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## Resistance To Colonial Oppression In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half Of A Yellow Sun* And *Purple Hibiscus*.

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### Abstract:

Every individual has a right to freedom, but freedom seldom comes without the journey of struggle. Resistance is one of the best tools in the struggle for freedom from oppression. The present paper tries to connect the British colonialism in Africa and the Nigerian military coup in the Biafra state of Nigeria through narratives of *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2017) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The novels take the reader back to the colonial oppression and showcase the implications of the Biafra war through the well-knit stories. To a greater extent, novels throw light on patriarchy, domestic violence, ritualized control, and women and child oppression in African households during the military coup in Nigeria, which are gifts of British colonialism. Further, the opposition shown in the novels against domination and oppression are the reminders of resistance taken against colonialism by the indigenous people during and after colonialism.

**Keywords:** British colonialism, Nigerian military coup, Biafra war, Oppression, Resistance.

### Introduction:

The establishment of missionary schools in the African continent had a motto of imposing colonial culture, views, lifestyle, behaviour, thought processes, and habits among the indigenous people through the literature taught in schools and colleges. Colonizers pretended as if they were doing some favour to Africans by providing them with education but their inflictive nature had a focus on centralizing themselves and marginalizing Africans. As the center holds everything, this center dismissed African institutions of power, spirituality, and literature as inferior to colonizers. Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie both cite the writings of Sixteenth-century London merchant John Lok as an inaugurator in the development of a tradition that would continue to depict Africa in an unfavourable light. In her 2009 TED talk Adichie refers to the influence of John Lok, in establishing the European tradition of writing about Africa: "This single story of Africa ultimately comes; I think from Western literature". Here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Lok, who sailed to West Africa in 1561 and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as "beasts who have no houses" he writes: "They are also people without heads, having their mouths and eyes in their breasts" (Adichie, 2015). Further, poems like 'The white man's Burden' by Rudyard Kipling proposed that the white race is morally obliged to civilize the non-white people of the earth and also to encourage their progress through colonialism. This propagates that Africans were only considered as passive recipients rather than active producers of knowledge and Africans could not progress themselves rather, they needed the help of colonizers.

The introduction of universities in Nigeria was traceable to the 1925 memorandum on education policy in British Africa. The Nationalist struggle was also known to be instrumental to the emergence of university education in Nigeria. This introduction of university education to the Africans indicated that independence would be incomplete if it did not extend beyond the realm of self-governance to include institutions of knowledge production. The first president of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe, proclaimed 'free the African intellect' from the imprisonment of colonial education (Wikipedia). This phrase not only marked a moment away from Eurocentric epistemologies but also signaled an educated reorientation for the emerging middle classes towards the type of knowledge and expertise that were deemed useful in an independent Nigeria. The university environment provided an important site for decolonization enacted in part through the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into its various fields of study.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer and storyteller who was born and raised in the university town of Nsukka her father was a professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria, and her mother was the first female registrar there. This influence of the university makes her depict the university in her novels as a place for the radical politics or subversive actions of its academics and students.

After independence, African intellectuals started to think of appropriate tools to get rid of the colonial mindset among the indigenous Africans. But this process made students feel double consciousness because the literature prepared by the colonizers for the Africans was in favour of the colonizers and the same literature continued to be taught in classrooms after independence also. However, the orally transmitted indigenous stories presented to them outside the classroom were completely different. In the opening chapter of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nsukka University's professor of mathematics and a radicalist Odenigbo addresses his house boy Ugwu as a good example of the existence of double consciousness – "Education is a Priority!' how can we resist exploitation if we do not have the tools to understand exploitation?" (Adichie, 11). "There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books' master stopped to sip his tea. 'They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Nigeria. That is rubbish. Our people fished in Nigeria long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park" (Adichie,11). "It is now that we have to begin to decolonize our education! Not tomorrow, now! Teach them our history!" (Adichie, 75).

The character of Richard Churchill in the novel is shown as a submissive writer from England, who has a keen interest in writing a story about Biafra titled "The World Was Silent When We Died". Throughout the novel, the reader feels that this beautiful narrative is written by Richard but the real author is Ugwu, an Igbo. This is an indication of a shift in representing the Igbo people in historical texts, demonstrating an act of repossession of the narrative. Through this Africans became centered concerning the authorship of African histories rather than only being subject. Odenigbo explains to Ugwu how the people in power create things according to their wishes neglecting and marginalising the others. Odenigbo clarifies what is true and how it has been made. He shows that the colonial masters not only ruled but also changed the world map, wherein they placed themselves on the top which never existed, and remained at the bottom which never existed. "This our world, although the people who drew the map decided to put their land on top of ours. There is no top or bottom, you see". (Adichie,10).

European imperialism, during colonial rule, recreated and renamed modern African states for easy access. This change of name also changed its administration and influenced the lifestyle, customs, and beliefs of the area. This recreation is opposed by Odenigbo in the novel. He is not ready to accept it, and he would like it to be called before the colonial reconstruction of Nigeria. "Of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe," Master said. "I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came". (Adichie,20).

Prof Ezeka Snorted and shook his head, then legs crossed. "But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The Pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination..." (Adichie,20)

"The pan-Igbo idea existed long before the Whiteman!' master shouted. 'Go and ask the elders in your village about your history". (Adichie,21)

Odenigbo, the child of postcolonial resistance to colonialism never agrees with any kind of superiority of colonizers. He never admits that they are superior and the Nigerians are inferior. Odenigbo opposes when his girlfriend, Olanna's father says the idea of Nsukka University is silly and that Nigeria is not ready for an

indigenous university rather than a proper university in Britain. Odenigbo argues that the Nsukka was free of colonial influence.

Adichie depicts Nigerians in this novel not as fragile, weak recipients but as rebellious, independent people who are capable of making decisions and becoming united if it is necessary. Olanna's visit to Kano, a place where her uncle Mbaezi and his family stay always makes her understand the politics of its region at the same time united resistance to it. She recalls how once men and women were discussing that the northerners were not admitting Igbo children to their schools. Uncle Mbaezi had stood up and stamped his foot. "Ndi be any! My people! We will build our school! We will raise money and build our school!" (Adichie) She had appreciated his talk but worried that would be difficult to build a school perhaps it was more practical to try and persuade the northerners to admit Igbo children. But now, only after years, Igbo Union Grammar School has been built.

Olanna's sister Kainene, has a friend Major Madhu, who comes from his training, and he is shocked to see Richard Churchill's comfortable stay in Nigeria he says that Richard will feel homesick soon. Madhu said this only to understand whether Richard was happy or pretending to be. But Richard disagrees with that. Madhu becomes angry and says that the British have just decided to control immigration from the commonwealth, haven't they? They want people to stay in their own countries. The irony, of course, is that we in the commonwealth can't control the British moving to our countries (Adichie,79).

For women, colonialism resulted in an erosion of rights, and equality, esteem which were formerly granted to them. Women in pre-colonial Africa held positions of power and they were influential in many aspects of their societies. Throughout colonization, European powers altered African communities with their patriarchal norms. As a result, women were cast aside and given inferior positions in the home and society. Colonialism established a notion that women were subordinate to men and that men should hold all positions of power and authority. African women were treated as sexual toys. Colonizers confined them for their enjoyment only. Adichie resists this treatment through the words of Major Udodi. The conversation continues among Major Madhu, Kainene, and Richard along with food and drinks. As they complete their dinner and sit comfortably Major Udodi visits them. He mocks and warns Kainene of having a British boyfriend. 'I magnum, you know, what I am saying is that our women who follow white men are a certain type, a poor family and a kind of bodies that white men like'. He stopped and continued, in a mocking mimicry of an English accent, 'Fantastically desirable bottoms. He laughed. 'The white men will poke and poke and poke the women in the dark but they will never marry them. How can! they will never even take them out to a good place in public. But the women will continue to disagree themselves and struggle for the men so they will het chicken-feed money and nonsense tea in a fancy tin. It's a new slavery, I'm telling you, a new slavery but you are a big man's daughter so what you are doing with him?' (Adichie,80-81).

Odenigbo and his team's meeting was held in his home. Richard's house boy had prepared some dishes for them. Everyone liked them including Olanna.

Stuffed garden eggs, yes? Olanna glanced at Richard, 'Yes. Harison has all sorts of ideas. He took out the insides and filled them with cheese, I think, and spices. (Adichie,108)

You know the Europeans took out the insides of an African woman and stuffed and exhibited her all over Europe?' Odenigbo asked. (Adichie,108).

'Odenigbo, we are eating!' Miss Adebayo said although she was stifling laughter. (Adichie,108)

The other guests laughed but Odenigbo did not. 'It's the same principle at play, he said. You stuff food, you stuff people. If you don't like what is inside a particular food, then leave it alone, don't stuff it with something else. A waste of garden eggs, in my opinion (Adichie,108).

Odenigbo visits house boy Ugwu's village when his mother is ill. He observes the farmland having rows and rows of corn and cassava like neatly plaited hairstyle, master says, 'See? This is what our government should focus on. If we learn irrigation technology, we can feed this country easily. We can overcome this colonial dependence on imports' (Adichie,88).

Adichie has created many such situations in the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* on the backdrop of opposition to the Nigerian military coupe. However, the narration and situations in the novel suggest that she is also confronting colonial oppression in Africa.



*Purple Hibiscus* is another novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Which is a rare combination of colonial rule and its implications, domestic violence, patriarchy, religious fanaticism, and autocratic rule, And silent resistance to it. The novel is narrated through the voice of Kambili, one of the two children of Eugene Achike, who is a colonial-read, highly disciplined religious businessman, completely obsessed with the colonial discipline and highly influenced by the colonizer's behavior and manners. He is like a colonial master at home. Those who do not accept his ideas, agree with his words, and do not follow his path will be punished by him brutally. He never misses the ritual of Christianity just to stay away from sin and imposes the same on his wife Beatrice, and children Kambili and Jaja. Beatrice and Kambili accept domination, violence, and words and follow him in the initial stage and later on, they silently rebel against him. Just like the Africans who accepted the domination and oppression of the colonizers in the beginning and broke against them once they started understanding things better. But Jaja questions, argue and decides against him from the beginning. *Purple Hibiscus* opens with Jaja resisting his father's brutal authority and, as the narrative unfolds, the reader can see multiple moments of defiance by Jaja against his father in addition to other members of his household.

Eugene had bought wafers, chips, and drinks to home from his factory which were served at the breakfast. Though it did not taste good Beatrice and Kambili lied that tasted good but Jaja did not.

'Have you nothing to say, go, Jaja?' asks Eugene

"MBA, there are no words in my mouth", Jaja replied.

"what"? there was a shadow clouding Papa's eyes, a shadow that had been in Jaja's eyes. fear. It had left Jaja's eyes and entered Papa's" (Adichie,13).

"I Have nothing to say," Jaja said.

In the novel, Adichie shows multiple situations of domination and resistance to it. The moment Eugene's two children come to know that their mother is pregnant instead of being happy they worry and Jaja states "We will take care of the baby". It is a good example of Eugene's oppressive behaviour. Jaja has made up his mind that they have to take care of the baby otherwise it will also suffer under his father's domination.

Eugene's dominating attitude has not only been imposed on his wife and children but also on his aged father and widowed sister. Eugene is a very soft and kind-hearted man but only to those who follow his words, follow Christianity, speak English, love England, respect popes, and fathers. His father Papa-Nnukwu never followed and liked colonizers but Eugene, their staunch follower wanted his father to throw away the chi in thatch, a shrine that his father worshipped in his yard, and be like him for which he had offered him a house, car, and driver just to convert into Christianity. but his father had laughed and said that he simply wanted to see his chi; he would not throw his chi; so, Eugene became furious and stopped talking and visiting him. He didn't allow his children to meet him but the members of Umunna, their community at village Abba urged him to let Kambili and Jaja visit Papa-Nnukwa to greet him because every man who is old enough to be called grandfather deserved to be greeted by his grandchildren. But Papa-Nnukwa always grieves for Eugene's behavior "Nekenem, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries" (Adichie, 83).

Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, A poor university professor, is a bold widow with children living in a small flat. She never asks for any help from an affluent business man Eugene because of his condition on help. "Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first, he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, nwunge m, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima's trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things". (Adichie,95)

On Sunday, eating solid food before an hour of mass was prohibited but Kambili's period cramps were worsening so Beatrice and Jaja advised her to take some cornflakes before taking the pandole tablet. As she started to have it, Eugene saw it and became furious. Beatrice started to explain the reason hesitantly but Jaja got angry and said "I told her to eat cornflakes before she took pandora, papa. I made it for her". (Adichie,102)

The novel's inclusion of important historical figures who were involved in an anti-slavery and anti-colonial movement such as Olaudah Equiano provides a long view of resistance struggle in the region. This allows the readers to draw a parallel between past liberation struggles in the colonial contexts. In his paternal aunt Ifeoma's home Jaja was enquired by his cousin, Ifeoma's elder son Obiora origins of his name to which Jaja responds:

'My name is Chukwuemeka. Jaja is a childhood nickname that stuck'... 'when he was a baby all he could say was Ja-Ja. So, everybody called him Jaja,' Auntie Ifeoma said. She turned to Jaja and added, 'I told your mother that it was an appropriate nickname, that you would take after Jaja of Opobo.' Jaja of Opobo? The stubborn king? Obiora asked. 'Defiant, Auntie Ifeoma said,' and when the British came, he refused to let them control all the trade. He did not sell his soul for a bit of gunpowder like other kings did, so the British exiled him to the West Indies. He never returned to Opobo'... That's sad. Maybe he should not have been defiant', Chima, Ifeoma's younger son said... 'Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes, Auntie Ifeoma said.... 'Defiance is like marijuana is not a bad thing when used right'... Her conversation was with Chima and Obiora, her two sons but she was looking at Jaja. Obiora smiled and pushed his glasses up. 'Jaja of Opobo was a saint, anyway. He sold his people into slavery, and besides, the British won in the end. So much for defiance.' 'The British won the war; they lost many battles.' Jaja said'. (Adichie,143-145). The novel ends with the strong step of resistance by a silent sufferer in the hands of her husband Eugene. Beatrice is the one who was a silent victim and silent observer of Violence at home showing a perpetual quest for freedom. Beatrice's pain and helplessness are obvious in her reaction after she loses the second pregnancy because of Eugene's beating. She now resolves to eliminate the source of her misery and pain of losing her pregnancies. So, she begins to eliminate that one life which is a threat to many lives. "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor". (Adichie) The pursuit of peace and survival are the reasons for her the real cause for action. It was an extreme response for an extreme action of Eugene. Through this action, she reverses the trend of Eugene's oppression of them, and her satisfaction with taking this step can be seen through her admission of guilt and readiness to face the consequences which can be compared to the resistance against colonial oppression.

**Conclusion:** To sum up, Adichie tries to link these narratives to the resistance of Nigerians to British colonialism in the postcolonial era and the implications of the Biafra War. It also shows that the past and present are not separate rather the second is the continuation of the first to unfold the human experience in which oppression and resistance both exist. The continuation of history is visible through the sense of rebirth of Jaja of Opobo in the character of Jaja in *Purple Hibiscus*. The parallels have been drawn between British colonial rule and Nigerian Military rule in which people struggled to survive.

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