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“Fragments held in a fragile clasp”: The struggle for identity in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the construction of identity in the post-colonial society depicted in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). Two important concepts applied in this analysis are *Us* versus *the Others*, and how the characters construct their identity by aligning and demonizing other groups in relation to these concepts in order to define themselves. This paper also argues that the identities constructed around these concepts often have a contradictory character, as they tend to disregard the complex foundation which defines post-colonial Nigeria and its inhabitants, and instead several characters rally around simple notions such as ethnicity in their search for identity. The analysis also incorporates simplified versions of some of Homi Bhabha's concepts which describes the process of constructing an identity in a colonial society, namely *Hybridity*, *Ambivalence*, and *Mimicry*. Bhabha's terminology enables a more in-depth inquiry into the complicated process of asserting one's identity in a post-colonial society, and how influences from both the colonizers and the native culture affects this process. In the end, this paper shows that the statements made by several characters have a contradictory nature as they view themselves as closely aligned with certain groupings in 1960s Nigeria, but their actions do not mirror how they perceive themselves. Another aspect which this paper touches upon is the correlation between having a *hybrid* identity in a post-colonial society and feelings of anxiety in connection to the character's native culture.

Introduction

This is an essay about identity, in which I will discuss how the notion of *Us* and *the Others* is depicted and defined by the characters within a work of fiction, namely Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). The process of asserting what *Us* consists of usually involves the alignment of one's behavior with those whom one considers as peers, but it also involves positioning this *Us* in contrast to what we regard as *the Others*. When the discussion concerns how identities are constructed, one question usually resurfaces: Is it our environment or is it our genetic code which determines how we turn out? While the concept of *tabula rasa* is not often brought up in these discussions, most would agree that our surroundings play a big part in a person's journey towards finding and defining who they are. By surroundings I refer to factors such as one's family, culture and tradition, financial and social circumstances, which all have an impact on how an individual turns out. But, the notions of *Us* and *the Others* does present a problem when used in a post-colonial setting as there is often an abundance of different ethnicities, traditions, and languages, alongside different experiences of the colonization itself. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the construction of the character's identities on a deeper level, as they are subjected to pressure from several directions being formed which problematizes the usage of *Us* and *the Other*. In order to provide an additional depth to this discussion, the construction of identity in Adichie's novel will be analyzed with Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts *ambivalence*, *mimicry* and *hybridity* as a supporting framework. According to Bhabha, identities in colonial and post-colonial societies are never in binary opposition but rather all part of a melting pot consisting of the native's culture and the colonizers culture. Therefore, Bhabha's theories will be used to discuss the identities of the characters while the notions of *Us* and *the Others* will be used to signify how the characters themselves define their identity. The postcolonial environment brings another interesting aspect into the mix, as many of the individuals born and raised in such a climate come across the notion that their culture is inferior compared to the one brought by the colonizers. Besides investigating how the notions of *Us* and *the Others* are used in connection to the characters identities, this essay will also argue that while several characters in the novel claim to feel at home with certain concepts, habits and traditions, there are various instances where these claims are contradictory and even flat out wrong in comparison to their actions.

Adichie's novel takes off in Nigeria at the start of the 1960s, when the British have just ended their colonial project in the region and handed over the reins to the native population,

resulting in 45 million people deriving from over 250 different ethnic groups with different languages, religions and traditions suddenly being forced to coexist without any neutral oversight. The novel closes ten years later with the ending of the Biafra-war, fought between Nigeria and the seceding state of Biafra which lasted for less than three years before it was defeated and was reabsorbed into Nigeria. The novel follows four characters who all support Biafra during these years, and their journey towards defining themselves in this new, dynamic environment is what this paper seeks to investigate. The first character is Odenigbo, a revolutionary university lecturer and mathematician who initially praises the revolt and dreams of a nation for the Igbo, free from Western influence. Odenigbo is active in the conflict as a writer supporting Biafra and his home also functions as a weekly meeting place for a group of academics who get together to drink and joke around, but most importantly to discuss politics, both domestic and internationally. Another character is Olanna who initially is Odenigbo's partner and later becomes his wife. Olanna's family owns a large construction company which regularly handles governmental contracts, and which places them amongst the Nigerian elites in regard to income and assets. Olanna herself still maintains relations with her rural relatives despite her upper-class status, but her relationship with them is problematic to say the least. There is also Odenigbo's houseboy, Ugwu, who moves away from his poor rural village into the university city of Nsukka and is educated by his 'Master' on subjects such as language, writing, and politics. Compared to the others, Ugwu is uneducated and initially unaware of the ethnic powder keg which is about to start a civil war. Another central character is Richard, a lonely Englishman whose love for Nigerian art prompts him to travel to Nigeria and whose feeling of kinship with the Igbos makes him stay despite the ongoing conflict. In this paper, the main focus will be on how these characters define themselves as both individuals and as a collective in the middle of an ethnically loaded conflict. My thesis is that these characters' actions and thoughts regarding their identity are contradictory on several occasions, and although they claim to feel home at with certain groupings and concepts, their behavior often does not mirror these claims. A major reason for the characters tendencies to contradict themselves stems from their utilization of *Us* and *the Others* in the process of defining their identities. For while these binary oppositions are useful in everyday language, the usage of them in the novel tends to exclude everyone who is not part of the *Us*, which in the end leads to definitions which are skewed since they do not incorporate the complex nature of the post-colonial society and instead focus only on simple traits such as ethnicity.

To analyze these characters, I will draw upon three of Homi Bhabha's concepts regarding identity in postcolonial societies, which will be explained below. There is also a need

to provide a short historical background covering the years leading up to Nigeria's independence and the conflict which broke out seven years after. My investigation will be guided by three main questions concerning how the characters define themselves:

how do the characters define their identity in relation to the concept of *Us*, and how do they contrast this definition with the concept of *the Other*?

In what ways can these definitions of the character's identities be labeled as contradictory?

As a last note on my approach to this analysis, I will be using sources in this paper which cover Nigeria, Nigerian culture, and Biafra respectively from a non-fictional point of view and applying them to how certain characters and occurrences are portrayed in Adichie's novel. While it is extremely important to acknowledge this distinction since the characters in the novel are of course fictional, there are several instances in *Half of a Yellow Sun* where the depiction of the Biafra war corresponds perfectly with the historical facts. Kalu Wosu, senior lecturer at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria, asserts that a close reading of Adichie's novel reveals "its rootedness in verifiable historical facts." (124). The timeline in the novel corresponds well with how the war developed, several characters are based on real people, and the cultural traits in the novel all correspond to Nigerian culture during the 1960s. For these reasons, my analysis may at times venture outside a literary studies perspective during the course of this paper.

Ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity

One of the most important names in the field of postcolonial studies is Homi Bhabha, whose essays on identity and culture in a colonial society were gathered into a complete work in 1994 called *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha's work was partly written as a response to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, in which Said claims that the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized is one of binary opposition in which the colonizers are the dominating power which forces the natives to adapt to their culture and concepts. Bhabha argues against this view and claims that the relationship is instead a spectrum through which both parties interact with each other and that the exchange of culture actually travels in both directions. His term for this state in which the colonizers and their subjects interact is *ambivalence*. In this state, the subjects are not classified as simply resisting or accepting the influence of the colonizer, but instead Bhabha acknowledges that there are aspects which both appeal and appall to the subjugated individuals (153). According to Young, Bhabha borrowed the term from the field of psychoanalysis where it is used to describe a state of "simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object,

person or action” (153). Bhabha’s thesis that the cultural exchange travels in both directions does not imply that the colonized were not oppressed in the colonies, but it does provide them with agency within the complex network of interactions that takes place in a colonial society.

In his work, Bhabha introduces several other concepts which, he argues, are essential to understanding and defining the behavior of both the colonizers and the colonized. One of the concepts defines the colonizer’s approach, in which they implement their own language, education and religion in the colonies, as *mimicry* (122). The term is borrowed from the field of biology and is used to describe the ability of certain insects and animals to mimic the behavior of other creatures in order to gain advantages such as camouflage or to appear as a poisonous species. The concept of *mimicry* is actually two-fold as it can be discussed both from the viewpoint of the colonizers and the colonized. Therefore, an explanation of the colonizers approach will be a good starting point. First and foremost, the wish of the colonizers for the subjugated to mimic them does not translate into a wish for them to become as the colonizers are. In fact, it was often vital to maintain certain differences between the colonizers and the colonized in order to control the colony, as the realization that the conquered were equal to their masters could very well result in uproar or even a complete breakdown of the system. Therefore, the conquered were to be similar but not identical to the colonizers, and this was sometimes achieved by letting the natives keep some cultural traits. As an example of this, Bhabha presents of the case of Charles Grant’s *Observations on the State of Society Among Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* from 1792 (123-124). Grant wished to bring order to an Indian colony which was to be done by implementing the English language and religion. The natives were to adopt the Evangelic faith and they were to be taught uncompromisingly in English in order to be subdued to the colonial rule. Grant made an unorthodox exemption though, as he encouraged them to maintain their caste-system in combination with the Christian faith. By doing so, Grant made sure that the natives would not be able to unite under a new identity and realize the injustice of the colonial system as old boundaries kept them apart.

Mimicry can also be viewed from the perspective of the colonized. Many of them naturally wished to align themselves with their rulers in order to gain advantages. While the results are similar, the difference lies in that it is an implemented system in one case while it is a striving for identity in the other. Many colonized individuals were fascinated with the new inventions, religious systems, food and other things to which they were introduced, and therefore many strove to apply these aspects to their own lifestyle. As the colonizers implemented several western concepts of ruling in the colonies such as governmental bodies and a legal system, many natives were forced to cohere to these systems in order to have any

possibility of advancing in the colonial society (126)-. Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the act of *mimicry* has been deemed degrading by the natives in many colonies as it often involves abandoning one's cultural heritage for the one implemented by foreign rulers.

Another of Bhabha's concept which will be implemented in my investigation is *hybridity*. As was the case with *mimicry*, *hybridity* is also borrowed from biology where it refers to the practice of combining two different species into a new breed. Bhabha's theory applies the term to the construction of identity and, simply put, it refers to how identities in colonial societies are created as a fusion between influences from colonizers and the native culture (277). Bhabha's theory broke from the previous view of that relationship as binary and instead of the colonizers forcing the colonized to conform, Bhabha concludes that identities are negotiated in a sort of middle-ground in between both cultures, upon which neither one has claim. Natives who are born in a colonial society are extra susceptible to this influence, as they are both familiar with their family's native culture while at the same time being aware that their heritage is undermined by the one put in place by their rulers. As a result, they are often familiar with two languages and two sets of traditions, which in some cases acts as a source of distress due to the notion that their native culture is subordinated by the colonizers culture.

Nigerian independence, the Biafra war, and the years before

Colonizers often sought to unify larger areas under their rule as a mean to simplify the process of controlling and exploiting them, which in several cases resulted in borders being drawn with no regard to ethnicities, religion, culture and similar factors. As Nigeria is home to over 250 different ethnic groups, this paper will only focus on the two that are most relevant to my investigation of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the Igbo and the Hausa, which constituted the main participants in the Biafra war. The Hausa were, and are, the largest ethnic group in Nigeria and are historically connected to the northern parts of the nation. They have been Muslims for several centuries and during a large part of their history they have participated in a large Hausa community in the northern region of today's Nigeria with shared traditions, hierarchy, and political system (Onyuku 5). The Igbos have historically consisted mainly of independent, smaller tribes deriving from the southern parts of Nigeria, who have had connections to one another but who, on the whole, have not had a coherent system of governing nor any real unified Igbo state. For these reasons, the colonizers allowed the Hausa to maintain their political system, their religion, and no missionary schools or hospitals were built in the north, while the

Igbo had missionaries forced upon them and had to accept a stricter form of governing (9). During most of the colonization, the northern region was separated from the rest of Nigeria and they had their own set of laws, basically being treated as a separate nation from the western, eastern, and southern parts of Nigeria (Isichei 390-391). As a result of these complications, the oncoming unification between the states was problematic to say the least. These complications are repeated by Hawley in his article which covers Biafra's history, where he states that "the "nation" that follows colonialism is usually not much of a gift; throughout Africa, in fact, it has been more akin to "the black man's burden", a problematic assemblage of people who frequently enough have little more in common than proximity" (16). The main problem was seemingly the lack of any concepts around which the region could unify, and the divergence between the territories only increase as time went on.

In 1960, the regions were united and formed Nigeria, although it remained a state under the British crown up until 1963 when it became a republic. The independent Nigeria, ruled by a democratic parliament, lasted only for a couple of years until the outbreak of the Biafra war in 1967. Isichei assert that the parliament's short lifespan can be attributed to two factors "the politics of ethnicities and the theory of winner-takes-all" (468). In regard to the mindset of 'winner-takes-all', the financial situation amongst many politicians was initially very fragile. Except for the few who belonged to an old generation of aristocrats, "most politicians had made a desperate and successful struggle to escape rural poverty. The frantic accumulation of wealth was meant to build a wall between themselves and poverty, between their children and poverty" (Isichei 468). In regard to the 'politics of ethnicities' mentioned, several politicians were using ethnicity as part of their campaigning and the language was colored by the demonizing of other ethnicities who were accused of trying to dominate Nigeria, such as one claiming that the Igbos were "striving might and main to penetrate the Western economy thereby exploiting our wealth and riches for themselves." (469). This tense political climate culminated in January 1966 when the first republic fell in a coup.

The coup was carried out by a group of young army majors who claimed that their goal was to stop corruption, with the group stating that:

"Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 per cents, those that seek to keep the country permanently divided so that they can remain in office as Ministers and VIPs of waste, tribalists, the nepotists" (Isichei 471)

While the stated goal was to stop the nation from being divided by “tribalists”, it did not appear that way to most spectators. Out of the seven majors who carried out the coup, six were of Igbo decent, and they not only killed two Northern leaders, one from the West, the finance minister from the mid-West region, and several other high-ranking military officers, but also family members and servants belonging to the politicians. The two regional leaders who were Igbo managed to escape, and while the ones responsible claimed that this was not intended, the coup certainly appeared as an attempt by the Igbos to grab power. A new coup carried out by the Hausa controlled military took place some weeks later and in the time that followed many Igbos in the north started facing persecution and fell victim to mob violence, which caused many Igbos to leave the region (Isichei 472). Due to the tense political climate leading up to the coup, a large part of the Igbo population created an independent state in 1967 known as Biafra in the south west part of Nigeria. The state came to last three years until the Hausa controlled Nigerian army took full control of the area in 1970.

Finding and defining the new *Us*

As I pointed out in my introduction, a central concept in defining *Us* as a group is contrasting *Us* with *the Others*. Out of the four main characters in Adichie’s novel, three of them have already reached adulthood and at the start of the novel they all have a clear sense of who is included in their definition of *Us* and *the Others*. In the case of Odenigbo, *the Others* consist of the West at the start of the novel and is later turned into the Hausa, the enemies of Biafra. The difference is striking when the adults are compared to Ugwu, as he starts his journey by travelling from his rural village into the university city of Nsukka in order to become Odenigbo’s houseboy. Before being introduced to the urban middle-class lifestyle in his new home, Ugwu seems contented with his tribal upbringing and traditions but that quickly changes when he compares it with the big house filled with books, a fridge and a radio. These impressions quickly supply him with the notion that his culture and experiences are of lesser value than those connected with the middle-class lifestyle, and his act of mimicking his “Master’s” behavior starts almost instantly in order to conform to this lifestyle “He walked on tiptoe from room to room, because his feet felt dirty, and as he did so he grew increasingly determined to please Master, to stay in this house of meat and cold floors.” (7).

According to Madeleine Hron, Ugwu’s function as an adolescent exploring a new, dynamic environment is not unique concept in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and instead she claims that children are a commonly used trope amongst third-generation Nigerian writers such as Adichie.

'Third-generation' refers to those born in the third generation after the Biafra war and whose experience of the war is mostly based on their family's stories or other kinds of witnesses. As the recounts of such horrific experiences may require a generation or two before they can be retold, Nigerian writers of the third generation often use child characters as they view the world through a filter of innocence without being colored by the conflict. Hron states that the typical child in these stories are:

Always intrinsically enmeshed in a cultural and social community, and thus must somehow negotiate ethnic identity or social status in the course of the narrative. In third-generation Nigerians in particular, it becomes apparent that the child's quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization (29)

The children often struggle with their identity when setting out on their journey towards adulthood, a journey which Hron asserts is undertaken in a "hybrid space [where the child] becomes initiated to relations of power, social discourse and their embodied practices" (29). Without contemplating his reasons, Ugwu understands that in order to maintain and eventually permanently obtain this higher quality of life, he must assimilate to all aspects of it. His sense of what is considered as desirable conduct, how power is displayed and other concepts which were so obvious in his village have suddenly been turned on their head. This insight fills him with shame in a double sense, as he is ashamed of his poor upbringing, his inability to speak English and his previous hygiene standards, while at the same time he experiences shame due to the fact that he actually starts to look down on his family and tribe, who have raised and cared for him up to this point.

While Ugwu realizes that his experiences differ severely from Odenigbo's, he is also told of a third party which will try to influence him with false propaganda, namely the West. As previously stated in the section covering Nigeria's history, the schools in southern Nigeria were established by the colonial power and while they did educate children they did so from a Western perspective. As Odenigbo wishes to supply Ugwu with an education, he informs him that there are in fact two answers to every question he will learn in school, the correct one and the lie told by the West. In order to be educated, he will have to learn both and give the incorrect one on the exam while Odenigbo will supply him with books to learn the correct one. Odenigbo tells him the story of Mungo Park, the white man whom the school will claim discovered the Niger river, a statement which is rubbish since their forefathers fished in the river long before

Mungo Park existed, but when Ugwu writes his exam his is supposed to write Mungo Park. While Ugwu understand what Odenigbo is saying, he does not understand why. As he has just been introduced to a new, complex network of power structures, Ugwu can only do his best to assimilate to this new *Us* and accept what he is being told, so he just answers “Yes, sah” while wishing that “this person called Mungo Park had not offended his Master so much” (11). While Odenigbo is inherently negative towards several Western concepts, his view of the Nigerian school system as a megaphone for the West is actually very accurate. While Nigeria had control of education in the early 1960, the colonial power had worked very hard up until that point to maintain a positive image of themselves. Yearly they were arranging the Empire Day, which was basically a celebration of everything good that Britain had accomplished: a large festival where people dressed up and watched parades, and where they sang “God save the queen” and “Rule Britannia” (Aderinto *Empire* 732). Besides the yearly festival where the empire was praised, several Nigerian newspapers were heavy influenced by British culture and promoted “Western education and modern childhood” (Aderinto *Researching* 254). As the pressure of British culture was felt in the school, in the news, and in yearly held festivals held in Nigeria, it does not appear as strange that Odenigbo would make sure to inform Ugwu about the influence of the colonizers.

Regardless of the West’s influence on the school’s curriculum, Odenigbo states that an education is vital for Ugwu if he is to ever understand the problems that plague the newly freed Nigeria, for “how can we resist exploitation if we don’t have the tools to understand exploitation?” (11). Odenigbo is seemingly in the state of *ambivalence* here, in which he takes advantages of tools provided by the colonial power to fight it, while never giving an inch on his conviction that Nigeria should be free from Western influence. Ashcroft makes a statement regarding a similar concept in a chapter from his work which covers how resistance is expressed within a colonial society. As opposed to a resistance built on blood and rioting, this version of resistance uses *ambivalence* “to ‘imitate’ transformatively, to take the image of the colonial model and use it in the process of resistance, the process of self-empowerment” (Ashford *Post-colonial Transformation* 23-24). By adopting Western ideas and turning them against Nigeria’s oppressors, Odenigbo is able to negotiate a *hybrid* identity in which he applies the useful concepts of colonization as a form of resistance.

Ugwu’s striving to become like Odenigbo can be likened to the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, as Ugwu feels inferior in comparison with his new “Master” and uses *mimicry* as a way to obtain this higher quality of life. It is worth noting that Odenigbo does not actively try to subdue Ugwu in any way similar to the colonial approach. In fact, he

treats him a lot better than several of the other houseboys on their street who all sleep on the floor and do not have the option to choose what they will cook for dinner as Ugwu has (17). After a couple of weeks of working as a houseboy, Ugwu has already adopted several of his “Master’s” habits and through his *mimicry* he has now obtained what should be described as a *hybrid* identity. During this period, Ugwu receives the news that his mother has fallen ill, so Odenigbo offers to take her to a city doctor and to let her stay at his home afterwards in order to rest in a calm environment. This is the first time since Ugwu left his village that he meets his mother, and it is evident through their conversation that Ugwu’s notion of *Us* has shifted from his fellow Igbo villagers to Odenigbo’s modern lifestyle:

‘...what will kill me is that smell.’ ‘What smell?’ ‘In their mouth. I smelt it when your madam and master came in to see me this morning and also when I went to easy myself’ ‘Oh. That is toothpaste. We use it to clean our teeth.’ Ugwu felt proud saying we, so that his mother would know that he too used it.’ But she did not look impressed. She snapped her fingers and picked up her chewing stick. ‘What is wrong with using a good atu?’ (91-92)

The most important word to note from the passage above is, of course, ‘we’, which clearly displays that Ugwu has in fact not only adopted the middle-class lifestyle but that he actually identifies himself via this new *Us*. But his mother’s reaction is also an interesting reflection of Ugwu’s change, as she seems annoyed by her son’s new habit. While she finds the smell of toothpaste nasty in itself, she also questions the fact that Ugwu has seemingly replaced the chewing stick, a traditional method of maintaining oral hygiene in Nigeria, with a Western invention. As I mentioned in my section covering Bhabha’s concepts, the act of *mimicry* is often seen as something negative amongst many natives, as it meant giving up parts of your cultural heritage. Evidently, Ugwu has given up a part of his village identity in order to obtain this new exciting lifestyle which has enabled him to read, write, and discuss formerly unknown subjects in English.

If the relationship between Ugwu and Odenigbo is analyzed via Bhabha’s terminology as similar to that of a colonizer and the colonized by the claim Ugwu tries to assimilate through *mimicry*, it must be added that he is in a state of *ambivalence* as well. Ugwu does not simply accept every aspect of Odenigbo as correct, rather, he regularly questions statements made by his master. Ugwu’s status as an adolescent combined with all the new impressions he comes across often causes him distress, as he has a hard time deciding which side to support. In the

example above, he proudly regards himself as being one with the modern, middle-class Nigerians, but in an earlier scene when Odenigbo comes to his village to pick up his mother the contrast between Ugwu's old and new ideal fills him with anxiety:

Ugwu suddenly wished that Master would not touch his mother because her clothes smelled of age and must, and because Master did not know that her back ached and her cocoyam patches always yielded a poor harvest and her chest was indeed on fire when she coughed. What did master know anyways, since all he did was shout with his friends and drink brandy at night? (90).

Ugwu's distress is evidently two-fold here, as he believes that Odenigbo is looking down on his mother due to her poor hygiene and rural way of life, and the notion fills him with anger towards his employer. At the same time, Ugwu himself is ashamed of his mother for to the same reasons which he suspects Odenigbo does so. The middle portion of the quote above which regards Ugwu's mother's lack of success in cultivating cocoyams might be viewed as insignificant, but I find that it is the most interesting part of Ugwu's critique of Odenigbo. While it is expressed in a state of agitation and conflicting feelings of shame, Ugwu is basically criticizing his Master for his lack of insight, both in regard to his mother's character but also to the Igbo tribal society. This is an important factor, as Odenigbo himself is Igbo and views his cultural heritage as a member of the Igbo tribe as a vital part of his identity despite not socializing with any tribal Igbos besides his houseboy. I will leave this critique of Odenigbo here as it will be developed further at a later stage of this paper.

Ugwu's anger is only temporary, which is evident by his proud statement regarding his dental care made in the conversation which takes place a few days afterwards. As time goes on, he step by step replaces his ideas of what is preferable behavior and characteristics with those supplied by Odenigbo. When the two are introduced for the first time in Odenigbo's home, Ugwu compares Odenigbo's muscular body to that of Ezeague, the man who holds the wrestling record in his home village (6). After he has worked as a houseboy for some time, the foundation of these comparisons is moved from the members of his tribe and instead Odenigbo is regarded as the vantage point for what are deemed as desirable characteristics.

While Ugwu's identity is still being shaped during the course of the novel, Olanna and Odenigbo have already established their notions of *Us* and *the Others* in post-colonial Nigeria. But despite this, there are still some conflicting feelings in regard to their relationship with tribal citizens of the nation. The most interesting case of these conflicting feelings is found in

Olanna, who has been raised amongst the top 1% elite in Nigeria, but who still maintains a relationship with those of her relatives who live according to tribal standards. Just as Ugwu experiences shame in relation to the members of his tribe, the difficulties in Olanna's relationship with her tribal relatives is characterized by a two-fold agony as she wishes to identify with their lifestyle, but she is unable to comprehend their customs and is in fact repulsed by several aspects of their way of life.

During a visit to her cousin's village, Olanna informs her cousin that she plans on moving in with Odenigbo without marrying him, which causes her cousin to be bewildered. According to her, it is only women like Olanna "that knows too much Book" who are able to just move in with a man without marrying him, for if a woman belonging to an Igbo tribe waits too long they will "expire" (41). Her cousin claims that a woman's duty is to find a husband or else she has failed to uphold the social and cultural demands put upon her by her tribal society. Olanna instead proclaims that her cousin is still young and should focus on sewing instead of starting a family, despite the cultural pressure. Olanna's suggestion strongly suggests a lack of insight into the limited choices available to tribal women, as her cousin stated even before Olanna's suggestion that all of her female friends have already married and moved away to live with their respective husbands. While Olanna seems to not comprehend the tribal norms and traditions, she strongly wishes to identify herself with their lifestyle, but secretly she is far from comfortable in the environment:

Olanna wished she could shift her stool closer to the door, to fresh air. But she didn't want aunty Ifeka, or Arize, or even the neighbor to know that the smoke irritated her eyes or throat or that the sight of the cockroach eggs nauseated her. She wanted to seem used to it all, to this life (43).

Olanna's identity has evidently gone through the process of *hybridization* which is what causes her to feel distressed in connection with her rural relatives. Due to her family's financial situation, Olanna has been able to travel the world. She has lived in London for quite some time and gotten accustomed to every aspect of the Western lifestyle, such as music, clothes and other luxuries, all unavailable and unfamiliar to her family in the Nigerian countryside. Despite not having much common ground stand on, Olanna still has a desperate need to feel connected with her rural relatives and to comfortably identify with their way of life. Ashford brings up an example in *Post-colonial Transformation* which he uses to support the claim that the opposition between the colonizers and the colonized is not a binary one, but I believe that it is applicable

to how Olanna tries to associate with her tribal relatives. In the example, Ashcroft compares the experience of colonization with being oppressed within one's family by an authoritarian family figure, stating that:

the experience [...] depending on their age, gender, and social role, could be entirely different from each other. Similarly, people could give entirely different interpretations of historical episodes based on how they want to identify themselves. They could take a group stand for political or moral reasons on a matter of which themselves might have never had a direct experience or from which they might have in fact benefited (22)

Olanna is seemingly trying to reconnect with her cultural heritage, wanting to 'seem used to' an identity which has somehow been lost along the way and replaced by her *hybrid*, Western-influenced self. These kinds of attempts to re-discover a lost identity are discussed by Stuart Hall's article Cultural Identity and Diaspora, where he concludes that attempts of these kind are often futile in the sense that they assume the existence of a vital trait, a fixed set of characteristic from the past which can be discovered and used to reinstate the original self. The main reason for this futility is that "[The cultural identity] undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power." (225). As the *hybrid* identities in a colonial society are constructed by influences from several different directions, the end result is a mix which does not correspond completely to either the native culture or to the colonizers'. The anxiety connected to this sense of being in a middle ground with no foothold on either side is partly a reason to why this search for something original which has been lost is undertaken. Olanna's anxiety is connected to her wanting to feel at home with her tribal relatives while at the same time feeling disgusted by their way of life. She desperately seeks a definite *Us* with which to align herself, but she is unable to fit her own *hybrid* identity within the definition which she receives through her rural relatives. The strict notions of *Us* versus *the Others* have evidently a hard time accommodating identities which have been subjected to such a complex network of cultural, social, and ethnic influences, and are seemingly bound to fail in this instance.

The 'others'

The end of colonization in Nigeria during the early 1960s was a seemingly happy occurrence as the nation was to be self-governed for the first time ever. As we know, it only took seven years for the Igbo to create their own state and a civil war to break out which in the end claimed millions of lives. Early on in the *Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha asks a question which captures the essence of what many think about when hearing about the outcome of Nigeria's liberation:

How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of value, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2)

Although the Hausa and the Igbo did not share traditions nor religious beliefs, they were both victims of the same colonial power which could have been used as a base for unity after their independence. But as I have shown in the section covering Nigeria's history, the colonizers used the colonial approach in order to subdue and divide the region. They enforced religious and educational standards in Nigeria except in the north where the Hausa were able to maintain most of their cultural integrity, and therefore they did not create any real standard for the nation to unify around after the end of the colonial rule. This difference in treatment, one might call it favoritism, actually became a breeding ground for dissent and even hate when the various ethnic groups finally were forced to interact on their own terms. In his article which discusses Nigeria's democratization process, Williams brings up yet another missing factor which could have been used as a foundation for a unified Nigeria:

A weak state, lacking in national cohesion and relying solely on the power of coercion, was further weakened and delegitimized by the lack of a solid intellectual base. Intellectual affiliations were formed on the basis of regional and ethnical loyalties rather than identification with the state (294)

These affiliations based on regional and ethnical loyalties came to fuel the conflict which in the end resulted in the Biafra war, and they are also amongst the core traits which are often used to define *Us* and *the Others*. And as later examples will show, several characters in the novel use ethnicity as the foundation for distinguishing their own group from *the Others*.

But before discussing the ethnic aspect involved in definitions of *the Others*, I would like to present an example of the concept from the novel which does not include ethnicity but instead shows the importance of having a distinct *Others* against which oneself can be defined. As I have previously mentioned, Olanna's parents are amongst the Nigerian elite and through lucrative government contracts they have been able to obtain enough wealth to provide their two daughters with apartments and imported cars. In the scene in question, Olanna's family is holding a dinner with one of Nigeria's minister as their guest to discuss one of these potential contracts. During the meal, their servant Maxwell is carrying out food to the table but to the disappointment of Olanna no one around the table except her is thanking him for it, which she finds degrading "it was such a simple thing to do, to acknowledge the humanity of people who served them. She had suggested it once; her father said he paid them good salaries, and her mother said thanking them would give them room to be insulting" (30). To treat their servants with common decency would be to endanger the master-servant relationship established by Olanna's parents and their servants, as if them being equals would give them room to oppose orders. The servants are supposed to fulfill their function within the household and nothing else, and the relationship is to be maintained for that reason alone.

The relationship in question carries connotations to another one which has shaped Nigeria, namely the one between the colonizers and the colonized. When the colonizers were trying to induce the colonized population to *mimicry* them, the goal was never for natives to be identical to their rulers. Because, you cannot control individuals who believe themselves to be your peers. This strive to maintain such a relationship is also brought up by Isichei in *A History of Nigeria*, where she asserts that many of those who had managed to accumulated wealth in 1960s Nigeria had done so in an explosive way, quickly gathering enough money to place themselves amongst the elites and they were ready to protect this position at all costs (468). Ashford makes a similar point in *Post-colonial Transformation*, stating that the sudden absence of Western colonial powers left a power vacuum in the newly freed nation which was often filled by the indigenous elites rather than the power structure being rebuilt from the ground up (20). In an earlier section, I discussed how Ugwu uses *mimicry* to copy Odenigbo's behavior and habits. Olanna's parents have surely used the same approach in order to obtain their position and now when their wealth is secured, they have shifted from using mimicry from the vantagepoint of the subjugated and instead placed themselves on top of a power structure very similar to the one implemented by the colonizers. And while it is indicated that Olanna's parents have climbed the social ladder quickly during their lifetime, their new definition of *Us* is still very narrow as it seemingly excludes everyone who is not amongst the elite.

The family's background is only mentioned at one occasion in the book when Odenigbo's mother, who utterly despises Olanna, mentions rumors she has heard about how the family came into their wealth:

“I heard her father came from a family of lazy beggars in Umannachi until he got a job as a tax collector and stole from hard-working people. Now he has opened many businesses and is walking around in Lagos and answering a big man” (97).

While this background is neither confirmed nor denied, it does fit perfectly with the description provided by Isichei regarding Nigerians who managed to quickly gather absurd amounts of capital before the colonial rule had ended. This would also explain why Olanna is still close to her rural relatives, as several generations of wealth would have made it improbable that she would both associate with them and strive to connect with their way of life. If family's backstory is correct, the quickness by which Olanna's parents assert their differences from their servants is certainly interesting as their own background seem even more humble. As previously mentioned, a system was often implemented by the colonizers in which the only way to success is to play according to their rules, and Olanna's parents have certainly adopted the whole mindset in order to obtain and maintain their advantageous situation.

Previously I have discussed how Ugwu's status as an adolescent puts him in a position where he is bombarded with new impressions and constantly has to interpret them as he goes along. I have also mentioned that he is in a state of *ambivalence*, since he is not simply accepting every statement made by Odenigbo and instead he actually tends to question certain matters which he does not understand, while others are seemingly taking them for granted. This ability is important for his function as an, initially, naïve and innocent onlooker when the conflict breaks out. One of the most important examples of his ability to question statements and the willingness of others to demonize *the Others* is when Odenigbo and his circle of academics are reach by the news of the Igbo-led coup which marks the start of what would become the Biafra war:

‘The BBC is calling it an Igbo coup,’ the *chin-chin*—eating guest said. ‘And they have a point. It was mostly Northerners who were killed.’ ‘It was mostly Northerners who were in government,’ Professor Ezeke whispered, his eyebrows arched, as if he could not believe he had to say what was so obvious.

‘The BBC should be asking their people who put the Northerners in government to dominate everybody!’ Master said. Ugwu was surprised that Master and Professor Ezeke seemed to agree. He was even more surprised when Miss Adebayo said, “Those North Africans are crazy to call this an infidel versus righteous thing,” and Master laughed – not the usual derisive laugh before he shifted to the edge of his chair to challenge her; it was a laugh of approval. He agreed with her (125).

These guests are all educated individuals, who are constantly discussing both domestic and international political questions with critique being aimed at the US, Britain and other powers associated with colonialism, but when *the Others* consist of another ethnicity in their own nation the rhetoric quickly shifts. The only ones who question the legitimacy of the massacre is Ugwu and Olanna. Ugwu does so since he does not really comprehend why it is justified and Olanna because one of the ministers killed was the man whom her family dined with in the earlier example. Just as Olanna’s parents asserted their difference from the servant, the academics are quick to assert their differences from the Hausas and they do so by claiming that they deserve it because of their urge to rule. The most vital piece of information from the quotation above is that the participants are actually acknowledging that the Northerners have been placed in their position by the colonizers, represented by the BBC. Despite this, the subject of the former colony’s role in the conflict ends there. Rather than attempting to gather around a common experience of oppression, most of the guests agree that the coup is justified since the Northerners have tried to dominate them, an ethnically based accusation very similar to the real example from the section covering Nigeria’s history, in which a politician accused the Igbos of “striving might and main to penetrate the Western economy thereby exploiting our wealth and riches for themselves.” (Isichei 469). The colonial method of sowing dissent amongst the natives is obviously in effect here, and instead of trying to mend a broken relationship their differences are upheld as vital.

In regard to Ugwu’s reaction to the massacre, he is surprised that most of the attending academics agree that the coup was not only necessary but that it is supposed to mark “the end of corruption” in Nigeria. But while he does not understand exactly who these northerners are and why they deserved to be killed, he knows something about the slimy politicians killed, as he has read about them in literature which Odenigbo has supplied him with “...politicians were not like normal people, they were politicians. [...] they paid thugs to beat up opponents, they bought land and houses with government money, they imported fleets of American cars” (126).

While Ugwu contemplates the justification for killing politicians, he is simultaneously looking at Olanna whose family, unbeknownst to him, fits the profile of these corrupt individuals very well. While her family are not politicians themselves, they own a large construction company which regularly receives government contract which in turn has brought about the majority of their fortune. It is mainly Kainene, Olanna's sister, who manages the company and negotiates these contracts and in most, if not all, cases they include the ten percent mentioned by the majors who undertook the massacre on Nigerian ministers (Isichei 471). The ten percent refers to bribery and more specifically a sum which corresponds to ten percent of the value of the contract in question. In here lies a strange, even hypocritical, contrast between what is said and what occurs. In Ugwu's case, he is mostly repeating opinions which he has heard from Odenigbo, but Odenigbo himself is the one assembling these academics for their regular discussions where these opinions are voiced and agreed upon, while at the same time his partner is actually part of the social sphere which the others wish to purge. Odenigbo has met Olanna's parents, and while the relationship is strained to say the least due to his political opinions, the family's financial situation which extends to Olanna as well does not have any effect on their relationship. The academics attending have a seemingly broad definition of *Us* in this instance, as they are discussing the coup from a binary perspective with the Northerners, the Hausa, on one side and the Igbos on the other. But as the previous sections which have covered Olanna's parents, and her rural relatives, have shown, this dichotomy founded on ethnicity simply cannot deal with the spectrum of experiences and attitudes which these groups consist of. And as the next section will show, Odenigbo repeatedly argues from this binary perspective where ethnicity is the only relevant factor.

Olanna herself is aware of the contradictory character of her lifestyle as she does not want to be dependent on her parent nor be viewed as a spoiled upper-class woman, but she barely makes any effort to oppose their contributions. One occasion when this is noticeable when her parents insist on installing a telephone in the apartment they have bought her "She had protested, but only mildly, the same limp no with which she greeted the frequent deposits to her bank account and the new Impala with the soft upholstery" (103). Olanna is seemingly striving for two things: on one hand she wants to feel at home with her tribal relatives and be a part of traditional Igbo culture, but on the other hand she is too much accustomed to fine dining, traveling and warm baths to actually attempt to assimilate to their way of life. At this point in the novel the war is yet to come and therefore Olanna's anxiety due to her two-fold wishes can be pushed away and ignored. But when they are forced to move away due to the approaching

Hausa army, the veil is removed and Olanna, alongside Odenigbo, is forced to face the reality of how their claims compare to their action.

Hybrid identity, contradictions and cultural influence

Throughout Adichie's novel, the story is confined to Nigeria and Biafra respectively, and while the West is often mentioned in connection to the conflict there is a lack of presence from the colonial powers. By lack presence, I refer to the fact that there is little to not assistance from the West in the shape of military or humanitarian efforts nor representatives or government condemning the conflict. The representation of the West in Adichie's novel is instead visible via certain characters, statements, the consumption of certain goods, but also through cultural influence, and I would like to initiate this discussion with some words regarding Richard Churchill and Susan.

Richard is a native Englishman who moves to Nigeria after reading about a newly excavated collection of Nigerian roped pots in a magazine and decides that he needs to investigate them further. His last name is of course strongly associated with one of Britain's most famous politicians, a connection which he initially uses as an icebreaker, but he is not a representation of the colonial powers in the novel. Instead, Richard is an example of a Westerner who is 'going native', a term which is used to describe Westerners who adopt native culture, partake in native ceremonies, and tries to assimilate to their customs (Ashcroft *Post-Colonial Studies* 106). During the early part of the novel Richard is in a relationship with Susan, another Brit who is not as impressed with Nigeria as her boyfriend. While Nigeria has gained its independence recently, the wounds of colonization are undoubtedly still fresh as Susan remarks that the club where they mingle with other rich Brits have only allowed Africans for a few years: "...But you would not believe how many come now, and they show such little appreciation, really" (236). Susan is evidently a representation of the colonial mindset by her suggesting that Nigerians should be grateful to the whites for allowing them entrance to a club in their own country. She is far from the only white character with racist perceptions though, instead Richard is the exception amongst the white characters in the book, as two British gentlemen are overheard discussing how the Nigerians are certainly not ready to rule themselves when the club setting appears for the first time in the novel.

Richard uses *mimicry* in a way similar to Ugwu, as he is fascinated by everything Nigeria has to offer and he actively tries to learn about their traditions and culture. Richard initially acts as an observer, as on one occasion when he gets to visit Ugwu's village to witness a traditional festival, but he gradually transforms his habits to the extent where he almost

considers himself as a real Igbo. When he is first invited into Odenigbo's for drinks and discussion, many of the attending guests, who are all Africans, are skeptical towards him because of the color of his skin, but Olanna actually likes him to her own surprise "Perhaps it was because he did not have that familiar superiority of English people who thought they understood Africans better than Africans understood themselves" (36). While Richard does not consider himself to understand the Igbos better than themselves, he eventually considers himself equal to them in the sense that he speaks their language and partakes in certain traditions, and he is always extremely proud when other Igbos are surprised by his ability to speak their language. Starting out as a shy Englishman, Richard's perception of *Us* steadily shifts from his native England towards the Igbos of Nigeria. But just as a colonized subject's attempt to *mimicry* is doomed to create a similar but not alike copy of their masters, Richard's self-image as an Igbo is problematic to say the least as he cannot become a copy.

Out of the four main characters in Adichie's novel three are Igbo, and while there is a difference in the way that they interpret and express their cultural heritage they still share a common ancestry. Richards on the other hand is a white Brit, a rich white Brit at that, who has been able to travel and study freely during most of his life. Through a large part of the novel, Richard is set upon writing a book called 'The world was silent when we died', which is supposed to cover the atrocious crimes committed against Igbos during the war. Just as Ugwu uses 'we' to align himself with the Nigerian middle-class during the conversation with his mother, Richard uses it to assert his connection with the Igbos of Biafra. But Ugwu is an Igbo, like Odenigbo and Olanna, and they all share a common tongue and other experiences despite having been raised in very different environments. While Richard has managed to learn Igbo and partakes in certain rituals, he is relatively safe during the war due to a simple but very important factor, namely the color of his skin.

During an especially gruesome chapter after the war has broken out, Richard is at the airport and has just impressed the man behind the ticket desk with his ability to speak Igbo. Not long after, the airport is raided by Hausa soldiers who force everyone to shout out "Allahu Akbar" in order to distinguish via their dialect who is Hausa and who is not. The Igbo man who Richard holds his fulfilling conversation with is killed on the spot when he cannot pronounce the words without revealing his accent, while Richard is not even asked to perform the task (152-153). The soldiers are unable to determine who is Igbo or not by simply looking at their faces and therefore they force them to speak up, with the exception of Richard as he is obviously not an Igbo due to him being white. The incident is extremely traumatic, and it is through it that Richard realizes his true position in the Biafra war:

[life was not the same for] people who had witnessed the massacres. Then he felt more frightened at the thought that perhaps he had been nothing more than a voyeur. He had not feared for his own life, so the massacre became external, outside of him; he had watched them through the detached lens of knowing he was safe (168)

Just as in the discussions held in Odenigbo's home, some beliefs are easily taken for granted and accepted since they are not challenged in any severe way. It is not until Richard sees a real Igbo being killed right next to him due to the man's ethnicity that he can comprehend that his perception of *Us* might not correspond with the reality of the situation. But Richard is not the only one with a skewed notion of his notion of *Us*.

Odenigbo is the most interesting case of *hybrid* identity, as he is seemingly in denial regarding the fact that his lifestyle and habits are strongly influenced by the West. Before discussing Odenigbo's actions, I would like to present his own notion of *Us*. During the discussions which are held in Odenigbo's home, international politics and especially those which involve colonial powers are hot topics which regularly end in condemnation of the West for its role in the conflicts. During one of these discussions, one of the participants states that there is a need for a pan-African response towards the treatment of black people in the American South. But before he is able to finish his sentence, Odenigbo cuts him short by stating that pan-Africanism is fundamentally a European notion without any foundation in reality. According to him, the notion that all Africans can be united under one banner is a colonial view which only asserts that they are all black as opposed to the European white. The discussion that follows presents an interesting sense of how Odenigbo views himself:

“Of course we are all alike, we all have white oppression in common,” Miss Adebayo said dryly. “Pan-Africanism is simply the most sensible response.” “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 the white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man created *black* to be as different as possible from his *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came.” (20)

Evidently, Odenigbo considers his Igbo heritage as the most important aspect of his identity, a defining characteristic from which the rest of him stems. But what does he mean when he states that he is Igbo? Here a comparison with Ugwu is fitting, as Ugwu is Igbo himself and grew up in an Igbo village and is well versed in their traditions and habits. While Odenigbo impresses Ugwu with his polished manners during their first meeting, his conduct does not correspond well with Ugwu's own experiences of Igbo men. His Igbo dialect sounds unusual in Ugwu's ear, as it is "coloured by the sliding sounds of English, the Igbo of one who spoke English often" (4): his feet look feminine due to them being clean and evidently belonging to someone who regularly wears shoes (6): and his bathrobe looks like a female coat (9). While these examples only concern Ugwu's opinions of Odenigbo's lifestyle, the fact is that in 1960 85% of Nigeria's population were estimated to live in the countryside (Worldbank). And not everyone out of the remaining 15% identified as Igbo. So, while Odenigbo argues for international policies from the viewpoint of an Igbo, he should not be viewed as an accurate representation for that ethnical group in 1960s Nigeria. During the discussion, Odenigbo claims that the only authentic identity is the tribe but not even once throughout the novel does he partake in any events or ceremonies connected to Igbo culture. His definition of *Us* is skewed as it only takes ethnicity into consideration and disregards the fact that his *hybrid* identity is too complex to be defined simply as Igbo and Igbo only, as his habits are very different from the average Igbo, who both live in the country side and have no university or political education. One of the few interactions Odenigbo has with the rural Igbos before the outbreak of the Biafra war is when he visits Ugwu's village, and during his short visit he declines both food items and drinks offered to him by Ugwu's father, most importantly the kola nut (89). While this may seem insignificant, the kola nut is actually one of the most important tokens of good faith and friendship in Igbo culture, and Odenigbo himself always offers it to his own guests. In his article which deals with the significance of the kola nut amongst the Igbos, Duru states that:

In Igboland, the kola nut is foremost an item that initiates, promotes, and sustains social interaction. At any social occasion, whether a visit of friends, marriage, child dedication, burial, or even some business transactions, the kola nut is present. It has become so etched in the social conscience of the people that any refreshment offered a guest as an act of welcome is called Oji (kola nut). It thus intervenes regularly in social intercourse. It both embodies and acts as a unifying force among Igbos. (205)

While there is no indication that Ugwu's father or any member of the tribe is offended by Odenigbo turning down the offer, it cannot not be underestimated how important the kola nut is in Igbo culture. I would like to repeat Odenigbo's statement from earlier, that the tribe is the most important aspect of his identity. If this is the case, then his choice to refuse such a simple but incredibly important gesture is strange to say the least. The visit in itself as stated very short, as they need to get Ugwu's mother to the hospital and Odenigbo is also expecting guests in the evening with whom he is going to drink and discuss politics, and when these guests arrive they are all offered kola nuts (91).

As someone who upholds his tribe as the most elementary aspect of his identity and constantly critiques the West, Odenigbo certainly consumes a lot of Western products. In Beaudoin's article which deals with *hybrid* identities in post-colonial societies, he claims that the origin of certain cultural traits may not be certainly known in many cases. As new concepts are introduced in a colony by the colonizers, some of them will be opposed by the colonized, some will be negotiated into *hybrid* versions and some are similar enough to existing traditions that they may "become consciously enveloped as precolonial traditions" (46). Among the concepts brought by the colonizers one might mention universities, modern inventions such as the radio and the fridge, and alcoholic beverages such as gin and brandy. These things could understandably be incorporated into Nigeria without being intimately associated with Western culture as they all, except for maybe alcohol, improved the lives of the average citizen and marked a step in a modernization process rather than stemming from Western oppression. But there are other things in the novel which are harder to disassociate from Western culture, such as the soft drinks available at Odenigbo's home which are consumed by the academics during their discussions. I am talking here about Fanta and Coca Cola, two drinks which are closely associated with the US, a nation which is intimately connected with capitalism, but they are regardless an essential part of Odenigbo's fridge. In an earlier chapter, I argued that Odenigbo incorporates several tools supplied by the colonial power in order to resist their influence, such as pushing Ugwu towards getting an education in order for him to understand how Nigeria is being exploited. I would like to argue here that the consumption of certain products, such as the soft drinks mentioned above, falls outside of this category. Odenigbo's ability to speak perfect English, his insight into domestic and international politics and his doctoral degree in mathematics, certainly enable him to understand and resist colonial influence, but there is not any clear division between the incorporation of Western concepts to fight oppression and simply being a consumer of Western goods. The consumption of these products appears even more strange when his political stance is considered, as Odenigbo suggest that Major Nzeogwu,

a communist, is the kind of leader which Nigeria needs in order to move forward (125). The example is one of many which displays how easy it is for Odenigbo and his circle of academics to make claims concerning Nigeria's political situation without having to be concerned about the reality of the situation, or at least until the Biafra war starts. When these attitudes eventually get checked, it turns out that the conflict is far more complicated than how it was perceived in the discussions held in Odenigbo's home.

The war forces the characters to face their perception of *Us* in a new light, and that pressure exposes cracks in their self-image. Olanna and Odenigbo's outlook on the conflict is one which I would describe as naïve, as they cannot even comprehend the severity of it until the soldiers are almost on their doorstep, and the sudden realization shocks Olanna: "She did not know that things had come to this; in Nsukka, life was insular and the news was unreal, functioning only as fodder for the evening talk, for Odenigbo's rants and impassioned articles" (133). During their discussions amongst friends, the demonization of *the Other*, critique of the West, and Odenigbo's statement that there is not pan-African identity, seemed given and almost playful. Suddenly Olanna, Odenigbo and Ugwu are forced to move in order to escape the soldiers and their new home is a small one room apartment which feels almost claustrophobic compared to Odenigbo's house.

Another character has joined the family just before the war broke out: the baby, who never receives a name throughout the novel and is instead always referred to as Baby. Despite Baby being the result of Odenigbo cheating on Olanna with a village girl brought to their home by his mother for that explicit reason, Olanna takes care of Baby as if he was her own and it is through Olanna's striving for Baby to have a good childhood in a chaotic warzone that her disgust with tribal Igbos truly comes to light. Olanna's attitude towards her rural relatives exemplified earlier shows that she wants to feel at home with their customs but at the same time she becomes nauseous in the dirty and smoky huts. But even when hygiene and dirt are not the issue, Olanna still feels uneasy with several aspects of the lifestyle of rural Igbos. Even though the family are regarded as refugees at this point and are forced to live in a small accommodation close to other Igbos, Olanna still does not want Baby to pick up any habits from the village children he plays with, such as a bush-accent and the belief in spirits (331; 327). A strange contradiction in Olanna's behavior is her strive to align with her rural relatives while Baby is not supposed to have anything to do with those kinds of people. During one of the many times when they are forced to move during the war, they are supposed to be provided with a home by one of Odenigbo's academic friends, and Olanna strongly "hoped that Professor Achara had found them accommodation close to the other university people so that Baby would have the

right kind of children to play with” (186). According to Olanna, the right kind of people do not stem from Igbo tribes but rather from university educated people, and while Olanna still feels shame during the war due to her not wanting the children at the refugee camp to even touch Baby (128) she cannot deny her dislike of poor Nigerians any longer. Instead of a being a product of Nigerian culture, Baby is instead supposed raised in a Western fashion and taught to speak English from an early age.

Olanna speaks Igbo and is familiar with their culture, but when she is bathing Baby she instead sings “London Bridge”, a classic old English nursery rhyme (122). While Odenigbo has done everything in his power to avoid Western influences throughout the novel, his own child is in the end not raised in accordance to Igbo culture but rather as a hybrid. As I have previously noted, children are often used amongst Nigerian writers of Adichie’s generation when dealing with the Biafra war in their novels. As Baby is raised as a hybrid with an innocent outlook on the conflict, he might represent a post-war generation of Nigerians who are able to look beyond the dichotomy of ethnicity and finally create a nation which is truly unified.

Conclusion

The primary object of this paper has been to investigate how identities are constructed in Adichie’s novel in relation to the concepts *Us* and *the Other*, with Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theories as a supporting framework. During the course of this investigation, I have shown that there is a clear division being displayed on several occasions between how some characters speak and think of themselves in relation to their actions. Odenigbo claims to be Igbo first and foremost, but he is seemingly closer to a Western *hybrid* than the rural Igbo which he has no connection with. Olanna also wishes to be part of her rural relative’s tribal society but cannot feel comfortable amongst the filth and indigenous norms she encounters there. Ugwu does not display this division as clearly but evidently his definition of *Us* is changed throughout the novel in a way similar to Richard. In addition to this subject, I have also touched upon a correlation between *hybrid* identities and feelings of anxiety connected to the character’s native cultural heritage. Both Ugwu and Olanna repeatedly experience shame in connection with their tribal counterparts, and this anxiety is not easily resolved due to them placing the modern Nigerian lifestyle above the rural one. In regard to the concepts of *Us* and *the Others*, several instances in this novel have proven that these categories are easy to construct and gather around on the occasions where there is not opposing force questioning their legitimacy, but when they are put to the test they evidently seem to crumble. Additionally, these categories tend to have a skewed character as they cannot take *hybridity* into consideration and instead repeatedly leads

to definitions which are profoundly one-sided. As a final note, there are other factors which affects the outcome of these *hybrid* identities, such as the trauma of war, which I have not touched upon in this paper. Adichie's novel does overall contain an abundance of examples which could have been used in this paper and some which were actually cut, so while I believe to have proven the point I set out to make, there is still a lot of research available with this *Half of a Yellow Sun* as primary material.

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