dualities, you could read both Adichie and Achebe as conducting “a search for balance, rather than a struggle for dominance, thus conveying a reconciliatory message rather than a quest for blame” (Wenske 72). Moreover, her recognition of the fact that “both [Achebe and Adichie] write of the generation of grandparents and their parents in their youth” (72) is interesting, because they deal with the current conflicts of that time, namely colonialism for Achebe and The Biafran war for Adichie. They are conflicts that were both significantly “identity-shaping” for Nigeria and her inhabitants (72).

Igbo traditions and practices are brought up in the fiction of both Achebe and Adichie, as well as many examples of the dualities of the individual and the collective, Wenske continues. Bringing up these two in the setting of conflicts and war, as in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, is a challenge because of how easily they can be considered either good or bad (75), and therefore taking a stand for or against. In her article, however, Wenske shows how Adichie avoids blaming any part through anonymity:

Adichie finds the balance between good and bad in the interplay between the collective and the individual, where she is able to draw anonymity as a factor separating positive and negative collectivity (75).

Wenske further explains how Adichie portrays the collective as an anonymous, “nameless” group of people, and when Adichie portrays the war, she brings up what is good or bad but identifies the bad as “actions and anonymity – rather than personalities and tribes” (76). As Wenske describes, these societies need to be “reclaimed and reinvented” (76). They cannot go back after the conflicts but need to move forward and find a new balance in their country, and therefore the authors shift focus from the negative actions of the anonymous collective to the positive social unit that is the tribe. For the characters in *Half of Yellow Sun* this also deals with aspects of being African or Western, tribal or modern, when discussing education and how it affects the individual (the characters of this novel) and the collective (the Nigerian society).

The discussion on Adichie’s reluctance to putting blame on any part in the conflict of Biafra is also brought up in the article “Remediating Biafra: Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a Symbolic Vehicle of Postwar Reconciliation”. Abba explains in his article how Adichie by her novel attempts to represent the nation’s need for a “postwar dialogue” to create an enduring togetherness in Nigeria (Abba 1). He describes Adichie’s desire to inform Nigerians about their history to create a wider knowledge of the conflict, not only in the generation of her grandparents and parents, but in hers too. Purposefully, Abba notes, Adichie brings up descriptions of the war from all sides, not just the Igbo, or the Biafran perspective, as she questions it too: “...there is considerable evidence of Adichie’s desire to produce a narrative that symbolically holds both victims and perpetrators accountable for the atrocities of the war” (Abba 5). Abba thereby displays Adichie’s reconciling view that all people of Nigeria need to learn from this war and work together to form the future of their country.

Developing societies shown through progressive female authors is also what scholar Susan Z. Andrade writes about in her article “Adichie’s Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels”. Calling *Half of a Yellow Sun* “a story of the ending of old nations and the making of new ones”, Andrade claims that Adichie continues the work and legacy of Achebe’s fiction and themes, develops his writing structures, and goes deeper in her characterization (93). However, she explains how Adiche’s novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* not only reveal their relation to *Things Fall Apart*, as described above, but also to her female feminist predecessors, such as Flora Nwapa, Mariama Bâ and Buchi Emecheta. Andrade shows how Adichie extends the tradition of writing about “politics of the family while quietly but clearly telling stories of the nation” (Andrade 91). She also states that by Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the prose of contemporary female novelists has “increasingly become more nationally engaged the longer writers have been on the public scene of literary production” (Andrade 93). She claims that the hesitance of earlier female writings no longer is represented, as Adichie leaves no doubt what the theme of her storytelling is, as she “[represents] the national imaginary” (92) directly.

In addition to the influence from Achebe, another important topic in criticism of Adichie’s works are feminist perspectives. University lecturer Moffat Sebola brings up the challenges there are to modern feminism in Africa, based on Adichie’s fiction in the article “Some Reflections on Selected Themes in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Fiction and her Feminist Manifesto”. He grounds his topics on Adichie’s *Dear Ijeawele or A Feminist Manifesto* and give examples from *Half of a Yellow Sun* and other pieces of fiction by Adichie. One aspect is the matter of commodification of women. An example of how women can be reduced to a product of trade is in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, when Olanna’s parents try to use her, their daughter, to seal a business deal with Chief Okonji (Adichie, *Half*, 35). In his article, there are several shown examples about patriarchal, old-fashioned views about men and women, by which the men should aspire to be strong, powerful and wealthy, and the women only to strive to be liked and to be a subject for marriage; to see “marriage as a prize” (Sebola). Seen in this light, Sebola explains by a quote from *Purple Hibiscus* how female bodies also are sexualized: “the girl is a ripe *agbogho!* Very soon a strong, young man will bring us palm wine” (Adichie, *Purple*, 91-92). As it takes more than one woman to fight these patriarchal structures and traditions, Sebola explains that Adichie “encourages women to unite against patriarchal repression and abuse” (Sebola).

Development and education are also brought up in the article, “The Campus as War Zone: Contemporary Anglophone Fiction, Post Independence War and the African University”, in which Anne W. Gulick discusses the significance of education in postcolonial Nigeria, and specifically higher education. She argues that Adichie lifts the setting of the Nsukka University, due “to her own lived experience”, growing up around campus with parents working at the university of Nsukka. In contrast to Nigeria’s first university of Ibadan, Nsukka University was founded as an “indigenous alternative to the colonial college model” (Gulick 43). The male protagonist Odenigbo describes it in the novel as being “free of colonial influence” (Adichie, *Half*, 32). Gulick here claims that Adichie “[embraces] the romance of Nsukka as a hub for authentic, African postcolonial development” (Gulick 43), as Nsukka is also described as “a centre for development, freedom, liberation and feminism” (49). However, Gulick also suggests that Adichie blames the intellectuals for the diversities and coups that took place at the end of the 1960s. These people, portrayed in the novel by Odenigbo and his university friends, repeatedly discuss “progressive politics” in his home, but view rural Nigerians with a “condescending paternalism” (43). Gulick suggests thereby that they regard themselves as superior, while they are also portrayed with bad morals occasionally. Also, Gulick brings up how the character Olanna’s participation in campus demonstrations serves for Adichie to display the “active roles that women played in the war”, leading thoughts to Adichie’s “own experience as a student activist” (44). All in all, Gulick demonstrates not only the development of education but also of knowledge in progress and how political crisis and war are suggested to provide knowledge for the future of postcolonial societies.

As described, Adichie’s concern for explaining what postcolonial Nigeria looks like in terms of differences between people of varied ethnic groups and different levels of education is clear in previous criticism. Furthermore, what challenges the society faces in terms of intercultural understanding and development needs are illuminated. Adichie’s opposition to emphasizing stereotypes but rather explaining differences within groups is therefore an important focus. To quote Adichie herself: “The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete” (“The Danger of the Single Story”).

Writings by Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has written several pieces on the matter of feminism and the conditions for women, specifically in the countries she divides her time between, Nigeria and the USA, but also generally. In *We should all be feminists* she gives examples from her own

up-bringing but also testimonies from friends and acquaintances. Born and brought up in Nigeria, Adichie knows about gender expectations and describes this with many thought-provoking examples in this short story/TED Talk, in which she states:

The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn't have the weight of gender expectations (Adichie 34).

Adichie's article "A Young Female Is Unsuccessful without a Man in Nigeria" also gives witness to the cultural differences you could experience as a woman in contemporary Nigeria, compared to many western societies. According to Adichie, women in Nigeria need to navigate through many cultural circumstances which are very different from western societies, and this is not just in rural areas but also in modern cities. She describes in this article how women need to be escorted into a night club by a man and by examples of how parking helpers give thanks to the man even if the woman tipped the man from her own wallet (Adichie, "A Young Female is Unsuccessful..."). In *We should all be feminists* Adichie also gives an example from her own family, how she more interested in her heritage as Igbo than her brothers, but being a female, she is not allowed to take part in extended family meetings as "Igbo culture privileges men" (Adichie 46).

In her article "African Authenticity", Adichie explains the background to why she wanted to write about the Biafran war, a war she did not live through, but "grew up in the shadow of" (50). She describes how this war affected her family and the life they led onward, when her grandfathers had died, her parents had lost their possessions and food was a scarcity. In the light of this war, she also brings up the matter of being human:

When you are deprived of the comforts of the life you know...how does this change your relationship, your sense of self, your idea of self-confidence...how does it change the things you value? (Adichie, Authenticity 51)

Adichie continuously stresses the importance of equality in her feminist approach and in this light, she also discusses what it is like and should be like to be human. In "African Authenticity" she lifts this as the importance of an "equal humanity": "It is important that we recognize the equal humanity of the people with whom we inhabit the earth" (46). This is very clear in her fiction about contemporary Nigeria, as she portrays strong and diverse characters, both female and male, traditional and modern, in her attempt to paint a detailed picture of the

people in her home country Nigeria. She continues in this article, in order to explain the diversity of characters in her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, that it was important for her to include many characters to show the “dynamics of race and class and gender...and how the war complicated these dynamics” (51). War is typically something that can complicate relations and degrade and challenge us all, both in terms of humanism and feminism. I will come back to this matter in the analysis of how the female characters are depicted by Adichie.

3) Chapter 2: Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze the portrayals of the female characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. I will study how these women's life choices are depicted in the novels in relation to gender and cultural and social background and in what way education is shown to be significant for these choices. I will specifically examine their choices for occupations, relationships, and motherhood. Since these novels are set in postcolonial Nigeria and in a troubled political climate and unruly time, I will also apply examples of how these changing conditions in society are shown to affect the women's choices, as well as the cultural and social backgrounds of the characters. By analyzing how the characters lead their lives, both based on their possibilities but also through what obstacles they face, this essay explores in what ways education is shown to be an important factor in influencing the female characters' choices.

My analysis, of the portrayal of the female characters, will suggest that education in Nigeria is seen as an important part of empowerment for women. This suggested empowerment for the characters is not only societal but also personal; to fully grow and develop their respective personalities, to value life and learn from the choices they make. I will also argue that oppositions between the educated and the uneducated is clearly displayed and are shown to affect the life choices the women make.

Cultural and Social Background

The central characters in the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Olanna and Kainene Ozobia, are twins, born into a wealthy, Nigerian family in Lagos. Their parents regularly attend and host dinners and cocktail parties with important Nigerian businessmen and politicians. Chief Ozobia, their father, is a successful businessman himself and their mother is a luxury housewife, mostly known for her beauty. Olanna and Kainene are brought up in a materially comfortable life, provided with a good primary school, an "iniquitously expensive and secretive British secondary school" (61), as well as a newly completed master's degree from England. The twins' parents, however, come from poor conditions and with little schooling, but as their father had worked his way up in wealth, he and his wife had wanted to create a completely different life for their daughters, other than the one they had had when they were young. Kainene describes this desire for social mobility by saying that their father had been "determined that we be as European as possible" (61), when talking about the posh, British Secondary School she and her sister Olanna had attended.

Another example of the twins' social background is what Richard Churchill first learns about his future girlfriend Kainene's father: "Chief Ozobia owns half of Lagos" (59). Richard was introduced to Kainene Ozobia at a cocktail party, which he attended with his former girlfriend, Susan, who told him this. Susan had continued to gossip about Kainene's father: "...there is something terribly *nouveau riche* about him. He doesn't have much of a formal education...and neither has his wife. I suppose that's what makes him so obvious" (59). This perception, of the depiction of rich and influential people in Nigeria in the 1960s, is also confirmed by Kainene when she describes her father's peers: "The new Nigerian upper class is a collection of illiterates who read nothing and eat food they dislike at over-priced Lebanese restaurants and have social conversations around one subject: 'How's the new car behaving?'" (64). Through Kainene, Adichie here raises questions about education and class in post-colonial Nigeria and about who holds or should hold the balance of power. Adichie suggests that those in power should be those who are able to make educated decisions on what Nigeria needs in the future, in both cultural, educational as well as economic growth. The debate suggests concerns for topics of capitalism and socialism and what different views the ethnic groups of Nigeria bring to the debate.

Kainene also describes the views of her sister Olanna and her lover, "the freedom fighter":

He's a mathematician but he spends all his time writing newspaper articles about his own brand of mismash African socialism. Olanna adores that. They don't seem to realize how much of a joke socialism really is...[it] would never work for the Igbo. Ogbenyealu is a common name for girls and you know what it means? "Not to be Married by a Poor Man". To stamp that on a child at birth is capitalism at its best (69).

This passage demonstrates how Adichie wants to add a nuanced but also critical description of her own ethnic group, the Igbo, with both good and bad qualities, as well as of the other big ethnic groups of Nigeria brought up in the novel, the Hausa and the Yoruba. In his article, Abba also highlights the differences between people within the different tribes. He discusses, like Adichie, how the actions of the uneducated are explained to "[arise] from ignorance" (Abba 5), bringing up the example about the two Hausa men, one "enlightened" and one "illiterate". While Olanna's educated friend Mohammed saves her from being killed in the Igbo persecutions of Kano, it is the uneducated Abdulmalik who supervises the same slaughter of his former Igbo friends (Abba 6).

The twins have a female cousin on their mothers' side, Arize. She lives in Kano, in the north of Nigeria, with her family in a two-room bungalow with a little backyard. In Kano, the Yoruba and Hausa live side by side with the Igbo. Arize's father, the twins' uncle Mbaezi, works in a market stall selling housewares and her mother Ifeka has her own small kiosk on the roadside. Her brothers have moved away for work and Arize takes a sewing class and practices cutting patterns at home. When Olanna visits her uncle's family, she always feels at home, as she is shown to be more personal and closer to them than to her own parents. In her own words, whenever she came to Kano, she always felt at peace, she "felt a sense that things were in order...and that even if they tumbled down once in a while, in the end they would come back together again". Arize and Olanna call each other 'sisters', and she talks more freely to her than to her own sister (38, 39).

Having rich and influential parents, the twins are often on display in magazines, whether they want it or not. Kainene had also told Richard the night they first met, that she and her sister were at the party for their parents' display: "My sister and I are meat. We are here so that suitable bachelors will make the kill" (59). The passage shows that Kainene does not really seem to mind, or at least that she has come to terms with it, casually delivering a sarcastic line like that. Olanna's reluctance to this family fame, however, is clear when she sees a certain picture of her and her mother in an issue of *Lagos Life Magazine*, taken at a cocktail party. She had politely asked the photographer not to publish it but had later realized that "he would never understand the discomfort that came with the gloss that was her parents' life" (34). Here, the differences between the sisters are clearly displayed, as Olanna's expression shows her unease about the life of her parents and her desire to distance herself from them.

The twins' mother is portrayed in the novel as exceptionally beautiful. Richard's first impression of his future mother-in-law was that he was "startled by how perfectly almond-shaped her eyes were, wide set in a dark face that was intimidating to look at" (60). He finds it hard connecting Mrs. Ozobia as mother to Kainene, the latter being portrayed with less feminine features and "almost androgynous" (60). Kainene's sister Olanna, on the other hand, is described as the beautiful of the twins. She "took after their mother, although hers was a more approachable beauty with the softer face and the smiling graciousness" (60). Interesting to note above, is that Adichie's portrayal of the women's appearances is also suggested to reflect their personalities.

The depictions of Kainene in the novel show a confident, witty and somewhat mysterious woman, a bit cool and hard to get close to. Being twins, the two women, Olanna and Kainene,

had been close as children, but Olanna felt as if she had drifted apart from her sister ever since secondary school, and because Kainene “had always been the withdrawn child...the one who, because she did not try to please their parents, left Olanna with that duty” (36). But after their completed university degrees, it is Olanna who decides to leave Lagos to teach at the University and live with her boyfriend in Nsukka, and Kainene who accepts her father’s offer of managing his businesses in the city Port Harcourt, and to stay in the house he provided for her there. Her father compliments Kainene’s business skills to his acquaintances, and even proudly describes her as a son; “she is not just like a son, she is like two” (31). Kainene, on the other hand, regards her gifted house “as a bit of a dowry... an enticement for the right sort of man to marry his unattractive daughter” (69). As shown, Kainene’s lines in the novel are both catchy and mocking, but they are also delivered with a slight sense of disappointment or resentment, as they display her critique of her parents’ lives and views.

Apart from her beauty the twins’ mother, Mrs. Ozobia, is depicted as rather superficial, mostly caring about her personal appearance, her home and the prestige of the family and is not shown to have any deeper thoughts or opinions. After the first military coup in the novel, the political state of Nigeria clearly affects her husband and her, and Adichie shows this in the way that “the rows and rows of gold around her neck weighed her down, and made her head look slumped, as if she was under great strain and, in trying so hard to hide it, made it all the more obvious” (135). This is how Richard, Kainene’s lover, perceives his girlfriend’s mother after the spouses had come back from “a holiday” abroad (135), as they had called it. They secretly planned another one, Mrs. Ozobia had confided in him in drunken privacy at a party in their house. Olanna knew her parents had fled overseas not to be connected to the sensitive political diversions in Nigeria that could harm her father’s domestic businesses, “because [her father] was wary of his ten percents and lavish parties and slick connections, but neither he nor her mother said so. They called it a holiday” (131). As shown, the Ozobias are not politically engaged, only economically. They simply take advantage of the positive effects of their success and do nothing to risk any of that.

Mrs Ozobia also appears to regard her family’s display in society as more important than her daughters’ own wills and dignities. Olanna, for instance, was “used to her mother’s disapproval” (35), in the past for correcting a teacher at secondary school or for joining a student protest. She also knew the expression of her mother’s face the number of times she had turned important men down in marriage proposals. So, she was not surprised when her parents had invited Chief Okonji, the cabinet minister, to the house, and implicitly had used

her beauty as a link to give her father a lucrative contract to sell land, knowing the minister was very attracted to her. When Chief Okonji approached her, she had to refuse him both politely and firmly. Olanna “was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around...with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together” (33). Asking Olanna about it afterwards, Kainene commented casually, that “the benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as a sex bait” (35). Here, the views of the uneducated and traditional is displayed in Mrs Ozobia. Despite having smart, well-educated daughters, she still wants them to do what she did, marry someone important to create stability in their lives, to uphold the patriarchal structures in the community as well as in the family. Her educated daughters, however, have become enlightened through their education to think differently and to be able to make other choices in life. They are, in opposition to their mother, modern African feminists who know their worth and “resist being spoken for”, like Minna Salami writes about (“A Historical Overview”). They are aware of the complexity of their culture but are involved in its development needs.

Relationships, Marriage and Motherhood

In the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, oppositions between the educated and the uneducated are clearly displayed. Even if education is portrayed as accompanied by a certain amount of wealth and class for the characters, a significant difference is shown between the female characters and their choices for marriage, motherhood, and family. In early parts of the novel, the protagonist Olanna regards her plans to move in with Odenigbo as the primary goal for their relationship is to “be closer to him” (41). She regards marriage as secondary, something for later in life. She also expresses some form of anxiety for marriage, how she fears it could diminish a relationship. She says that they are “too happy, precariously so, and she [wants] to guard that bond; she [fears] that marriage would flatten it to a prosaic partnership” (52). Olanna’s fear is here suggested to reflect her fear of becoming the same as her parents. However, her choice to live differently is shown in how she reflects and challenges the traditional view of relationships and marriage.

Olanna’s sister Kainene is portrayed with a more casual attitude to dating and relationships, both being aware of her attractiveness and how people compare her to her more “beautiful” twin (60). Olanna describes her disapproval of her sister’s past boyfriends and especially the fact that she “dated so many white men in England” (36). She always felt they were condescending and had that “familiar superiority of English people who thought they understood Africans better than Africans understood themselves” (36). But Kainene’s latest

boyfriend, Richard, is nothing like that. He is shy and “unimpressed” (36) by important people and shows genuine interest in Nigerian culture and politics. He is also shown to be genuinely interested in Kainene, and that is what she seems to realize first after some time together. When Richard tells her that he has left Susan, saying it “never [was] a proper relationship, really”, he leaves Kainene with “surprise on her face and ...was it puzzlement?” (70). She shows this by giving him a tight, tremulous hug, which he later thinks about often, as he “had the sensation of a wall crumbling” (70). This description of an intimate sign of affection suggests that her guard, her “wall” of reservation was finally crumbled down, as she has found true love after years of superficial, casual dating. Kainene showing real, deep affection for Richard is also shown by her writing him a love note, which he finds in his briefcase when he flies back from a wedding in England: “Is love this misguided need to have you beside me most of the time? Is love this safety I feel in our silences? Is it this belonging, this completeness?” (150). Kainene is portrayed as a somewhat closed-off person who does not open up easily. She normally shows this by mockingly comment others, as shown before, to keep her distance. When they first started dating, Richard always had a hard time guessing what she felt, but as shown here her “wall” of distance falls down as he implicitly tells her that this is a “proper relationship” (70).

Olanna is shown to respect her sister Kainene and her confidence and fearlessness (271), but they have drifted apart. She is more of a big sister to her cousin Arize instead, as explained above, and Olanna feels relaxed her company. Their different views, however, are shown when they talk about marriage, work and motherhood. Arize questions Olanna’s plans and claims that it is only educated women who can chose to live with their boyfriends and focus on their work first, instead of choosing marriage and children. She exclaims: "It is only women that know too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know Book wait too long, we will expire" (41). In this argument, she also explains that her friends all have married already. Olanna wants to convince her to focus on her sewing, but Arize continues: “Is it sewing that will give me a child? Even if I had managed to pass to go to school, I would still want a child now” (41). Here is another example of the opposition of the educated and the uneducated. Olanna have choices both for work and relationship, but Arize needs to grasp her future as wife and mother as soon as she can, because she does not see another future and cannot risk being without it.

When Olanna’s relationship comes to a crisis, as her lover Odenigbo has slept with a visiting village girl, it is to her female relatives in Kano she goes to get perspectives, not to her own

family: "...if there was a place she could think clearly, it was in Kano" (225). It is her cousin and aunt who give her comfort and advice, empowering her with confidence to leave Odenigbo's house after his infidelity to live on her own. As a modern, individualist and educated woman, Olanna here still shows how she does not reject all matters traditional, she also needs "her tribe", her group identity (Wenske 73) and shows how her informal training of respect towards the elders do exist. While her critique of her own parents is obvious, she is shown to respect the wisdom of her aunt: "You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man...your life belongs to you and you alone" (Adichie 227). Arize and her mother Ifeka, who had been furious at Odenigbo when Olanna told them, had still encouraged her to go back and live on, but taking control and choosing how (Adichie 227). Here, Adichie portrays a young, modern woman seeking advice from an older uneducated woman who still can resist patriarchy and have an opinion. She shows here how informal training as well as higher education can co-exist, just as Ebubedike's interviewees explained in her research (Ebubedike 77). This view is also suggested symbolic for a higher goal for Nigeria in Adichie's writings, as Wenske brings up about the dualities of traditional and modern (Wenske 73).

The neutral sisterhood between the twins experience another setback, when Olanna gets even to Odenigbo's infidelity by sleeping with Richard, her sister Kainene's boyfriend. It displays their differences in character and the gap that grows even greater between them. Olanna shows how the selfishness of the act had relieved her but left her with regret and sadness for betraying her sister, whereas Kainene shows very little and acts very controlled when Richard tells her: "So you have been lusting after my sister. How unoriginal" (243, 256). To Olanna, however, Kainene shows great anger, which at the same time displays everything that has estranged them during their adult years:

Why did you do it? ...You're the good one and the favorite and the beauty and the Africanist revolutionary who doesn't like white men, and you simply did not need to... So why did you? (254)

This paragraph suggests how the sisters always hold their heads high, with high standards and high knowledge. They know there is always a choice, another way forward. But when something really matters, they lose their heads in a way, and show thereby what it means to be human. Olanna shows this when she gets even at Odenigbo by sleeping with Richard, and Kainene when she loses her face and reveals all her well-kept inner angers towards Olanna. Adichie herself explained this, that she wanted to write about "the grittiness of being

human...about people who are fierce consumers of life...about what it means to be human” (“Authenticity”, 50-51).

Olanna, who had wanted to have a child with Odenigbo before the infidelity, surprised both herself and Odenigbo when she declared that they would keep Odenigbo’s baby girl and raise her together. Even though she knew an important decision like that should not be taken lightly, holding the baby, she had felt it was right: “She had felt a conscious serendipity, a sense that this may not have been planned but had become...what it was meant to be” (251). This part reveals Olanna’s choice to believe in fate, which suggests her belief in the more tribal supernatural expressions like religion, something beyond reason and as Wenske explains (84); “in spite of the best logic and education” (81). Here, Adichie’s view is displayed again, of a society where the modern and traditional can go hand in hand (Wenske 73). It also suggests that Olanna does not fear the choice to raise Odenigbo’s daughter because she has a confidence as a modern, educated woman to be able to learn and figure out whatever comes along.

Kainene never shows any desire to be a mother, but still acts like a mother when she supervises a refugee camp during the war. Adichie portrays her using her education and skills to build up a camp, to be in charge of the supplies and trading for food – but also ends up being responsible for many orphaned children at the camp.

Adichie later shows how Arize, the one woman in the novel portrayed with straight up motherhood plans, did not have time for more than a wedding and a pregnancy. Her plans and happiness unfortunately did not last long. While Olanna had escaped the Kano massacre in her Hausa ex-boyfriend’s sports car, dressed up like a Muslim woman, Arize’s whole family was killed, betrayed by their Hausa friend Abdulmalik. They became victims of the Igbo persecution when the Hausa killed numerous Igbo people, blaming them for the coup (147).

Education and Occupation

A clear difference between the women is shown in how they regard their plans and options for the future. It suggests how education could widen women’s perspectives in life, both to see more possibilities for them and to question prevailing cultural customs regarding women’s place in the Nigerian society. Whereas Olanna has had the privilege to go to secondary school and university and thereby more options have opened up for her, Arize has not and wants to grasp what is regarded the expected or the safest way for women her age in her culture and community; to get married and start a family. Olanna’s education has empowered her to make

her own decisions about her life, even though her mother still wants her to marry someone important like she did. As shown above, Arize is not portrayed to have the luxury of choosing and therefore follows the expected customs.

Kainene, having the same background as Olanna, chooses to use her “newly acquired degree” in one of her father’s businesses. Even though she continuously mocks him and his peers, she stays in the “gloss” of her parents’ lives (31, 34) and chooses to accept the house her father provided for her. However, Kainene also wants to prove to her father her value as a woman and as educated: “She was determined to make her father’s factories grow, to do better than he had done” (78). It is also suggested that Kainene strives to achieve more and be more successful than Olanna too, as she is continuously compared to her, portrayed as being the “ugly daughter” and “androgynous” (35, 60). Her differences compared to Olanna, both in personality and in opinion is also displayed. While Kainene is portrayed as strong, fearless and confident, these are qualities Olanna appears to lack herself (271). Even though Kainene is opinionated, she is not shown to be so revolutionary or political after all, like her parents. She enjoys the benefits of both her privileged social background and her education, resisting her parents’ views while staying in the same setting. Moffat Sebola describes in his article Adichie’s view, that African women’s liberation from cultural and patriarchal oppression, “is dependent on black women’s confrontation of and resistance to these practices” (Sebola 9). Kainene does just that, addresses patriarchy directly in her choice and place of occupation.

As we see here, Adichie’s characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* balance between being African or Western, tribal or modern, as Wenske explains in her article. Olanna and Odenigbo flourish in being an African “elite” (78), being educated and westernized, but they still want to preserve their culture. Wenske brings up how the usage of language is a significant marker for this. English is regarded the superior language of the educated, while Igbo (or any other indigenous language of Nigeria) is the tribal language of the non-educated. Thus, language is used to show your social class and therefore also your class-mobility, as it has to do with education and your ability to master a new language. The characters in Adichie’s novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* use English as an official language and Igbo when they are more personal. Here, one can note the ambivalence towards the British colonial heritage, as language is one of the key points in the education brought to them by the colonizer. Wenske further argues that by continuing to speak Igbo, the characters break down “the undesirable effects of colonialism” (78). This way they show the good things about both African and Western

elements, demonstrating the importance of Igbo and tradition, even though English is shown to be a marker of education, class and material success.

Adichie also shows another interesting connection between language and education. In Kano, in the north, there are more ethnic groups than just Igbo, like the Yoruba and the Hausa, and they speak their own languages. What is remarkable in this setting is that Arize, along with her peers, speak the other languages too, as they have had this “informal” educational training growing up alongside the other ethnic groups, that made them superior to the likes of Olanna and Kainene in that sense. The training Arize had received from a young age also saved them from a dangerous situation after the first coup, in which the Igbo people are blamed and harassed in the streets of Lagos:

Somebody from the crowd called out, ‘We are counting the Igbo people. *Oya*, come and identify yourself. You are Igbo?’ Arize muttered under her breath, ‘*I kwana okwu*’, as if Olanna was thinking of saying anything, and then shook her head and started to speak fluent, loud Yoruba, all the while casually turning so they could go back the way they had come. The crowd lost interest in them (Adichie, *Half*, 132).

This incident alerted Olanna, both in how easy it had been to deny being Igbo, but also as she was used to Nsukka, the university town in which people like herself are portrayed to be protected from the “real” world: “She did not know that things had come to this; In Nsukka, life was insular and the news was unreal, functioning only as fodder for the evening talk” (133). This quote suggests that it is easy to have ideals and opinions among like-minded, but more difficult when push comes to shove. In Kano, Olanna is shocked by the world outside Nsukka, but Arize, who is used to differences between ethnic groups is now, when the coups happen, eventually brutally affected by their differences. Gulick suggests in her article that Adichie here blames the academics of Nsukka, like Odenigbo and Olanna, for the crisis in Nigeria that eventually led to the Biafran War (Gulick 44). She demonstrates this in describing how “the evening talk” sessions at Odenigbo’s house brought up above are “clubby, repetitive, and male dominated” and shows how “his progressive politics are at odds with the condescending paternalism with which he views poor and rural Nigerians...whose deep distrust of ‘modernity’ ...[has] disastrous consequences” (Gulick 43).

War Time – Change

Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, takes place before and during the Nigerian civil war, the Biafran War, in the late 1960s. The military coups eventually led to the domestic war, the Biafran war, when the Igbo claimed independence from Nigeria. In any large conflict, people need to question the current conditions and views to live on and shape their future lives. This is a time when the female characters need to reconsider their place or responsibility in the society, which affects their choices for occupation, marriage and motherhood.

When the Igbo are forced to leave Nsukka, Olanna evacuates with Odenigbo and their child to Abba, Odenigbo's home village. Both are reluctant to leaving, but as their choices were taking refuge or being killed, there was only one option. Olanna's reluctance to living close to Odenigbo's mother is because of her past arguments with 'Mama'; her lack of acceptance that her son had been misled by a "useless" university woman, that "she [had] used her witchcraft to hold him" (97). But as Olanna had felt so welcomed by the villagers, and even by Odenigbo's mother, she accepts these new circumstances, and Olanna and 'Mama' are "back to being civil" towards one another (184). As shown, the seriousness of the war time is suggested to heal Olanna's wounds of Mama's past abuse. Also, 'Mama's' warmer welcome could be explained in how Olanna has proven not only to be a "useless university woman" (97) but also a good mother to her son's daughter. Abba describes this in his article as an example of post-war reconciliation between the different people of Nigeria: "Adichie crafts her narrative as a critical tool in the forging of new knowledge capital that is necessary if people of diverse classes and ethnic configurations are to live together in a multi-ethnic space" (Abba 5), suggesting Adichie's goal for the future of Nigeria. Olanna's choice to become a mother to Odenigbo's child represents reconciliation for Mama, but it also displays her confidence and empowerment as a modern, educated woman. This argument is in line with Margaret Ebubedike's, that education is the tool for "empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence" and that educated women are provided with "multiple informed life choices that which [allow] them to live lives that they have cause to value" (Ebubedike 91, 72).

As Wenske brings up, the fiction of both Adichie and her predecessor Achebe deal with the current conflicts of the time of "their parents in their youth" (Wenske 72), colonialism for Achebe and the Biafran war for Adichie, and they were both significantly "identity-shaping" for Nigeria and her inhabitants (72). This "identity-shaping" on an individual level is shown in shown in Olanna's change of opinion regarding marriage:

It had made sense to her, the decision not to marry, the need to preserve what they had by wrapping it in a shawl of difference. But the old framework was gone now that Arize and Aunt Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi would always be frozen faces in her album. Now that bullets were falling in Nsukka (187).

This passage was followed by her 'yes' to Odenigbo and here Adichie shows how the massacres and the new conditions of the war had changed Olanna. Having lost family members, home, occupation and future plans, she needs to find a new identity in this new setting that is her life and marriage now makes sense. Adichie writes about it herself in the article "African Authenticity and the Biafran Experience":

When you are deprived of the comforts of the life you know...how does it change your relationship, your sense of self, your idea of self-confidence, your relationship with the people you love? (Adichie, "Authenticity", 51).

As the war goes on, Olanna not only misses the things she used to do and take for granted in her Nsukka life, but she is also shown to become more concerned with home and family, with her baby's health and cleanliness, and that her child would "have the right children to play with" (186). After some air raids, Olanna is also portrayed as afraid, especially when Odenigbo was not at home (276). After a while, however, she comes to terms with the fact that this is their life now and it was "the very sense of being inconsequential that pushed her from extreme fear to extreme fury". She had to matter" (280). She starts to teach children, stops being afraid, tries to live in the now and starts to make things herself, like soap and cake (291, 280, 283). The character Olanna here shows how she, an educated woman, is confident and can change, in line with Williams' descriptions of education as a means of self-growth and independence (Williams 91, 95).

Adichie also portrays some changes that Kainene goes through following the Biafran independence. When Port Harcourt had been bombed, she had moved to Orlu and had become in charge of a refugee camp (343). Though she has kept her sturdy confidence intact, having ideas for making a difference, like growing food, educating the refugees and creating opportunities for income (318, 319), she has become humbler. The environment of the camp, with dying and starving people, is shown to have changed her:

'Grandpapa used to say, about difficulties he had gone through, "It did not kill me, it made me knowledgeable" ...

'I remember.'

'There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable', Kainene said.

There was a pause. Inside Olanna, something calcified leaped to life.

'Do you know what I mean?' Kainene asked.

'Yes' (347).

By this passage we learn how Olanna has been forgiven by her sister.

Kainene is also shown to have become more concerned with politics and nationalism through the course of war. When a sick, pregnant woman in the refugee camp meets Dr Inyang, from one of the minority tribes, spits her in the face and calls her a saboteur, Kainene smacks her and shouts: "'We are all Biafrans! Anyincha bu Biafra!' Kainene said. 'Do you understand me? We are all Biafrans!'" (320). Kainene here gets furious at the disrespectful act, both because she works so hard with the refugee camp, for all the people there, but also because the war is shown to have made her more patriotic and involved in the matters of this national crisis.

In a way, the sisters are shown to be alike after all, they want to hold their heads high but are still not "choosing misery" in this short life because of "[one] single act" (245), like in the example of the infidelities or because of the war. Their respective personalities are also shown to grow by time and because of the war. They choose the life they want to live, and they want to show their worth, even at dark times.

To sum up, their respective cultural and social background affects the characters, as it is a part of the informal training they have received from a young age, just as Margaret Ebubedike describes in her article (Ebubedike 76). But the differences between them lie in the life choices they make. The twins' mother and their cousin, both without a formal training, make traditional choices regarding marriage and motherhood and they do not consider an occupation that would be their main income but instead rely on a husband to provide for them and their family. The educated twins, however, are modern African feminists, like the aspiration of the modern African woman in Adichie's writings about Feminism. They are open-minded and make progressive and confident choices, knowing their worth and capacity but also their responsibility as Nigerians.

4) Conclusion

This essay has examined the possibilities and choices in the portrayal of the female characters of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. By demonstrating the differences in how the women lead their lives regarding occupation, relationships and motherhood, this essay suggests the importance of education for these choices. As the novel in question is set before and during the Biafran War', at the end of the 1960s, this essay has also suggested what challenges the women experienced during this time and what changes they went through.

My arguments have involved the differences between the women's choices in relation to educational as well as social and cultural background. By contrasting the two sisters, Olanna and Kainene, with the same privileged upbringing in Lagos, to their cousin, Arize in Kano, who had lacked most of the things the sisters took for granted, this essay has demonstrated the significance of education for the women's choices regarding occupation, relationships, and motherhood. Arize herself had been denied a proper education due to differences between the ethnic groups in the north, but her father had been involved in the plans to build and start their own school, an Igbo Elementary school, for the future of children in the area.

This essay's analysis has shown how the educated women in the novel are given more possibilities and are also willing to work for them, to give back to the community. While Olanna is portrayed as more politically devoted than her sister to begin with, Kainene seems more involved as war had become a reality. However, they are shown not to plan too much, and to live more in the now, which compared to their cousin Arize, is something she cannot. Arize is portrayed to plan for her future, to become married and have a child, as she needs to grasp her few options while she can. However, she is not shown to be so alerted by the politics of the different ethnic groups. She appears to be used to it, having lived side by side with the Hausa and Yoruba all her life. Proposedly, that offers an explanation to how she and her fellow Igbo do not see the persecutions and domestic war coming. As life progresses, the twins, however, are shown to be sane, questioning and prudent, even if the atrocity of the war humbles them.

Theories of several critics have been closely examined to back my claims about education and culture and to form a context around the female characters of Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. As shown, differences between the women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are displayed in their life choices, and education is significant for the choices they make in different times and circumstances. Adichie's own fiction and articles have been given examples from, as well

as feminist readings and an overview to African feminism, to clarify Adichie's own thoughts and opinions. Adichie's clear feminist position is revealed in how she has portrayed her characters in relation to each other. Many women in the novel are depicted as opinionated, but the educated women are also modern and open-minded, while the uneducated ones are more tied to the norms of their traditional culture. Both Margaret Ebubedike and Stella B Williams described education in their articles as a means of empowerment and development, both for the individual and the society, and this has also been proved by my analysis. The main characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are portrayed as well educated, self-confident and responsible citizens, but also as human, developing and patriotic characters. These characteristics have also been brought up in the previous readings from different angles, and they have been proved to be highly symbolic of Adichie's suggested vision for the future of Nigeria.

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