

## **History, Memory and the Politics of National Unity in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There was a Country***

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**Abstract:** *One of the greatest challenges to national unity in Nigeria is the multi-ethnic composition of the country which was not given due consideration by the British colonial administration during the amalgamation in 1914. The result of this insensitivity by the British administration has been ethnic rivalry and mutual distrust among the different ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. These traits became evident in the first decade following Nigeria's flag independence in 1960 and crystalised during the Nigeria-Biafra war. Some Nigerians, especially the Igbo are still smarting from the effects of the war and successive governments' attempt to repress the memory of the war tends to increase the pain rather than heal the wound as many of the victims believe that the issues that led to the war have not been adequately addressed. This essay examines how the history and memory of the war and the lessons therefrom as portrayed in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe's *There Was a Country* can facilitate collective exorcism and engender national unity.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Few events in Nigeria's history have rivalled in intensity and propensity the series of events beginning with the botched military coup of January 15, 1966 and culminating in the fratricidal civil war of May 1967-January 1970. Granted, Nigeria's flag independence in October 1960 remains the most memorable and momentous event which is remembered with nostalgia by those who witnessed it. However, that memory is often blighted by the memory of the spasmodic political convolutions and turbulence that characterized the first decade following independence.

The events of that period have been copiously documented by Nigerian and non-Nigerian writers employing the modes of fiction and non-fiction. In fiction, the following titles are easily remembered, *A Man of the People*, and *Girls at War* by Chinua Achebe, *Survive the Peace* by Cyprian Ekwensi, *Sozaboy* by Ken Saro-Wiwa, *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *Laughter Beneath the Bridge* by Ben Okri, *The Man Died* by Wole Soyinka, *Never Again* by Flora Nwapa, *Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta, *Sunset in Biafra* by Elechi Amadi and recently, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie. In the genre of non-fiction there are: *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War* by Alexander Madiebo, *Biafra* by Nwankwo and Ifejika; *Nigeria and Biafra: My Story* by Philip Effiong; *Why We Struck* by Adewale Ademoyega, *Requiem Biafra* by Joe Achuzia, *Colonel Ben Brim* by Kalu Uka, *Because I Was Involved* by Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, and *My Command* by Olusegun Obasanjo. There has also been a remarkable attention on this period in the genres of poetry and drama. Christopher Okigbo's *Path of Thunder and Heavensgate*, J. P. Clark's *Casualties*, Chinua Achebe's *Beware Soul Brother*, Odia Ofeimun's *The Poet Lied* and Peter Onwudinjo's *Women of Biafra* are among poetry collections reflecting the events of that period while *Ali Mazrui's the Trial of Christopher Okigbo* dramatizes some of the events of the period.

It is not surprising that the events of the first decade of Nigeria's independence, particularly the Nigeria-Biafra War would generate such unprecedented literary output. According to Chinyere Nwahunanya, at some point in Nigeria's literary history, "The Nigerian civil war was the subject

matter of popular choice..." (xiii). For Kole Omotoso "The Nigerian civil war is the most important theme in post independence Nigerian writing" (*The Guardian*, 12). The Dominance of the civil war theme in post-war Nigerian literature perhaps finds an explanation in Lucien Goldman's assertion that: "periods of crises are particularly favourable to the birth of great works of art and of literature, because of the multiplicity of problems and experiences that they bring to men and of the widening of affective and intellectual horizons that they provoke" (50). Goldman's assertion above seems to affirm the fact that the human society provides a veritable source from which literary themes are drawn.

War as theme in literature becomes important for the writer because it affords the writer an opportunity to create and recreate history by recalling the past to shape the present, predict and possibly influence the future. War, therefore, holds an irresistible attraction for the writer because of what Chikwenye Ogunyemi describes as the sheer urge to record as truthfully as possible an excruciating, indelible, visceral experience which the author has been physically and/or emotionally involved in" (41).

The "physical and/or emotional involvement" of the writer to a large extent affects the claim of the writer to "record as truthfully as possible" the history of which s/he is a part of especially when that history has some negative connotations.

Given the above scenario, the position of the writer vis-a-vis a contentious history becomes disputable and sometimes controversial. It is perhaps for this reason that Ben Obumselu's question in relation to such 'controversial truths' captured in a novel becomes apposite. Obumselu asks, "Whose story does it tell and on whose side of the divide does the novel stand in the bitter argument...?"(23) The answers to these questions, especially 'on whose side of the divide does the novel stand?' are very important in a country like Nigeria where ethnic cleavages and divided loyalties threaten to eclipse national unity. Hence, a distorted or jaundiced history is likely to exacerbate the already volatile atmosphere and threaten the threadbare fabric of national unity.

Chimamanda Adichie in *Half of a Yellow Sun (HYS)* and Chinua Achebe in *There Was a Country (... a Country, henceforth)* have each claimed to have recorded 'truths' of the events leading up to and culminating in the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War and beyond. How true is this claim and what is the implication of the 'truth' recorded by these authors for Nigeria's unity? The answers to these questions form part of the focus of this essay. However, it must be noted here that the unusual choice of the texts: *Half of a Yellow Sun (HYS)* (fiction) and *There Was a Country, (...a Country)*, (autobiography) is deliberate. The aim is not to carry out a comparative study but to underscore the relationship between 'emotional truth' explored in literature and historical truth. Consequently, the relationship between memory, history and literature in the context of national unity as presented in these texts is foregrounded. Interestingly, *...a Country* is not completely non-fiction as the author's war poems are strategically placed in the text to complement some of the accounts. There are also reflections of the author's earlier fictional works in *...a Country*.

## **2. HISTORY AND IMAGINATION IN HALF OF A YELLOW SUN**

Chimamanda Adichie did not witness the Nigeria-Biafra War, because she was born seven years after the war ended. However, she wrote the war novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun (HYS)* because, according to her:

I wanted to write about love and war because I grew up in the shadow of Biafra...because I wanted to engage with my history to make sense of my present, because I don't ever want to forget<sup>1</sup>.

'Growing up in the shadow of Biafra' evidently suggests that the horrors of the war and the indelible scar it left on the predominantly Igbo Biafran landscape and on the psyche of the people were still visible and palpable at the time of her birth and even beyond. In fact, the events of the war remain relevant and topical more than four decades after it ended, prompting Adichie to observe that "many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria of today" (*HYS*, 350). The emotional involvement of the writer in the war privileges history and therefore affords her the opportunity to express in artistic form some aspects of her own history.

Hence, the novel becomes the author's imaginative way of recreating Nigeria's political history which has been marred by ethnicity, religious bigotry and leadership failure. By attempting to reposition this history, the writer, who believes that her work contains "emotional truth" employs fiction as the clarifying agent that makes truth plausible (Achebe et al, vii). Moreover, articulating in writing the horrors of the war as stored in her memory through stories she was told by her parents and relatives, and written accounts of the war serves as a cathartic process, because 'going through the gory details of war is perhaps the only authentic psychological and spiritual cleansing exercise for the individual or group who went through all manner of harrowing experiences' (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 77-78).

*Half of a Yellow Sun* contains what Philip Bagu calls "the historical truth and the artistic truth" (49) both of which are legitimate and valid for our understanding of the contentious issues but operate on different pedestals, though they complement each other. The result of this fusion of the facts of history and the art of imagination is "the story of sadness, loss, resilience and destruction that is *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, 40). But the book is not just about loss and destruction, it is also a book of self-determination, survival and hope - qualities which Ugwu perhaps the most rounded character in the narrative is endowed. Adichie foreshadows the hope of a new enlightened Nigeria through Ugwu's initial encounter with modernity when he first arrives at Odenigbo's quarters to find spacious rooms wide enough for him to walk around the house up and down, touching books, curtains, furniture and plates, "and when it got dark, he turned the light on and marveled at how bright the bulb that dangled from the ceiling was..." (HYS, 7). Usually, books and light bulbs symbolize enlightenment, hope and optimism. Unfortunately, it is the darkness of war and the horrors and trauma which characterize war that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is often associated with and that is the memory that often lingers in the mind of the reader. This negative memory is not surprising since the book begins with a symbolic reference to the negative history of Nigeria. The title of the book 'Half of a Yellow Sun' is symbolic, suggesting the genesis of the Nigerian dystopia. The title is a reference to the symbol of the Biafran flag. The sun is not full, but half, a reference to the incompleteness of the fledgling republic (Biafra) and its indebtedness to the other half (Nigeria).

The title could also be seen as the author's affirmation of the idea that 'Nigerian identity is burdensome' (Nyairo, 21). This idea is further projected in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where Nigeria is described as 'a collection of fragments held in a fragile clasp' (HYS, 158). This is perhaps a reference to the country as a product of a colonial administration which for administrative convenience welded together disparate tribes without the people's consent. The result is the perennial struggle for supremacy among the tribes in a bid to fill the power vacuum left by the colonial masters at independence. Professor Ezekia in the novel confirms the above position thus "one must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race" (HYS, 20).

The historical fact of ethnicity and race as the bane of Nigeria's unity is projected in the novel through incidents that resonate with the failure of the leadership to identify and harness the positive aspects of Nigeria's history for national unity. For example, early in the novel, prior to the outbreak of hostilities precipitated by the pogrom in Kano against the Igbo, the predominant northern natives refuse to admit Igbo children into government schools. In order to educate their children, the Igbo Union constructs an Igbo Union Grammar School (HYS, 38). Why would Igbo children not be admitted into government schools in the same country? It is because the Igbo are viewed as a people who "want to control everything", they are further seen as uppity, clannish and controlling the markets, being very Jewish (HYS, 154).

The growing resentment against the Igbo is further demonstrated in Kano where Olanna, who is visiting Mohammed, is warned against going to Sabon Gari to visit her relatives because "Igbo bodies are lying on Airport Road" and a man with a loudspeaker pressed to his mouth shouts in Hausa "The Igbo must go, the infidels must go. The Igbo must go" (HYS, 147). Even the army is not spared the unpleasant consequences of ethnicity as a systematic method of identifying and eliminating Igbo Officers is adopted as part of the government's "ethnic balance policy" (HYS, 141).

The failure of the government to douse the tension gradually leads to secession by Biafra, and later war. The tense and precarious relationship between the Biafran Igbo and the mostly Hausa

Northern Nigeria is pictured in the conflicts between different characters in the novel, especially between Olanna and Kainene. Though fraternal-twins like Nigerians from diverse cultural backgrounds during their childhood, they behaved like identical twins as they thought the same way and could read each other's mind without words. But now as adults, Kainene and Olanna have become so different that "they never talked about anything anymore" (HYS, 31), the same way Nigeria and Biafra could not dialogue to prevent the war.

The inability of the twins to dialogue later is not because of their realisation of their physiognomic, emotional or ideological differences, but largely because of their refusal to recognize and accept their similarities to each other. Their relationship is strained by an act of betrayal by Olanna, who in a depressed state, gets her twin sister's lover, Richard, drunk with alcohol. In their drunken state, they make love. Kainene learns of this betrayal and becomes withdrawn from her twin sister, Olanna. Their refusal to discuss and accept the reality of the betrayal, results in a stifling silence which ultimately implodes on them – a symbol of the civil war.

Ironically, the war creates an opportunity for unlikely friendships to be forged. Kainene and Olanna rise above their differences and communicate freely. Kainene works initially at a refugee camp where she supplies food and later sets up an orphanage, where she cares for the needy. Olanna and Mrs Muokelu set up a school for displaced children. The school is later bombed, but Olanna makes room in her house to run the school. Meanwhile, the ingenuity of the Nsukka intellectuals like Prof Ezeka becomes evident in the ingenious development of weapons such as Ogbunigwe, drugs and fuel to prosecute the war. This kind of collaboration in times of crisis forms part of the positive memories of the war that can enhance national unity.

It is, however, in Ugwu that Adichie encapsulates her vision and optimism. Ugwu's love and devotion to his master, Odenigbo and Olanna are evident in his efforts to foil mama's attempt to displace Olanna and make Amala Odenigbo's wife. He joins with others to care for refugees and Kano pogrom survivors. He even teaches in Olanna's school for children. Ugwu's transformation is rapid and symbolic – from a naïve village boy to a steward, soldier, teacher, historian and writer. Ugwu is able to cope with and deal the horrors of his experiences in the war better than his master, because whereas Odenigbo becomes more disillusioned and withdrawn, Ugwu finds his voice through writing and talking. In fact, Ugwu is one of the three narrators through whose lenses the reader sees some of the most horrifying experiences of the war. His writings in the book with the title 'The World Was Silent When We Died' help to transmute Olanna's experiences from vague, fleeting memory to concrete history for posterity. Adichie reports:

Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnest 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 (HYS, 312).

When all hope is lost in the war, it is Ugwu's book that keeps hope alive. The title of Ugwu's book is a timely reminder that national unity can only be achieved from within and not from without. Thus, like Ugwu the historian, Adichie chronicles the pain of our national catastrophe to soothe her pain and her people's pain because as Nwachukwu Agbada has observed: "Creative writing serves as an outlet for an individual's pent-up feelings, for his passion and for the expression of his hopes or disappointments. Writing could serve a stabilizing role in its writer's psychological make-up" (7-8).

While Adichie endeavours to come to terms with the reality of the war, she remains committed to the demands of emotional truth by maintaining a non-partisan stance in spite of her pain. This quality of the author is perhaps what prompts Charles Nnolim to remark that "the absence of a judgmental stance or apportioning blames is part of the greatness of this novel" (149).

### **3. HISTORY, MEMORY AND NATIONAL UNITY IN THERE WAS A COUNTRY.**

The literary scene in Nigeria witnessed a flurry of fiery exchange of venomous vituperations between critics on either side of the divide created by the publication in 2012 of Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country (...a Country)*.

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The last time such literary furore was witnessed in Nigeria was in the 1980's following the publication of Chinweizu et al's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* which contains a scathing criticism of the style of Eurocentric writers like Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and J. P. Clark.

However, the controversy that greeted the publication of *...a Country* was unprecedented because of the dimensions of the criticism which were not just literary but smacked of political, ethnic and ideological motivations. The reactions, to say the least, reveal the latent acrimony that characterises the veneer of national unity. Tope Oriola for example, reports that "since the release of excerpts from Achebe's *There Was a Country*", controversy, debates and insults have broken loose in the media and social networks over one of Achebe's personal understandings of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war" (1). Similarly, Okey Ndibe writes that *...a Country* "has been subjected to a barrage of 'reviews' by Nigerian commentators eliciting "both harsh denunciations and effusive praise", resulting in a "carnival scale reception" (1).

Of course, it is not surprising that *...a Country* should generate what Obi Enweze describes as the current fiercest battle within Nigeria's social milieu (quoted in Inyang, 1). The main reason for the war of words that heralded the publication of *...a Country* is undoubtedly because it deals with a most sensitive part of Nigeria's ugly past - the Nigerian Civil War - which many Nigerians, particularly the political class, would prefer to forget. The story of the civil war is indeed a dark spot in Nigeria's history. But it also constitutes a very volatile issue in national discourse especially among the Igbo, who bore the brunt of the war while it lasted. However, the outburst of many of the critics against *...a Country* at best invites the question and only serves to submerge the intractable and delicate issues that should be of primary concern to Nigerians. For example, what were the remote and immediate causes of the war? Why has the memory of the war remained a sore-point among Nigerians four decades after it ended? How can memories of the war and the lessons thereof improve leadership and enhance national unity? The need to address the above issues adequately and preserve the history and memory of the war for national unity by posterity may have informed Achebe's writing of *...a Country*. The author himself provides an insight into this in the introduction of the book where he states that:

It is for the sake of the future of Nigeria, for our children and grandchildren, that I feel it is important to tell Nigeria's story, Biafra's story, our story, my story (*...a Country*, 3).

Implicit in the above extract is the need to preserve the memory of the war against the threat of amnesia. This position is supported by Chimamanda Adichie as part of her reasons for writing the war novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. According to her:

The thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men, women and children enrages me, because *I don't ever want to forget*<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis in Italics).

While Adichie who did not witness the war chooses to preserve this memory through fiction, Achebe who witnessed the war and was in fact, a part of the history of the war chooses to preserve the memory using a fusion of fiction and non-fiction. The choices may have been informed by the fact that we remember differently.

The task of confronting an ugly history is usually daunting, but as Edward Brathwaite has asserted "it is only a fool who points at his roots with the left hand". No doubt, Achebe recognises the wisdom in Brathwaite's words above, and as it is typical of Achebe, he falls back on the philosophy of the Igbo proverb that "a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body" (*...a Country*, 1). But the interface between history and memory is usually a controversial and complex one, because the active participants in the events of history often remember differently, thereby imposing on history a subjectivity that is sometimes disputable.

Interestingly, Achebe in *...a Country* makes no pretence about the subjectivity of his memory of the history he sets out to narrate. He admits that his story is told from "sources of my own perspective" (*...a Country*, 3). Achebe's admission underscores the liberality of collective memory. Consequently, it is possible to have different versions of historical memory that reflect ethnic, social, religious or political inclinations. The multi-ethnic composition of Nigeria

compounds collective memory, making it vulnerable to controversy. Jeffery Olick and Joyce Robbin affirm “cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history” (133).

Achebe’s ... *a Country* is one of the versions of the stories vying for a place in Nigeria’s history. However, Achebe’s version raises a lot of dust, because of the perception of the book in some quarters as politicizing history in favour of the Igbos against some other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Achebe’s position, argue some of these critics, poses a threat to national unity. Curiously, Achebe seems to anticipate such reaction when he posits in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* that “the question of a writer’s involvement in politics is a matter of definition” (58). Similarly, Ngugi argues “what is important is not only the writer’s honesty and faithfulness...but also his attitude to these big social and political issues.... Politics is part and parcel of literary territory” (477-478). This is not to insinuate that Achebe is partisan in his story for there is an intricate yet intriguing relationship among collective memory, shared history and national politics a - relationship which literature constantly explores and exploits for societal regeneration. A clear understanding of this matrix of relationships coupled with an understanding of the complementary roles of history and memory provides a veritable platform for an unbiased reading of ...*a Country*. Through the vehicles of history and memory, Achebe identifies the balkanization of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1885 as the starting point of the tension that for long tugged at the seams of our national fabric. That conference, according to Achebe, “created new boundaries that did violence to African ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states” (1).

In the first part of the book, Achebe traces how this tension remained latent throughout the period of colonial domination – a gestation period that produced elite members of the “lucky generation” that saw independence and later became major characters when the tension exploded into a conflagration that engulfed and almost consumed the nation. In part two, the author focuses attention on the civil war and identifies the major gladiators, their actions and inactions, possible interests and his own personal experiences during the war. Issues that have generated most of the controversies associated with the book such as the infamous war policies of the Nigerian government, especially the obnoxious policy of economic blockade and starvation vis-à-vis the role of Chief Obafemi Awolowo are the concern of part three. It also tries to counter balance the claims of genocide from both sides of the conflict. In part four, the author stretches out Nigeria like a patient on a table and diagnoses corruption and indiscipline as well as leadership failure as the major problems of Nigeria and the greatest threat to national unity. However, the author provides an open window to peer into Nigeria’s future and provides possible remedies.

In this historical excursion, Achebe juxtaposes his war time poems with the story of Nigeria to emphasise the symbiotic relationship between literature and history. Although the text examines several factors that preceded and gradually led to the civil war in 1967, its major preoccupation is the war. The author indicts the ruling class in Nigeria, the British government and the United Nations for their duplicity in the war - a situation which resulted largely from their ignorance of or purposeful disregard for Nigeria’s peculiar history. The author takes a swipe at the ruling class for their ineptitude, incompetence and lack of a sense of history. According to him:

The chaos enveloping...Nigeria was due to the incompetence of the Nigerian ruling class. They clearly had a poor grasp of history and found it difficult to appreciate and grapple with Nigeria’s ethnic and political complexity (69).

These leaders tended to forget that for most Nigerians, like most Africans, ethnic pride took precedence over national pride. Odenigbo in *Half of a Yellow Sun* says: “the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe” (20). But, the leaders could not harness the positive aspects of the strident successes of some tribes over the others for national development, instead, these strides were viewed as an attempt by the tribe to dominate others and ultimately monopolise political power. Consequently, there arose an entrenched culture of resentment against any tribe seen as a threat to the others because of its dogged and enterprising spirit. This was true of the Igbo, a situation that made Achebe to lament that “the adventurous spirit of the Igbo could have been harnessed by committed leaders for the modernization and development of Nigeria” (...*a Country*, 76). Rather than harness this spirit, the leaders introduced the federal character policy which promotes mediocrity. For the author, this constitutes more threat than does the promotion of ethnic solidarity. Achebe believes that this culture of ethnic resentment which was tolerated by

the government of the day was largely responsible for the pogrom in Kano against the Igbo and thus heightened the tension that culminated in the civil war.

Part three of the book, whose main thrust is the war, receives the hardest knocks from critics mainly because Achebe singles out the Yoruba revered sage, Obafemi Awolowo, for criticism. Achebe berates Awolowo for articulating and implementing the 'infamous and regrettable' (232) policy of Economic Blockade and Starvation aimed at decimating and emasculating the Biafrans. Achebe is miffed by Awolowo's attempt to justify the policy in a statement credited to him (Awolowo): "All is fair in war and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don't see why we should feed our enemies fat in order for them to fight harder" (Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations*, quoted in *...a Country*, 233). Achebe does not hide his indignation at Awolowo's war strategy which to him (Achebe) is nothing but a veiled, insidious plan to whittle down the Igbo both in strength and in number through starvation. He contends:

Awolowo saw the dominant Igbo at the time as the obstacles...and when the opportunity arose the Nigeria –Biafra war – his ambition drove him into a frenzy to go to every length to achieve his dreams. In the Biafran case it meant hatching up a diabolical policy to reduce the numbers of his enemies significantly through starvation - eliminating over two million people,... (*... A Country*, 233).

It is mostly this excoriation of Awolowo that elicited the barrage of attacks against *... a Country*. However, it is important to remember that Achebe's position is informed by his personal experiences during the war and rather than just try to reify the pain and trauma he feels, he tries to transcend and exorcise it by expressing his 'impression' through writing. Besides, the author attempts to strike a balance in his projection of the actions of the key characters in the war by castigating Ojukwu the Biafran leader for his "belligerence and unwillingness to concede the superiority of humanitarian over political considerations, which made it impossible to reach any agreement about the methods to be used for moving relief supplies through the Federal blockade" (quoted in *...a Country*, 292).

Whether Achebe's memory of the facts of the war in connection with the above is 'true' or not is immaterial now. What is relevant here is that by writing *...a Country*, the author has succeeded in preventing our collective memory and history from sinking into atrophy and amnesia, thereby facilitating the process of collective exorcism. As James Berger argues, "only if traumas are remembered can they lose, gradually but never entirely, their traumatic effects" (415).

Interestingly, Achebe's indictment extends to the British government and the United Nations for their roles in Nigeria's political development. For example, Achebe criticizes Britain for its overt support for Nigeria during the war, a support which was not informed by the need for national unity but by selfish interests. Achebe cites Michael Leapman's report as a reference point:

Cabinet papers for (1967), just released, show how the decision to continue arming Nigeria was not based on arguments for or against secession, or on the interests of its people... "the sole immediate British interest is to bring (Nigerian) economy back to a condition in which our substantial trade and investment can be further developed" (*...a Country*, 99).

Meanwhile, the primacy of British economic interests over national unity in Nigeria was evident just before independence with the eleventh hour introduction of *Sir James Robertson* as New governor general "so that its compliant friends in (Northern Nigeria) would win power, dominate the country, and serve British interests after independence". (*... a Country*, 50). It is not surprising therefore that Nigeria's democracy "was compromised from its birth" (51).

As for the United Nations, Achebe sees its silence, and indecision during the Nigeria-Biafra war as unfortunate and tragic. According to him, "had the United Nations been more involved, there would not have been as many atrocities, as much starvation, as much death" (*... a Country*, 212). But Achebe knows that although the international community may have contributed to the dysfunctional state of Nigeria, the leadership in Nigeria which he finds culpable will be largely responsible to right the wrongs of the past and reposition Nigeria's history to strengthen national unity. The key, he submits, "lies in the manner in which the leadership of the country is selected" (244).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Irrespective of how Nigerians from whatever tribe feel about the events of the 1960s, particularly the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, the fact remains that the events have become a significant, albeit painful part of Nigeria's history that can never be wished away. Like Toni Morrison's, *Beloved* which the author insists is "not a story to pass on", yet is set down in writing, not to pass on the pain nor to instigate revenge but to interrogate history and make its pain tolerable and bearable, Adichie and Achebe insist on a story that must be told so that a healing process which ostensibly began with the "no victor no vanquished proclamation and the 3Rs programme (of the Gowon administration) which for about four decades on still crawls can be completed through a convocation of a national summit for reconciliation. The success of the narratives lies in their non-judgmental tone which allows the reader to digest the painful memories without anger. Adichie achieves this through her multiple narrators - Ugwu, Olanna and Richard, who bring to bear on the story their diverse perspectives, while Achebe's story, though told from a personal perspective benefits from a multiplicity of sources so that the memory can allow for both criticism and the possibility of a national reconciliation.

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