



EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL SPIRIT IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S HALF OF A YELLOW SUN THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIALIST / MARXIST FEMINISM IN FEMINIST POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY THEORIES

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Abstract:

This paper aims at a study of Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* as a fictional narrative that has socio-political facts highlighted especially with reference to the protagonist. Feminist writer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 in an Igbo middle-class family in Enugu, Nigeria. Her mother became the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria while her father was a professor of statistics. The fifth of six children, she experienced a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close family. Under the pressure of social and family expectations, Adichie did 'what she should do' and began studying medicine at the University of Nigeria. After a year and a half, she decided to continue her writing aspirations, graduated with a medical degree, and received a communications scholarship in the United States. This fiction is critically analyzed with the recently categorized women under Feminist Political Philosophy which had various categories of feminism. The third part of feminist political philosophy is socialist feminism. In Socialist feminists, the exploitation and oppression of women essentially originate from the capitalist social and political order. During the decade of this fiction got published, Adichie's influence and experience of being a young black feminist is portrayed in this fiction. The protagonists of this fiction are the socialist women who survived the post war effects and started to show more interest in political inequalities. Olanna, a main protagonist and strong women who have studied sociology in London. Her immense interest in politics keeps her on argument in politics always, with her husband. Kainene is a sarcastic personality, who builds up many emotional defensive against the world. The social equality and liberty of women can be achieved only by dismantling the capitalist order which is based on not only exploitation of working class but also enslavement of women.

Key Words: Socialist Feminism, Marxism, Feminist Political Philosophy, Post-World War, Capitalist

Adichie's three novels focus on contemporary Nigerian culture, its political turmoil, and sometimes how it is heavily influenced by the West. She released *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, *Half of a Yellow Sun* in 2006, and *Americanah* in 2013. Each time her novels manage to convey a new idea of Nigeria to the world.

For decades the socialists had fought to create a more egalitarian society that did not exploit the poor and the helpless, as capitalism did. Like Marxism, socialist feminism recognized the oppressive structure of a capitalist society. Like radical feminism, socialist feminism recognized the basic oppression of women, especially in a patriarchal society. The socialist feminists, however, did not recognize gender and only gender as the sole basis of all oppression. Rather, they claimed that class and gender were at least partially symbiotic, and that one could not be approached without regard to the other. Socialist feminists wanted to integrate the recognition of sexual discrimination into their work to achieve justice and equality for women, the working class, the poor, and all of humanity. (Jagger 301)

Half of a Yellow Sun takes place in Nigeria in the 1960s. The book begins when Ugwu, an Igbo boy from a bush village, goes to Nsukka to work as a boy's boy for Odenigbo, a Professor and radical. Odenigbo is in love with Olanna, the beautiful daughter of a rich Nigerian. Olanna moves in with Odenigbo and meets his friends who argue about politics every night. Ugwu becomes an excellent cook and goes to school. Meanwhile, Richard, a white Englishman in Nigeria, leaves his girlfriend Susan when he falls in love with Kainene, Olanna's sardonic twin sister. Richard moves to Nsukka and befriends Odenigbo and Olanna. Odenigbo's mother "Mama" visits Olanna and calls her a witch, which makes her very angry. Olanna and Odenigbo try to have a child.

The narrative jumps a few years after the overthrow of the Nigerian government. The northern Hausa blame the Igbo for the coup. There is another coup now, and this time many Igbo soldiers are killed. Olanna now has a baby named "Baby" and brings her to Kano to visit her relatives. Violence against the Igbo becomes a pogrom, and Olanna's relatives are brutally murdered. She escapes on a train to Nsukka. Meanwhile, Igbo civilians are being murdered at the airport. Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo leader, announces that Southeastern Nigeria wants to resign and become the Republic of Biafra. All characters are overjoyed.

After meeting one of Susan's parties, Richard falls in love with Kainene. They start meeting for lunch at one of their father's hotels, which soon leads to some unsuccessful trysts, as Richard is inexplicably unable to perform sexually. However, Kainene does not seem to be upset about his lack of excitement, and they continue to talk as usual. In this quote, Kainene complains about her parents and the social class they occupy. She argues that they are under-educated yet rich, resulting in a banality focused on their "new-rich" purchases such as foreign cars and expensive meals. (Tunca 3)

Women are the most oppressed among all the oppressed groups. No one needs a revolutionary transformation of society worse than they are, and no other group has the capacity to unite the oppressed in a powerful labor movement that deals with all the injustices inflicted on the dispossessed of capitalism: racism, poverty, homophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ageism and war. (Meulenbelt 113)

Richard is fascinated by her stinging jokes and her foresighted observations and strong self-esteem, even though she grew up in the social class she rejects. Although critical of the new-rich (people with "new money" who are often regarded as distasteful and glaring), like their parents, Kainene displays some hypocrisy, as she benefits greatly from the wealth and education she receives as a result of her family's socio-political status. Nevertheless, Richard is in awe of her determination.

The socialist-feminist conception of productive activity recognizes the historically determined and changing nature of human production, including the production of sexuality, as well as the historically determined nature of the production of other goods and services. Socialist feminism, in its analysis of contemporary society, goes beyond the traditional definitions of "economy" and looks at activities that are not about the exchange of money. Therefore, its concept of productive activity, it includes the reproductive and sexual work done by women at home (Jagger 304).

When Odenigbo's mother meets Olanna at Odenigbo's house, she accuses her son's girlfriend of being a barren, over educated "witch" who is cursed because she did not nurse with her mother. Upset, Olanna leaves Odenigbo's house abruptly. When Ugwu tells Odenigbo what happened, he goes to Olanna's university-issued flat, where she rarely sleeps, and tells her not to worry about his mother, who he claims struggles with being a village woman in a modern world. Olanna is offended that he does not defend her (Olanna), but rather excuses his mother, and in this quote, she tells Odenigbo to leave. She did not let him feel that something was wrong with her. It was her right to be upset, she had the right not to put her humiliation aside in the name of excessive intellectualism, and she would claim that right. She pointed to the door. Go play tennis and do not come back.

She watched him get up and leave. He banged the door. They had never had a quarrel; he had never been impatient with dissent from her as he was with others. Or it may simply be that he humored her and did not think much of her opinions in the first place (Adichie 129).

Equality for women cannot be achieved under capitalism while socialism cannot be attained without the participation and leadership of working and poor women in the struggle to win it. Socialist feminists believe that the only way to win the fight for women's rights is to connect it up with the larger global campaign for human liberation in all its forms.

Olanna soon realizes that this is the first time they have fought, though Odenigbo quarrels nightly with the people who visit his salon. Olanna wonders if, like her parents and Miss Adebayo, he sees her as a pretty face whose education is dismissible and whose ideas are quaint but do not matter. She suddenly becomes ill at ease with Odenigbo's presumptuous intellectualism, and the confidence that she used to admire, and instead views it as pompous and pretentious. As a pretty rich girl Olanna has fought her whole life to be heard for her thoughts and not for her status and appearance. This is a fight that few would pity, but it has left her weak and voiceless in many situations, and this quarrel marks the first fight in a long journey for Olanna to find her personal strength.

In analyzing all forms of productive activity, socialist feminism supplements the analytic tool of class with the additional conceptual tool of gender. It perceives that human productive activity is organized invariably around a sexual division of labor and that the specific historical form taken by the sexual division of labor has always been basic in determining the historically prevailing constitution of human nature. Socialist feminism's distinctive contribution to our understanding of human nature is its recognition that the differences between women and has been subject to constraints that are simultaneously social and technological. (Jagger 305)

Olanna had wanted to give the scent of his mother's visitsome time to diffuse before telling him she wanted to have a child, and yet here he was, voicing her own desire before she could. She looked at him in wonder. This was love: a string of coincidences that gathered significance and became miracles. (Adichie 135)

Even before Olanna and Odenigbo reconcile, Olanna decides that she wants to have a baby with Odenigbo, as a kind of proof of their love and future together. While in bed one morning, Odenigbo sleepily tells Olanna that he wants them to have a child together. As Olanna has not yet voiced her wish to Odenigbo, she sees this mutual desire as a sign of the strength of their lasting relationship together, despite their occasional differences in opinion (and Adichie phrases this realization in a quite lyrical way). Odenigbo's brash, often overly-intellectualized opinions can sometimes erase his decisions of any kind of compassion or sentiment. By

contrast, Olanna, though highly intelligent and educated, tends to follow her heart in matters of opinions and decisions, a difference that usually binds, but occasionally divides them.

Socialist feminism has often been compared to cultural feminism, but they are quite different although there are some similarities. Cultural feminism focuses almost exclusively on the unique traits and accomplishments of the female gender in opposition to those of men. Separatism is a key theme, but socialist feminism opposes this. The goal of socialist feminism is to work with men to achieve a level playing field for both genders. Socialist feminists have referred to cultural feminism as pretentious.

The earnings system survives with the unpaid work of women at home and low paid work in the market. Their inequality is concretized in a perverse agreement in which owners and employers benefit from the status and misery of second-class women. This is a radical experience and explains the enormous role that women, especially women of skin color and indigenous women, play as leaders in the struggle for revolutionary change. (Black 28)

Both men and women have an interest in changing their unequal relationship. The subjection of women forms the basis for the exploitation of the poor working class of all races by the ruling class. Workers who are feminists know that, if they fight for women's rights, they will stand up for all the exploited, even for themselves. (Meulenbelt 115)

While the book shows many images of the terrible violence during the war, this moment is one of the weirdly calm mothers who wears and shows her child's head, one of the novel's most insistent and consistent passages. Adichie uses this image to connect the horrors of war with the humanities of everyday life: even if her child dies and there is only one lifeless brain left, the mother has to think about the efforts she has made to get the thick hair of the To weave daughter. Although colonial and war efforts have attempted to rob the Nigerian and Biafran populations of their humanity through severe acts of violence, humanity and love remain as well as the care a mother uses every day to braid her daughter's hair, love, which she does not even die then so much that a mother is driven to remember her daughter's mind. This picture shows not only Olanna, but also other characters who hear about it throughout the novel from second hand.

Socialist feminism is also distinctly different from liberal feminism, although the concept of liberalism has changed over the early decades of the 21st century. Although liberal feminists seek equality of the sexes, socialist feminists do not believe that is entirely possible within the constraints of current society. (Martin 11)

The focus of radical feminists is more on the root causes of inequalities that exist. They tend to take the position that sexual discrimination is the sole source of the oppression of women. However, radical feminism may be more closely related than some other forms of feminism are to socialist feminism.

After Olanna finds out that Odenigbo slept with Amala, she goes to Kano to find some solace with her extended family members. She tells her aunt about her situation, and in this quote, "You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Do you hear me?" Aunt Ifeka said. "Your life belongs to you and you alone, sosogi. You will go back on Saturday" (Adichie 283). Aunt Ifeka replies unsympathetically to Olanna's complaining. A man, she asserts, should never come to define Olanna's life, as it is her life and hers alone. Thus, the decision whether to forgive him or to leave permanently should be hers alone and not be dependent on anyone else's desires or wishes.

Socialist feminism would turn capitalism and the subjugation of women and all other outsiders on their heads. First, because socialism replaces the current system of wealth for a few with a system that can satisfy the majority's human needs. Secondly, because the fight for equality between women and the poorest and most oppressed executives guarantees that everyone wins, because when the lower heads of the business leaders ascend, everyone moves forward with them. (Eisenstein 307)

Olanna's desire to please everyone in her life--from her parents to Kainene to Odenigbo--often leaves her distraught when she is left with a choice that involves her own personal happiness. Olanna has always expected and admired Odenigbo's confidence, but as Aunt Ifeka points out, this admiration is often to a fault, as Olanna usually lets Odenigbo's decisions rule her life. For the most part, she has been content to become a part of his life rather than him becoming a part of hers, but she knows she has more self-respect than to let him be totally forgiven for sleeping with his mother's house girl. The decision to forgive or to leave, Aunt Ifeka can tell, is completely ruining Olanna's life in the present. Olanna's subsequent decision will be important, but should not be life-defining, as she has been making it out to be.

The theory of socialist feminism, on the other hand, sought to avoid separating feminism from the rest of society. Socialist feminists in the 1970s preferred to integrate their struggle against women's oppression with the struggle against other injustice based on race, class, or economic status. Socialist feminists wanted to work with men to correct the inequities between men and women. (Meulenbelt 118)

After Olanna slept with Richard, they agree not to tell Kainene what happened between them. Olanna tells Odenigbo, shaken by Olanna's break in loyalty, and the fact that she would drop her morality enough to sleep with her twin sister's boyfriend. Or she should have told him more: that she regretted betraying Kainene and him but did not regret the act itself. She should have said that it was not a crude revenge, or a scorekeeping, but took on a redemptive significance for her. She should have said the selfishness had liberated her (Adichie

306). In this quote, Olanna wishes, back in her apartment, she would have told more about her feelings about her night with Richard.

As the more attractive, "pleasant" twin, Olanna is perceived as morally and socially superior to Kainene. Kainene, whose slender figure seems masculine to many, is traditionally "masculine," which seems to be a reaction to her sister's personality: she is sharp-witted, sarcastic, and smart in both her own life and in her business career Logic. In a way, Kainene could have slept with her twin's boyfriend and could not have regretted the act if Richard had cheated on her: Challenge a morally reprehensible act that could be even more despicable.

The theoretical foundations of modern socialist feminism were set forth by Friedrich Engels in his book *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. He explains that the rise of private property, class society, patriarchy, slavery and the state was preceded by a common, matriarchal social system. He pointed out the role of women in the economic, social, cultural and political life of these communal societies and the egalitarian relationships that shape them. As a result of the overthrow of the matriarchy and the rise of private property and capitalism, women now bear the brunt of poverty, suffering, deprivation, wars, and the environmental destruction that is causing the profit system.

The danger and the general wickedness of the deed are delicious for Olanna, and her lack of regret leads to a release of her feelings towards herself and Odenigbo's unfaithfulness. Now that they are right and indeed she has the upper hand she can forgive him and herself. And more importantly, the fact that she has complete control over her life and her agency makes this obvious sin an identity affirming moment for Olanna herself.

The critique of Marxism and conventional socialism by socialist feminists is that Marxism and socialism largely reduce the inequality of women to something accidental, caused by economic inequality or the class system. Because the oppression of women lies before the development of capitalism, socialist feminists argue that the oppression of women cannot be generated by class division. Socialist feminists also argue that the capitalist hierarchy system cannot be dismantled without reducing the oppression of women. Socialism and Marxism are primarily about liberation in the public sphere, especially in the economic sphere of life, and socialist feminism recognizes a psychological and personal dimension of liberation that is not always present in Marxism and socialism. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, had argued that the liberation of women would be primarily through economic equality (Martin 88).

"I will never forgive myself if I lose you, Kainene."

Her face was expressionless. "I took your manuscript from the study this morning and I burned it," she said.

Richard felt a soar in his chest of emotions he could not name. "The Basket of Hands," the collection of pages that he was finally confident could become a book, was gone... But it did not matter. What mattered was that by burning the manuscript she had shown him that she would not end the relationship; she would not bother to cause him pain if she was not going to stay. Perhaps he was not a true writer after all. He had read somewhere that, for true writers, nothing was more important than their art, not even love (Adichie 324).

After Kainene finds out that Richard slept with Olanna, Kainene is understandably angry and Richard spends a restless night on the couch, worried that she will leave him. In this quote, Kainene salutes Richard the next day with an eerie serenity, announcing that she has burned Richard's only issue of his book, which is nearing completion. Although shocked at the loss of his job, Richard is overwhelmed by the fact that this act of retribution means she will not leave him, presumably to watch over his fear of losing the manuscript. Richard realizes that he is more interested in Kainene than in his writing and wonders if that means he is not a true writer.

From the moment Richard was born to apathetic parents, he apologized for his existence and was guilty, especially for the privilege he receives as a white Englishman in post-colonial Nigeria. Both his writing and his love for Kainene become his only anchors in the world in a way they did not exist before. He hopes to do something good for the world by writing a book on a British-oppressed Nigeria, but more than ever falls in love with Igbo Ukwu artifacts in Kainene. When Kainene announces that the book was burned, he finds that his relief is far greater than his anger and that he appreciates her more than his writing. (Lóránd 42)

Theorists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Charles Fourier argue that the main cause of female oppression is the economic system. Capitalism should serve the interests of men while exploiting women. In short, capitalism and patriarchy are interconnected. The work of women is underpaid, undervalued and often unpaid. Women are also under represented in the most powerful professions; tend to be precarious, underemployed, and more likely to work part-time. Capitalism also puts women in the status of the reserve army of labor, with a disproportionate number of housewives and other women (Lemons 72).

After the school is closed to be used as a refugee camp, Olanna and Ugwu teach children in their backyard, whose parents pay a small fee or provide benefits in kind. In this quote, Adichie describes how Olanna proudly teaches her students to be patriots and explains the symbolism of the Biafran flag.

She taught them about the Biafran flag. They sat on wooden planks and the weak morning sun streamed into the roofless class as she unfurled Odenigbo's cloth flag and told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future (Adichie 352).

The colors of the Biafran flag mean both remembrance and hope that the country will not be blindly created without thinking of the bloodshed that has occurred in the struggle for independence. Biafra would be a state that knew the dangers of colonialism and the greed for foreign influence and (ideally) would not be able to repeat such corruption.

At Kainene in Orlu, Olanna complains to her twin that Odenigbo has apparently turned into another since the beginning of the war. She complains about his excessive alcohol consumption and the suspicion that he slept with Alice. "Yes, good. There's something very lazy about the way you have loved him so blindly for so long without ever criticizing him. You've never even accepted that the man is ugly," Kainene said (Adichie 386). In this quote, Kainene answers that she is happy that Olanna has finally stopped blindly accepting her love and trust in Odenigbo without criticizing her.

One day, as Olanna gently brushes on baby's hair that falls out of malnutrition, she tells Ugwu that she cannot stop thinking about the little girl's head she saw on the way back from Kano's calabash. Ugwu asks her to say more and writes down everything Olanna tells him.

Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves (Adichie 512).

Like Ugwu's diminished nightmares after he started writing, Olanna feels relieved when she tells Ugwu everything she has seen that day in Kano and on the train back to Nsukka. The reader begins to suspect that the author of "The World Was Still When We Died" may not be Ugwu but Olanna. Ugwu's determination to record the atrocities Olanna has experienced and the sense of liberation and understanding she feels underscore the importance of recording these events for posterity and ensuring that such events never happen again. It also underscores the tragedy of neglect that Biafra felt throughout the war from around the world - just as Olanna's desire to be heard wants Biafra to be heard and helped, as people starve behind enemy lines, cut off from all food. Here Adichie shows how important narratives and memoirs are to lend humanity even to the cruelest genocides.

After Kainene was missing for two days, Olanna and Richard drive around looking for her. In this quote, Richard Passanten asks if they've seen her, and uses a picture he keeps in his wallet to consolidate her memories. Occasionally, he accidentally removes the photo he keeps of the rope pot that inspired him to move to Nigeria. Nobody has any information for Olanna or Richard, and when they drive home, Richard screams desperately. "Richard showed them Kainene's picture. Sometimes, in his rush, he pulled out the picture of the roped pot instead. Nobody had seen her... On the drive back, Richard began to cry (Adichie 510).

Feminists who are impressed by the universality of these things have sought explanations in the biological "realities" underlying all human social existence. On average, men are physically stronger than women, especially when compared to pregnant women or women breastfeeding babies. In addition, men have the power to make women pregnant. The forms of sexual inequality, however different they may be from culture to culture, are ultimately based on the obvious physical advantage that men have over women. That is, they ultimately rest on violence or the threat of violence (Lipschultz 177).

While there have been many false positives for the loss of the four narrative figures - Olanna and Odenigbo's impending breakup, Olanna's visit to Kano during a massacre, Ugwu's near-death experience - it is actually Kainene whose disappearance remains a mystery on the last pages of the novel. She is the one main character is objectified, differentiated, and analyzed by each of the other characters, notably Olanna and Richard. The fact that Richard keeps the image of the rope pots next to his photo of Kainene symbolizes the fact that he loves Kainene and is lost in her absence, but never completely lost his fascination for Nigeria because of his "otherness" of his culture remnant of his native English language and his white skin. (Lóránd 43)

After Kainene disappears, Richard goes to Lagos to visit Kainene's parents. At home, he also meets Madu. After years of pent-up anger and jealousy towards Madu, Richard embarks on the courage to ask him if he loves Kainene, to which Madu replies that he does. Richard asks him if he has ever slept with Kainene and Madu just laughs. Richard feels condescending to Madu, and in this quote he thinks a multitude of angry, even racist thoughts on the man he believes he slept with the woman he loves. Instead of saying these things, he beats Madu, who then beats Richard and makes him unconscious.

Madu got up. Richard reached out and grasped his arm. Come back, he wanted to say, come back here and tell me if you ever laid your filthy black hand on her. Madu shrugged Richard's hand off...Darkness descended on him, and when it lifted he knew that he would never see

Kainene again and that his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadows, only in half glimpses (Adichie 537).

Although Richard has found a home in Nigeria and then Biafra, as he has never felt at home in England, this inner monologue shows that he still feels an otherness for the Nigerian people. His love for Kainene is sometimes so great, a kind of fetishization of appearance and action, so different from what he looks like, and his own personality, that he thinks the worst thoughts he can have about Madu, which is easy as his trauma occurs in racism. Although Richard may still be unconsciously infused with racist ideas, he would never say these things aloud. Instead, he expresses his grief with a blow to which the mighty, self-confident Madu reacts with an even stronger punch. As Richard slips into unconsciousness and leaves, he thinks about how his world will change without Kainene at his side, a symbol of how both she and Biafra have forever shaped who he is. He had defined his life around Kainene and Biafra, and now both are lost.

The socialist-feminist conception of productive activity recognizes the historically determined and changing nature of human production, including the production of sexuality, as well as the historically determined nature of the production of other goods and services. Socialist feminism analyses contemporary society and goes beyond the traditional definitions of the economy and looks at activities that are not about the exchange of money. (Ehrenreich 3)

Therefore, in its concept of productive activity, it includes the reproductive and sexual work done by women at home. Socialist feminism analyzes all forms of productive activity and supplements the analytical instrument of the class with the additional conceptual instrument of gender. It notes that human productive activity is invariably based on a sexual division of labor, and that the specific historical form of sexual division of labor has always been of fundamental importance in determining the historically prevalent constitution of human nature. The special contribution of socialist feminism to the understanding of human nature is the recognition that the differences between women and men were at the same time subject to social constraints. Therefore this paper has viewed the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* as reflecting the thought processes of socialist feminism. It questions the contemporary social construction of womanhood.

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