

Satirized Feminism in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*

by

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Abstract

The exploration of the several pictures of male domination in society from which the woman has to be liberated abides as the hallmark of feminist writing. Each of the identifiable shades of feminism reveals the writer's orientation cum inclination to the cause of the woman in the march towards what is viewed as obligatory emancipation. There are suggestions that most radical feminists find creative writing as a veritable medium for reacting to the unpalatable experiences they have had. For this reason, anti-feminist writers reluctantly see reason with this revolutionary enterprise and easily latch on to pitfalls in such writings. To this extent, certain works have been imposed with gender proclivity by both feminists and their detractors, especially in contexts where gender discourse translates into some kind of battlefield. However, writers who consider such conflagrations as a cloud over other preferred themes tread the path of neutrality or moderation. It is supposed that Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* was made to project certain mediation in the face of the feminist charge against *Things Fall Apart*. Resultantly, in her novels which came after *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Adichie found more compelling themes than the subjugation of women. Consequently, the portrayal of her female characters, in perceivable satire, seems inclined to negotiating the charges against men, as profusely portrayed in her first novel, for the often pinpointed woes of women in society. Consequently, this work examines how the view of satirized feminism is projected in *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*. The consciousness of imperative mediation comes into focus as it becomes manifest in the logic of Adichie's narratology.

Introduction

Globally, the urgency of instituting the poetics of humanism has found easy eloquence in the apparent disparity in the status of men and women in many spheres of life. Indeed, what is known as the patrilineal order within the African society is also a global phenomenon, applying in distinct measures from one culture to the other. Feminists suppose that every (wo)man ought to become part of the struggle for the liberation of womanity. They also suppose that even men who philosophize the equality of (hu)manity are bound under their moral obligation to reject the domination of one sex by the other. However, while the deeper scrutiny of the disproportions against women pertinently generates the rage which feminism has borne, it is the simplicity in gauging the often indicted inequalities that may have generated more strife than is rational for humanist thinkers. Therefore, a demand is placed on the possibilities of mediation considering that sex has become a major determinant of the polarization of writers on the feminist question.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* came with a big bang on the patriarchal question. Nonetheless, the two succeeding novels, *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, have implicated a profuse characterization of women not exactly as being oppressed by man but indeed often browbeaten by their own self delusion. On their merit, these works are infused with purposive literary ingredients, justifying the ingenuity of a master (mistress) storyteller for which Achebe attests, on the front cover of *Half of A Yellow Sun*, that Adichie came as a writer that was fully made. It is perhaps in riding at this echelon that the consciousness of the key conflicts of African literary engagement is ostensibly implicated in the expediency which precipitates the discourse of her satiric intentions in works easily adjudged to be feminist. There are visible suggestions that the polarization of critics as well as creative writers on the basis of gender is arraigned with a purposed satire in the portrayal of the characters in both novels of Adichie under study here.

Abrams and Harpham recognize the adoption of formal and informal satires in works of literature, and they proceed in explicating variants of these two major classifications of satire whose brands are associated with their practitioners' identity – Juvenalian satire by Juvenel, Mennipean satire by Mennipus, Horatian satire by Horace and Varronian satire by Varro (352-355). These are Roman and Greek philosophers who adopted the satiric mode in projecting their viewpoints, or in other contexts, by rejecting certain perceived aberrations which had assumed the status of conventional practices in their societies. In validating such goals of literary engagement among these classics, Cuddon draws his instances of satiric intentions from the works of Ben Johnson, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. Cuddon emphasizes that “the satirist is a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, and ideals; of moral and aesthetic values” (632). Therefore, in engaging satire in this discussion, it is imperative to appraise how Adichie's themes convey the deprecation of cultural ideals as well as the morality they emphasize.

The Juvenalian satire is seen in Adichie's portrayal of delusion, employed to full effect in the depiction of the female characters in *Americanah*. Also, soon after the story begins in *Half of A Yellow Sun*, the gathering of intellectuals at Odenigbo's residence projects how the Mennipean satire evokes the ridiculous attitudes of these characters. Both novels, *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* are replete with the derisive hypocrisy which is known of the Horatian satire. Again, Abram and Harpham identify with satires as "an accidental element" (353) within other thematic preoccupations. Visibly, the adoption of satire is effectual in these two novels, providing the required comic relief within the exploration of the Nigeria-Biafra War in *Half of A Yellow Sun* and the engagement with class trepidations and racist battles in *Americanah*. But most intuitively, they both evoke the appraisal of modes of female writing that mediate the fumes of gender ardor within the corpus of African feminism(s).

Perspectives which easily submerge the efforts of African feminist writers in their quest for fulfillment lean on the reasoning that what is often associated with gender writing is as alien to Africa as other colonial intrusions. It is in this regard that attempts have been made to generate a platform for adopting an African understudy to feminism. Mogu relates to 'womanism' as such alternate feminism as is the "panacea to not only, literary, but socio-political problems in the society" (20). While the suggestions that womanism now sounds more attuned to the African culture become strong, Mogu argues that feminist criticisms gained ascendancy as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker began to write in reaction to such Black male writers as Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Langston Hughes. Mogu regards this as "the apex of Black literary endeavour in the United States" (14). All the same, Mogu observes that the character Mrs. Thomas in *Native Son* is not altogether a "deflated specie" (104). He goes on to posit that feminism "is consequent upon the preponderance of criticisms by feminists in America which boil down to the issue of improper and negative depictions of Black women by male writers" (130). Similarly, this applies to the conceptualization of African feminism, represented in Flora Nwapa's submission that, "there have been female portraits of sorts presented by men from their own point of view, leading one to conclude that there is a difference between the African male writer and his female counterpart" (528).

But, Ama Ata Aidoo cites critics beyond the shores of Africa who have paid less tribute to female African writing. These are Tilman Riemenschneider, Gerald Moore and Ian McEwan. It is in recollecting McEwan's view of these writers as "female-scribblers" (515) that Aidoo's appraisal is substantiated. Ultimately, Aidoo is visibly inclined to coercing finesse in female African writing by insisting that the experiences of the female African writers do not entirely detract from those of their male counterparts. Aidoo is perhaps ironical in eliciting the constraints which the woman as a creative writer might encounter. The instance given is that of Buchi Emecheta, "who bore five children and struggled to raise them single-handed in a decidedly hostile milieu, and in the years between 1972 and 1984 managed to publish nine novels?" (518) While insisting that quality cannot be reneged, Aidoo poignantly identifies how damaging, in different measures and cloaks, critical works could be on feminist writings. Feminist critics are often accosted with the measure of attention paid to the quality of a writer's artistry. Ann Dobbie's view is captured here:

Whereas feminist critics in general have sometimes been criticized for having too little to say about the quality of literary texts, those concerned with the issues of power and economics have been especially chided for their lack of attention to questions of artistic quality. (117)

These arguments may account for Adichie's multi-dimensional derivations of satire in the novels under investigation. Nonetheless, it is imperative to ascertain how deliberate the employment of satire is in dousing this smoldering conflagration, or whether they are intended to sustain the virtue of humanism and realism in her craft. In recognizing how satire is employed in correcting social vices, Nwachukwu-Agbada highlights Achebe's adroit and poignant satire on Okonkwo's masculinity as some kind of gender irony:

Achebe does not endorse Okonkwo's morbid desire to be thoroughly masculine. This is probably why he often puts him in ironical situations. The battle he relentlessly mounts on the feminine portion of his psyche is a futile one because he soon commits the 'female ochu'. (79-96)

The fact that Adichie patronizes Achebe's cultural inquisition gives warrant to the conjecture that the heat of the feminist nudge might as well become aberrant with her desire to build upon and sustain the acceptance of the uniqueness of traditional Igbo values. Simply, one locates how the several shades of irony that exude in the texts become analogous to the artistic density employed as romantic irony. Gary Handwerk views such craft as a model construction of literary history that comes "retrospectively and polemically" (206). There are logical suggestions that certain feminist ideals are upturned in such seeming modesty that the intention sounds quite covert.

Adorable Manhood Versus Despicable (Wo)manity

There are varying views of the goodness of the man in Adichie's portraiture. The inclination to the sensuous picture of man gives the indication that Adichie overthrows all shades of feminist impressionism. With the rage against manhood which *Purple Hibiscus* brewed, it may give warrant to the conjecture that the same feminist charge resonates in all her novels. This impinges stringently on the perspective of satire in these latter novels under study. Contrary to known feminist precepts, there is a prevalent portraiture of man as the desirable other. The men are made to reveal the kind of sex appeal for which women salivate and desire to possess. Perhaps, Adichie tends to invoke the spirit with which Achebe had moulded an Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, the seven-year unbeaten wrestling champion from Umuofia to Mbaino – "Every nerve and every muscle stood out, on their arms, on their backs and their thighs ... When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs" (3). In *Half of A Yellow Sun*, Ugwu's psyche lets out an invoking depiction at the dawn of his encounter with Odenigbo, which notably, Adichie, somewhat inadvertently, bestows on him: "His walk was brisk, energetic, and he looked like Ezeagu, the man who held the wrestling record in Ugwu's village" (7).

Also, Olanna's consciousness, very much Adichie's, sounds emphatic in the sensuous carriage bequeathed upon Odenigbo, like other male characters. The narrative voice says: "She watched Odenigbo walk across the veranda, aggressive confidence in his strides. Her man. Sometimes when she looked at him she felt gripped by proud possession" (186). Even the fact of Ojukwu's posture is obvious in this regard: "Ojukwu came downstairs...Everything about him sparkled, his groomed beard, his watch, his wide shoulders" (170). Adichie also identifies with Ojukwu's tone in the presentation of the speech declaring the sovereign state of Biafra. The narrative voice in *Half of A Yellow Sun* says: "Ojukwu's voice was unmistakable; it was vibrantly male, charismatic, smooth" (161). While it may not have been intended to disparage the feminist cause, it simply recollects a satire on the challenges against Achebe's portraiture of Okonkwo, especially the indictment for what is variously regarded as exaggerated manliness against repressed womanism.

The reversal of gender roles from *Purple Hibiscus* to *Americanah* are obvious in the judgments Ifemelu passes on her mother and Pastor Ibinabo here: "Her mother was a kinder and simpler person, but like Sister Ibinabo, she was a person who denied that things were as they were. A person who had to spread the cloak of religion over her own petty desires..." (AM: 50). Ironic also is the uncommon kind of child abuse which Ifemelu expresses, "HER MOTHER PULLED her ear, an almost-gentle tug, as though reluctant to cause real pain. She had done that since Ifemelu was a child" (AM: 51). As has to be noted, the uppercase here is not accidental, but lucid in portraying certain despicable acts by women.

The lucid pictures of hypocrisy severally indict the anti-Christian attitude which Ifemelu's mother is known to exhibit. In contrast to the hypocritical father depicted in *Purple Hibiscus*, there is in *Americanah* the hypocrisy of the mother against an erring and judgmental daughter (AM: 52-53). With the incident of Uju's pregnancy, she confesses to her previous experience for which she had to commit abortion. This instigates the emphasis on the consequences of illicit sexual engagement, especially for the girl. Here, Ifemelu's father appears to be more disturbed with Uju's plan for her pregnancy than the man with whom the act was done "Well, I cannot ask about the man's intentions," he said finally to Auntie Uju. "So I should ask what your own intentions are" (AM: 83). In affirming that the woman ought to be more cautious and articulate in life's affairs, there is a suggestion that the blame for the woes of the woman is rather heaped on nature than the man. In such circumstance, the actions of the woman appear to strip her of virtue.

The callousness of the woman is portrayed in Odenigbo's mother. Adichie employs a twist, as the woman turns the allegation of witchcraft on Olanna: "'They say you did not suck your mother's breasts.' Master's mother turned to look at Olanna. 'Please go back and tell those who sent you that you did not find my son. Tell your fellow witches that you did not see him'" (HOYS: 96-97). The act that Odenigbo's mother exhibits here aligns with certain myths which reveal Ugwu's acquaintance with the Igbo oral tradition:

Ugwu stopped. He knew many stories of people who had used medicine from the *dibia*: the childless first wife who tied up the second wife's womb, the woman who made a neighbour's prosperous son go mad, the man who killed his brother because of a land quarrel. Perhaps, Master's mother would tie up Olanna's womb or cripple her or, most frightening of all kill her. (HOYS: 98)

Odenigbo's mother chooses another path to accomplishing her designs which was altogether despicable. She drugged her son, Odenigbo and made him impregnate the girl she herself had chosen to take Olanna's place. All these may have informed Ugwu's affirmation that he "had never heard Master speak about his mother" (HOYS: 85).

In *Americanah*, Adichie presents visible pictures of how women antagonize their fellow women. The female relatives of Uju's benefactor (the General) were the ones that dispossessed her of all that was bequeathed to her after the General died. Again, Kosi's instance with her house girl reveals the kind of molestation which is particularly gruesome. Such callousness is eloquent in her tone: "Can you believe the nonsense, darling? She came here with condoms and she actually opened her mouth to say that rubbish. Can you believe it" (AM: 34). Often too, where these intemperate actions are taken by women, it is the parallel placement of the response by the man that gives a clue to how unacceptable it is. Usually, the presentation of the sharp contrast is often thrust upon the audience so as to draw their verdict on the act. Here, it is Obinze's treatment of the matter that gives a picture of humanism and indeed re-presents acceptable moderation: "Her former employer raped her and she decided to protect herself this time" (AM: 34). In the same vein, the despicable roles of women as secretaries, house girls, babysitters and even bank-ladies are also portrayed here:

Lagos could do this to a woman married to a young and wealthy man; he knew how easy it was to slip into paranoia about housegirls, about secretaries, about Lagos girls, those sophisticated monsters of glamour who swallowed husbands whole...a female banker who had been given a target deposit amount, an easy exchange. (AM: 34)

The hairdressers at the salon whom Uju patronizes are seen as ass-licking servants and Ifemelu sees them in this light: "Those girls, I was waiting for them to bring out their hands and beg you to shit so they could worship that too" (AM: 77). Uju's own confirmation of ass-licking, in her relationship with the General, is even more pejorative:

You know we live in an ass-licking economy. The biggest problem in this country is not corruption. The problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won't lick anybody's ass, or they don't know which ass to lick or they don't even know how to lick an ass. I'm lucky to be licking the right ass. (AM: 77)

The superfluity of women's emotions is presented in a poetic manner, and often gathered in what Wordsworth had regarded as a moment of tranquility. Adichie recalls how the pet name, 'Ceiling', became Ifemelu's choice for Obinze.

The first time she let him take off her bra, she lay on her back moaning softly, her fingers splayed on his head, and afterwards she said, "My eyes were open but I did not see the ceiling...She began to call what they did together ceiling... *I'm longing for ceiling*, she once wrote on his geography notebook". (AM: 20)

'Ceiling' became a regular reminder to Ifemelu of that passionate sexual experience with Obinze. Although Obinze had seen this as genuine and sincere love, Adichie's presentations of the other (a)moral affairs that Ifemelu got entangled with did not reveal any change in this despicable exhaustion of passions, indeed not particularly of love, but some kind of sentimental delusion. In the relationship with Curt, Adichie is particularly derisive in making Curt emphasize about the meeting with Ifemelu, "it was love at first laugh" (AM: 191). Adichie's view of the consequences of intimacy and sex comes again in Uju's innermost feeling: "Aunty Uju, who thought of sex as something a woman gave a man at a loss to herself" (AM: 288). Adichie's narrative voice sounds emphatic in justifying the indictment of nature for the plight of women. Here, Obinze's mother observes: "Nature is unfair to women. An act is done by two people but if there are any consequences, one person carries it alone" (AM: 72). Such observation by a woman neither brings a charge against men for their shortcomings nor does it attempt to wish away the fact that the virtuousness of the woman is required as she conducts the affairs of her relationship with the men.

Caricaturing the Female Image

In satirizing the image of woman in *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, Adichie plunges into some measures of caricature. Yet, they are made to align with the view of 'colonial mentality' as a suffusing subject matter. The Black woman's hair palaver which resonates in *Americanah* appears to have sprung cursorily in *Half of A Yellow Sun*. The instance here gives this indication: "...and then the wind blew the woman's wig off her head. She was bald. They used hot combs to straighten their hair... because they wanted to look like white people (HOYS: 19). The duality of the consequence on the baldness, resulting from the desire for unwholesome imitation, is glaring. There is another instance of mimicking the city women. As a pattern in seeking the attention of men for relationships, even among the truly village girls. This is depicted in Nmesinachi who is said to shave and irregularly pencil her eyelid. And, Arize who is desperate to marry: "I want a husband today and tomorrow, oh! My mates have all left me and gone to husbands' houses" (HOYS: 41).

At another level of mimicking the White liberationist struggle, Miss Adebayo is pictured in lacking the finesse which was befitting of her companions in Nsukka: “her unintellectual ways and her too pretty face and her mimicking-the-oppressor English accent” (HOYS: 51). Yet, there are suggestions that such actions could rather be viewed as being intemperate. Again, the crude and unlearned disposition of the old woman at the airport, whose son was returning from study overseas, comes with seething caricature. She had complained about the jealousy of the other women whose children possessed empty brains (HOYS: 28). Also remarkable is the old woman’s exclamation at the landing plane which she had expected to stop abruptly. It was for this reason she “muttered something about foolish people who could not build planes well” (HOYS: 28).

And then in *Americanah*, Adichie’s portrayal of the hair braiders supposes that they could have done better in their native countries than in the US where their trade sounds loathsome. And these braiders discover almost belatedly that they ought to return to their homes to be able to get married. Much of the caricature in *Americanah* pertain to the apparent discontentment with the oversea adventure, perhaps an indictment on feminism and all its tenets and the Western fervor which swallows foreign ideals hook, line and sinker. These and other aberrations appear in *Americanah* as the uneventful scenes that find their way into the fantasy in American artistic works – “You can’t even read American fiction to get a sense of how actual life is lived these days. You read American fiction to learn about dysfunctional white folk doing things that are weird to white folks” (AM: 336). In contrast, Aisha, the Senegalese hair braider, is made to commend the development of the home video business from Nigeria here: “Nigeria film very good now” (AM: 14). Quite intentionally, this stands against Ifemelu’s own appraisal of her own people’s artistry, “Ifemelu thought little of Nollywood films, with their exaggerated histrionics and their improbable plots” (AM: 14).

It is not accidental that Adichie chooses these female characters in representing the class of people who watch and analyze the artistic status of Nollywood movies. Glaringly, the imitation of the ideals of the West which implicates feminism comes again here:

Then, she reached forward and pushed the magazine into the pouch in front of her and said, with a slight sniff, that it was absurd how women’s magazines focused image of small-boned, small-breasted women on the rest of the multi-boned, multi-ethnic world of women to emulate. (AM: 178)

Adichie makes impressionistic caricature of the kind of things that fascinate women. Uju is exhilarated about the General whom she regards as ‘Oga’: “Oga is happy...to know that he can still score a goal at his age, old man like him” (AM: 84). Ironically, the General’s age is rather presented as a complement to other abhorring observations that had gone before: “I must be mad. He has a beer belly and Dracula teeth and a wife and children and he’s old” (AM: 83).

Even at the end of the narrative where it appears that Adichie presents Kosi (Obinze's wife) as a mature woman, there is a seeming travesty on what Adimorah-Ezeigbo submits as snail-sense feminism, *ire ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu* (the caution and precision with which a snail treads along the thorny path). The view comes in a flashback here:

He hung up and thought about the day their baby, slippery, curly haired Buchi, was born at the Woodland Hospital in Houston, how Kosi had turned to him while he was still fiddling with his latex gloves and said, with something like apology, Darling, we will have a boy next time" He had recoiled. He realized then that she did not know him. (AM: 458)

It is through Obinze's reaction that Adichie's caricature reveals the utter rejection of this tricksterish brand of feminist pursuit which began to effuse in Kosi. In retrospection to their days of courtship, the hints about Kosi's cunning disposition are further divulged – "Then she told him that her relatives were asking what his intentions were. 'They just keep asking,' she said and stressed the 'they' to exclude herself from the marriage clamour"(459-460). There is a sudden acquaintance with such persistent deceit that wells up again in Obinze's detection that Kosi had all the while been aware of his emotional state from the point that he had innocently informed her (his own wife, Kosi) of Ifemelu's arrival from the US. Here, Kosi reveals the gravity of her petulance:

You have a responsibility to that child downstairs! What you do today can ruin her life and make her damaged until the day she dies! And all because your old girlfriend came back from America? Because you have had acrobatic sex that reminded you of your time in the university. (464)

Nonetheless, it is not in doubt that in these circumstances, Kosi's trickery obfuscates her real intentions. For instance, she does not, as always, project her own discontentment in that context, but presents Buchi's plight. Like Kosi, Adichie's caricature of her female characters engraves Aristotle's compelling view of the character as being consistently consistent or "consistently inconsistent" (28).

The view of enslavement, in the African woman's predicament as sex worker, is seen from Odenigbo's perspective, exemplifying the ends which the White man is said to seek here: "You know the Europeans took out the insides of an African woman and then stuffed and exhibited her all over Europe" (HOYS: 108). Even the white woman, Susan, presents this picture of expatriate sexual relationship with scathing bitterness, what Adichie presents as "comic caricature" (HOYS: 236), is elaborated thus: "But this was expatriate life. All they did, as far as she was concerned, was have sex with one another's wives and husbands, illicit coupling (HOYS: 237).

Nonetheless, the twist which sounds affectively ironical to the woman is that Richard had neither a marriage relationship with Susan nor indeed any conjugal intentions in the future, in spite of all her attempts at patronizing him. Adichie's narrative voice says, "He had been in Nigeria for a few months when Susan asked if he would like to move in with her, since her house in Ikoyi was large" (HOYS: 56).

Ifemelu's blog enterprise is seen as a form of inclination to gossip which comes with joblessness:

so that she began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people's stories for something she could use. Sometimes making fragile links to race. Sometimes not believing herself. The more she wrote, the less sure she became". (AM: 5)

It is Ifemelu whose confession here reveals Adichie's caricature of women, a vehement indictment.

Subverting the 'What a man can do...' myth

The myth: 'What a man can do, a woman can do better', has always called attention to the physiology and physiognomy of the woman. Whether advertently or otherwise, Adichie appears to have portrayed some of the women who in their inclination to upholding this myth have been enmeshed in such complex form of contradiction as subverts it. In *Half of A Yellow Sun*, Miss Adebayo's attitude gives the early indication of Adichie's consciousness of the 'What a man can do...' myth, for which she is severally berated. Much of these are seen in the manner of her affront with Odenigbo. Consequently, Ugwu is made to reject Miss Adebayo's offer of a lift, from the market back home, because he did not like the measure of her female assertiveness:

...but he thanked her and said he still had many things left to buy and would take a taxi, although he had finished shopping. He did not want to ride in her car, did not like how her voice rose above master's in the living room, challenging and arguing. (HOYS: 19)

Kainene's interest in managing the father's business stands as another inkling of Adichie's consciousness of this myth. Kainene is pictured as being "determined to make her father's factories grow, to do better than he had done. In the evenings, visitors – company people negotiating deals, government people negotiating bribes, factory people negotiating jobs..." (HOYS: 78). Here, the ironical outcome of her managerial success is apparent in bribery and nepotism which become the trigger to her own enterprise. Other despicable attitudes effuse in her affair with the expatriate, Richard. And, Kainene's smoking habit (HOYS: 57) sounds unacceptable because it makes her look particularly like the mistresses of politicians.

There are repeated scenes of her smoking spree: “She inhaled and exhaled. Silver ashes swirled down to the floor” (HOYS: 58). While Adichie is not blatant about the man-woman contest, Kainene’s portrayal is very suggestive of the consciousness in this regard.

This myth ironically comes into effect in the pictures of women outdoing men, presented as (alter)native wooing. The desire of women to go chasing after men, and to take care of them, in somewhat superintending attitudes, abound in the two texts. On the other hand, the men appear to rebuff or disregard such unconventional piety. Olanna declares here: “I’m moving to Nsukka, she said” (HOYS: 44). This journey was to meet her fiancé, Odenigbo. It is ironic however that her arrival seemed not to have made much meaning to Odenigbo. The narrative voice observes that, “Olanna moved to Nsukka on a windy Saturday, and the next day Odenigbo left for a mathematics conference in Ibadan” (HOYS: 47). Olanna’s rush to Odenigbo’s house and the latter’s journey to the conference without any delay at all, are all suggestive it is the woman that ‘chases’ and ‘craves’, a rather upturned order.

In another context, Kainene arranges to meet with Richard at Zobis Hotel suite which belonged to her father. Ifemelu is pictured in her move to Blaine’s house to begin a reconciliation after their quarrel. In spite of the fact that the latter did not have any such consideration in their affair, it detracts from the Igbo culture in which it is the man that goes back to the home of his bride to seek peace in the event of a marital squabble. It is glaring that in *Americanah*, Ifemelu’s kind of conduct does not seem agreeable to the writer’s expectation for the woman. This is glaring here: “FOR NINE DAYS, Blaine did not take her calls. Finally, he answered the phone, his voice muffled. ‘Can I come this weekend so that we can cook coconut rice? I’ll do the cooking’” (AM: 349). Blaine’s bluff, like the entire derogation that the racial matter recollects, is seen to come into effect only with the compliance of the migrants. Adichie’s themes sound religiously sermonizing, with the very call on the woman to attain some kind of sanctification and proper repositioning. It is the men that are moulded to elicit the writer’s objective in the reverse order.

The game of trading proverbs between Ifemelu and Obinze incriminates Adichie’s inclination to subverting the ‘what a man can do myth’. Helen Chukwuma observes, “Men as a rule are more proverbious than women: in part because they are more concerned with situations and occasions that call for proverb use such as the matters of governance, legal transactions...” (212). The matters detected in this excerpt are those for which the feminist cry has always come, much against traditional entrenchments. With Ifemelu’s portraiture in *Americanah*, the women are rather indicted for contravening certain traditional values that are known to be the pattern within Adichie’s Igbo nativity.

In the context of the novel *Americanah*, Ifemelu who had initiated a proverb contest, believing in her own competence, discovers that Obinze could say more than the very common proverbs which she had begun with – “A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing” (AM: 61). She is even seen to confuse the figure, frog for toad. Obinze prongs deeper with the uncommon proverbs for which Ifemelu retorts in bewilderment, “How do you know all that’ she asked, impressed...many guys won’t even speak Igbo, not to mention knowing proverbs” (AM: 62). And Adichie’s narrative voice recollects, “She [Ifemelu] could only say two more before she gave up, with him [Obinze] still raring to go” (AM: 61). This is not only emphatic of the said subversion but a poignant patronage of masculine intelligence.

Adichie aligns with Obioma Nnaemeka’s affirmation of the myth: “behind every successful man is a woman” (294). This contrary inclination comes in Nnaemeka’s appraisal of the women which Chinua Achebe creates in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. It is in her view that the African conciliatory alternative to Western feminism is espoused. There are indications of Adichie’s preference for consummate spousal reciprocity. Ironical as it sounds, she recalls how Lord Lugard had amalgamated the North and South protectorates of Nigeria and accepts the name which the wife had given to the country, Nigeria (HOYS: 115). Adichie creates an amiable relationship between Odenigbo and Olanna that compels their mutual desire to have a child. When that did not come both of them accepted the baby whose conception had come off Odenigbo’s mother’s malevolence. Also, Olanna complements Odenigbo’s love for Ugwu by offering powder for his body odour.

Adichie employs Ifemelu’s character in revealing how alienated the woman could become, especially in the pursuit of Western values. “Ifemelu became so much alienated from her own people and personality – She wanted to see them, but the thought of their visit exhausted her. She was not sure she would be able to be their daughter, the person they remembered” (AM: 301). This entire gambit is summed up in the observation, “...because she lived in America. Rules had shifted, fallen into the cracks of distance and foreignness” (AM: 314). It logically follows that Adichie locates the key points in her perception of the ‘shifted rules’, and ridicules what it has done to the man-woman relationship.

Race as Metaphor for Feminist Prejudice

The measures of feminist prejudice that are visible in *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* seem to indict the racist conflict. These had come in milder measures underlying Adichie’s earlier thematic projections in *Purple Hibiscus*. With the fanaticism to the white man’s religion, against certain traditional conventions, Adichie’s earlier brand of feminism was made to stand against Papa Nnukwu’s humanism in *Purple Hibiscus*. The metaphor in the racist matter pertains to the prejudice that has become part of feminist pursuits.

This is captured in one of Ifemelu's blogs here: "...Because of course we're all prejudiced... but racism is about the power of a group and in America it's white folks that have the power. How? Well, white folks don't get treated like shit..." (AM: 327). In relating the force of feminism in the West, it appears to implicate a kind of disconnection that pertains to gender, just as there is the segregation of the races.

Much later in *Americanah*, Adichie re-discovers the pattern which she had adopted in the preceding novel, that is, how they draw attention to the ambivalence of the West. It is found in their treatment of the so called 'Third Worlders' as sub-humans. In *Half of A Yellow Sun*, this pattern was cast as a string of eight outlines for a book that Richard planned to write. It is with recourse to this pattern that Uwakwe and Chinedu-Okoh observe that "there is the highlight of the world politics which incidentally has continued to extend the conflicts in Nigeria". These critics had paid attention to how this prototype, which simply foreshadows a different book project, had come off Achebe's model of symbolic irony. In *Things Fall Apart* the District Commissioner's idea, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger...*, comes as the title of the book he was to write on Africa. In tying up their argument, Uwakwe and Chinedu-Okoh insist,

It is in appreciating how these fragments of historical experience have been made to occur as symbols, that Adichie's efforts in presenting the sketch of another book in *Half of a Yellow Sun* becomes revealing. The title, of this other book, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, bears a passionate appeal which reveals how long the predicaments of Africa have lasted. (165)

The co-occurrence in these patterns is perceivable at the different levels which reveal the seeming unremitting rebranding of the gambit of slavery. The view of the 'Pacification of the Primitive Tribes' in *Things Fall Apart* gives a clue to Adichie's ideology and reveals the processing of the psychosis which drives the racial upshot. Most provocatively, the satire effuses in the ironical presentation of the racial matter which has also plunged the Blacks into a race, the struggle to recover their personality as though it depended on their colour. In *Americanah*, the high point of portraying the character, Bartholomew is to satirize his recourse to changing his colour. "Couldn't you see? His face is a funny colour. He must be using the cheap ones with no sunscreen. What kind of man bleaches his skin..." (AM: 117). More worrisome is the fact that Aunty Uju kept asking for prayers, so that her relationship with Bartholomew matures into marriage, in spite of Ifemelu's observation that the man looked quite inferior to her – "In Nigeria, a man like that would not even have the courage to talk to you" (AM: 117).

The pictures which Adichie paints of women poignantly suggest that the brand of Western feminism which seeks to excavate faults where there are none only decimates the African culture and patterns of humanism. Indeed, it alters the course of nature in the manner that bleaching does.

The consequence is that the racial upshot has provoked a kind of race for the attainment of their class complex, just as Uju's craze for marriage blinds her to Bartholomew's funny personality – the fact that he represents those considered to have “got lost” (AM: 116) in America. Adichie employs several pieces of the blogs she credits Ifemelu with in relating the race matter. Here is an emphatic one:

Not just black, he says, but recognizably black because there's all kinds of black and no offense but he doesn't mean those black folk who look Puerto Rican or Brazilian or whatever... Because the world treats you differently. I got the idea of the book in Egypt. So I get to Cairo and this Egyptian Arab guy calls me a black barbarian. (AM: 330)

The measure of blackness here which implicates the ill-treatment of the supposed inferiors also seem to lure them into the several inordinate struggles for survival. It is this matter that provokes the title, *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The ‘silence’ of the world is cast as a kind of the cold war which is elucidated here:

The Cold War forced people to choose, and it was either you became an internationalist which of course meant communist to Americans, or you became a part of American capitalism, which was the choice the African American elite made”. (AM: 337)

The ‘elitist’ obsession which is also deducible in the racial upshot has continued to infuriate the attendant prejudice, even in its moderated posture within the era in which the colour question is no subject for public discussion. This picture began to make sense to Ifemelu in her several encounters with the stark reality of this ‘cold war’, seen in the advice Ginika gives here: “Because this is America. You are supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things” (AM: 127). This sense of diplomacy is also put to effect in the outlines in *Half of a Yellow Sun* which Adichie sets out in the same font as that in which Ifemelu presents as *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*. The titles which Adichie credits to Ifemelu's blog include: Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism (AM: 184); A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor (AM: 296); Open Thread: For All the Zipped-Up Negroes (AM: 307); Job Vacancy in America–National Arbiter in Chief of “Who is Racist” (AM: 315); Obama Can Win Only If He Remains the Magic Negro (AM: 321). It is in placing these posts with the one's Ifemelu did on her return to Nigeria that one begins to perceive the relatedness in terms of the superiority/inferiority complex which Adichie is intent on satirizing. These instances are revealing:

It is because Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skins and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted. (AM: 421)

Adichie suggests that such ideologies as feminism must be perceived as cultural intrusion, if not outright decimation since the pattern of living in Africa differs significantly from that which breeds segregation in the western world. That the institution of marriage and all its obligations have come under challenge by the feminist scrutiny is suggested:

There are many young women in Lagos with unknown sources of wealth. They live lives they can't afford. They have only ever traveled business class to Europe but have jobs that can't even afford them a regular flight ticket. One of them is my friend, a beautiful, brilliant woman...She lives on The Island and is dating a big man banker. I worry that she will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have... (AM: 422)

There are clear instances in which the attitudes of African ladies are seen to patronize the several shades of the imperialism. These are also consequent upon the dissipation of moral values which proceed from cultural hybridization or some adventurist desire. The narrator's voice is revealing in this regard,

What I am saying is that our women who follow white men are a certain type, a poor family and the kind of bodies that white men like...It's a new slavery, I'm telling you, a new slavery. But you are a Big Man's daughter, so what are you doing with him". (HOYS: 80-81)

Adichie's satire resounds with her emphatic inclination to morality. There is the apparent immorality of women in their acquittance and acceptance of certain imported values. This includes the face of varied feminist struggles which detract from the cultural patterns in Africa. These receive a fuller exploration in *Americanah*. Again, it is Adichie's narrative voice that yields a panacea here:

The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But the real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved... (AM: 296)

There are several occurrences relating the 'separationist' candor which parallels feminist prejudices with the White racists. The figure also appears to be narrowed down to writings with these inclinations – "...White writers can be blunt about race and get all activist because their anger is not threatening" (AM: 336). These figures are pertinent in Adichie's lexical choices – 'writers', 'blunt', 'race', 'activist' and all pertaining to their 'anger' that doesn't sound 'threatening'. Adichie is convincingly disgruntled with racism, given the particular parallel it draws with mainstream Western feminism.

Her observation in *Americanah* supposes a detachment of the gender battle from the segregating influence of racism – “race is not biology; race is sociology ... Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it is all about how you look” (AM: 337). But more pertinent in this regard is the fact that feminism erupted in the wake of certain racial matters which had earlier been identified in Mogu’s book, *Black Male Writing and Black Female Responses in the United States*.

The reversal in the order of migration is made, perhaps, to deplore adventurist women, Uju and Ifemelu as case in point, who undertake the oversea journeys in the given state of their disillusionment. Indeed, their migration and its accompanying delusion result in the misery of alienation for which these women express their longing to return, even in search of husbands. The attendant involvements satirize the encroachments that feminism has made on African culture and values. These are made to co-occur with such other deplorable involvements as Uju’s despicable relationship with another woman’s husband and the events precipitating her migration to the United States; Ifemelu’s obsession for Obinze, leading also to extra-marital sexual outre; and the persecution of women by women as is revealed in Olanna’s encounter with Odenigbo’s mother. These are all made to compare with the kind of humanity’s inhumanity to humanity figured in racism. Therefore, the tendency to surrender one’s fate to racism as it is with Ifemelu seems rejected.

Wittingly, Adichie presents Obinze’s accomplishments as a cherished reversal of the despicable order of migration, the implications of which incite far reaching chauvinistic impulse. Obinze’s status is raised to employ expatriates and ostensibly compels them to come to live in Lagos (AM: 349). In this presentation, Adichie apparently bemoans the dehumanizing situations of the Blacks and the conditions of the unemployed migrants which Ifemelu’s character represents. This modest posture in the placement of Obinze as an employer of labour, contrasts with the extreme capitalist tendencies of the expatriates in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (53).

Conclusion

In painting the picture of the America-seeking personages, Adichie is inclined to interrogating attitudes that suggest unwarranted simulation in feminist writings. From *Half of a Yellow Sun* to *Americanah*, Adichie does not leave her audience in doubt as to her quest to abdicate or at least ameliorate the existing feminist rage. Most pertinently, the fate of her female characters are inclined to condemning their recalcitrant rejection of patterns in the African culture that had ensured harmony and realistic living, especially where the man and woman are known to compliment one another. Odenigbo’s regard for Olanna is seen in the declaration to Ugwu, “A special woman is coming for weekend. Very special (HOYS: 21). It is the voice of the same intellectual who insists on decolonizing education. And indeed, these two novels of Adichie are seen to serve veritable ingredients of the much needed education.

Her adoption of intellectuals in both novels is significant. Obinze's mother (re)presents another perspective to the required education. She is the one who not only cautions Ifemelu and Obinze, providing acceptable courtship patterns for intending couples. Nonetheless, Obinze's mother sounds forthright while maintaining such flexible disposition in suggesting the use of condoms when it appears almost inevitable in the affairs of Obinze and Ifemelu:

...If you make the choice to be sexually active, then you must make the choice to protect yourself...Ifemelu, you too. It is not my concern if you are embarrassed. You should go into the pharmacy and buy them. You should never ever let the boy be in charge of your own protection. (AM: 97)

Adichie reclines from presenting her female characters as objectified victims of men's brutality. Rather, they are placed as subjects of reflexive actions, attitudes which go with certain re-lived consequences of women's unmediated involvements. Similarly, she presents several instances in which the satirized characters are placed in ironic contexts. Just as Okonkwo kills the boy that calls him father in *Things Fall Apart*, Odenigbo is drugged by the mother so as to have him impregnate the young girl, Amala, in *Half of A Yellow Sun*. Also, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's mother berates her against the factual observation about the dubious (419) chief who became their church benefactor. It is logical to conclude that Adichie constructs ironic characters, providing a retrospective polemic on accessible African feminist values. The rhetoric employed in these texts reveal how Adichie manipulates her language with deftness and competence, demonstrating the aptitude of the model creative writer, especially in the several shades of passivized actions recollected. Perhaps, with the switch in her feminist tenor in the two novels in focus here, placed against the air in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie is seen to reject the fixated verdict which is typical of the reverberations in feminist voices.

In summation, it is expedient to observe that the objective here is not to locate Adichie as a maverick to the feminist struggle, but as one whose emergence, not only as a writer but as a humanist, implicates the obligation to disseminating such discovery as only maturity could bestow. Adichie's two paradoxical presentations, 'The dangers of a single story' and 'We should all be feminists', give this evidence. The resolution of the extremes of the gender battle comes with its own convolution in the conceptual appraisal of her title, 'The dangers of a single story', projecting the subversion of those myths that may indeed inundate and relegate creativity in African literary writing. What Adichie has sought to pursue in these two novels is a path that gives a justification of a humane inquisition into the feminist crunch. It is perhaps for this reason that Adichie in the presentation, 'We should all be feminists', insists that her male cousin who alerted her of her feminist proclivity, though a man, is to be placed in her own estimation as the most accomplished feminist. Does Adichie imply that the feminist challenges are of concern to both men and women? Does she rather draw the attention of women to certain pursuits that revoke their struggles in the age of globalization?

Or, is she inclined to invoking the morality in African cultural values? These and many more which have come under scrutiny in the discussion of *Half of A Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* also implicate the re-assessment of feminism in Africa, just as it re-negotiates what the alignment of the writers might have to be.

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