Twinhood, Allegory and the Ambivalence of the Postcolonial Nation: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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Abstract
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'Half of a Yellow Sun' has been widely read as a historical novel interested in retelling a national story. In the novel, Adichie returns to the story of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. She interrogates Nigeria's state of postcolonial nationhood through the experiences of twin sisters Olanna and Kainene and their family and friends, whose lives have been drastically transformed by the war. This article discusses the interweaving of these personal lives and the national narrative in the novel, arguing that the author's use of twins and other forms of pairing allegorizes the complex temporalities of the modern postcolonial nation. To conduct this discussion, the article draws theoretically on Frederic Jameson's conception of national allegory, a view that places "Third World" narrative fiction as inherently representative of the national, and Homi Bhabha's idea of the ambivalence of the nation, which proposes a narrative doubleness that combines historicist and everyday temporalities of the nation as a means to understanding modern nationhood. Engaging 'Half of a Yellow Sun' from this perspective, the article positions the text as a novel that, despite narrating a conflict between two opposing national forces, constructs the postcolonial African nation as a complexity that defies binaristic reading.

Keywords*: twinhood, allegory, nation, ambivalence, postcolonial nation*

Introduction

> What I want to emphasize in that large and liminal image of the nation with which I began is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.
>
> – Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*

> There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land; the real answer and the one you give in school to pass.
>
> – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*

The concept of nation, with the endless debates around its meaning, has continued to be a matter of importance in the postcolonial African literary enterprise. Not only has the nation been pivotal in shaping postcolonial identities, in both nationalist and post-nationalist senses, the literatures that have emerged from the former European colonies have also been largely defined within the framework of the national. This is not to claim that this relationship between literature and nation is solely an African phenomenon. The connection can also be traced to periods long before the birth of modern African literature. Benedict Anderson, for instance, links the formation of modern European national consciousness to the upliftment, standardization and spread of vernaculars by print capitalism, which began to flourish from the sixteenth century (44). The establishment of English studies as a discipline in British universities in the nineteenth century has been linked to the political motive to make recipients of such an education "feel that they belonged to England, that they had a country" (Peter Barry 13). On the other side of the Atlantic, shortly after the American Revolution, there were persistent calls to writers to produce a body of literature that would be said to be genuinely American.

The burden on the head of the African writer has so much to do with the weighty awareness of the "great array of bayonets and cannon" (Fanon 28) that characterized the transition from 'pre-modern' polities to colonially-established modern African nation-states. (Aware that nation is a contested term, I should parenthesize at this point that the conception of nation used in this article is based on

Ernest Renan's idea of the nation as a modern phenomenon as opposed to the primordialist view of nation as rooted in pre-modern ancestry or merely in linguistic communities). After decades of economic exploitation and misrepresentations of the African person and society, Europe handed over power, albeit reluctantly, to new nations that were largely untampered colonial configurations. Referring to the arbitrary formations that laid the foundation for these new postcolonial nations, historian Martin Meredith states that European colonizers took "little or no account of the myriad of traditional monarchies, chiefdoms and other African societies that existed on the ground" (1) and conveniently merged "hundreds of diverse and independent groups, with no common history, culture, language, or religion" (1-2). For Meredith, Africa's post-independence crises cannot be disconnected from the nature of this arrangement. The Nigerian example shows that over two hundred and fifty ethnicities were lumped together into the modern nation of Nigeria (2). In the period before independence, two revered Nigerian figures had questioned the genuineness of Nigeria as a nation, apparently from either a primordialist perspective or resentment towards the British for exercising undue power in this activity. Tafawa-Balewa, Nigeria's first prime minister, commented that "Nigerian unity is only a British invention" (Meredith 8), and Obafemi Awolowo, a prominent political figure in Western Nigeria, wrote that "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'" (Meredith 8). Two things stand out in these proscriptions of the random formation of the modern African nation-state: a focus on the geography whose land was the primary focus of colonial economic interest and the neglect of the societies that inhabited those terrains.

Many years after the excitement of independence, unsurprisingly, Africans still grapple with the idea of nation in relation to ownership, belonging, resource distribution and political power. African writers have particularly engaged these issues in their works as a means of interrogating the present in the light of history. From early writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Es'kia Mphalele to contemporary novelists like Helon Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo and Zakes Mda, the African novel has largely remained a national story told in diverse styles and voices, grappling with history, culture and contemporaneity.

In relation to the focus of this article, quite a handful of third generation Nigerian novelists have coincidentally found interesting material in the idea of twinhood or doubleness as a means of engaging matters of identity, gender, nation and history. Examples range from Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2006), which centres on the crossing of fiction and history, to Diana Evans' *26a* (2006) and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005), both of which deliver the 'magical' and psychological dimensions of twinhood, synchronously touching on transnationalism, diaspora and hybrid identities. Jane Bryce, commenting on the female writers, remarks that "[t]he use of twins as a narrative device has emerged in these writers as a means of exploring the repressed feminine in relation to a socially conditioned version of femininity, inflected by issues of exile, hybridity and metissage" (50). Unlike the others on the list, however, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun,* is set during the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s, in which two of the major characters are a set of twin sisters. Bryce does link twinhood, or at least, the doppelganger, to the "text of contemporary social reality [...] haunted by traces of a repressed past [...] preeminently the Civil War" (59). It is this connection that I explore in this article in connection with the concept of the modern postcolonial nation. My particular interest lies in the novel's use of twinhood (and other forms of twinning) as a national allegory that explores the intertwinement of everyday time of the nation and its historicist linearity. The discussion is carried out in conversation with Frederic Jameson's notion of national allegory and what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the ambivalence of the modern nation.

National Novel, National Allegory and Ambivalence of the Nation

If *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a "national novel," in the words of John C. Hawley, it is only logical to ask what kind of national novel it is, or on what basis it can be categorized as one. Hawley claims that the novel can be described as such for "getting at the spirit of the Nigerian people, recreating that spirit in the *specific lives of compelling characters*, but at the same time refusing to be overtaken by the *events of the war* to the degree that some earlier novels may have been" (23, emphasis mine). A national novel in this sense is a weaving of "specific lives," or ordinary existence of the citizens of a nation, and "events of the war," a metonymy for the national or political. Most scholarly works on *Half of a Yellow Sun* have commented either thinly

or elaborately on this tension between the quotidian lives of the characters who are citizens and the war, a bigger story, occurring around them. They have focused on the relationship between the national and the domestic space (Dalley), the body (Dalley), material culture (Cooper), family (Coffey) and individual characters (Rideout). Most of them note that although the novel is a historical one, it foregrounds the domestic lives of the fictional characters more than the historical layer. These conversations draw us further into a discussion on the ambivalence that has been noted in various forms, such as what Obi Nwakanma calls the ambivalence of Igbo nationalism (8). While the literature shows an interest in the fact of the novel performing an allegorical function, this article weighs in with a particular focus on twinhood and twinning as an allegory of national ambivalence.

In her reading of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Meredith Coffey declares her interest in unearthing "a political allegory legible within the characters' personal relationships and historical circumstances" (64). Speaking about the twins, she points out that "the relationship between the sisters Olanna and Kainene aligns with the relationship between (Northern) Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria, the latter known as the Republic of Biafra between 1967 and 1970" (64). She also looks at the allegoricality of the twins' parents and other characters like Ugwu and Richard Churchill. Her interest in drawing a connection between the personal and the political leads her to dwell on the absence of closure engendered by the disappearance of Kainene towards the end of the novel. Jennifer Rideout, in her own study, concentrates on Olanna as the only allegorical character. In her argument, Kainene, who represents the future, and Mama, who represents tradition, are out of the allegorical picture. She contends that Adichie "uses Olanna as the female allegorical symbol of the nation, juxtaposing her with her twin sister, Kainene – a strong, modern woman – and with Mama, another strong but custom- bound woman" (71). Rideout's work is situated in feminism, with attention paid to how Olanna is transformed in the course of the story to an allegorical figure that represents the nation. This is different from Coffey's focus on the distribution of allegorical roles to different characters, especially the twins, to mirror the nation in crisis. Halley Danish is another scholar who has explored the allegorical dimension of the novel quite closely. Naming the novel a work of allegorical realism, she dwells more on the representation of

the body from being a site of sensuous pleasure to that of pain and suffering during the war (139).

Obi Nwakanma draws a link between the body of Igbo Nigerian fiction, in which *Half of a Yellow Sun* is situated, and the ambivalence of the postcolonial nation in a much wider way. He looks across literary generations, whose attitudes towards the nation of Nigeria differ due to interruptions such as the Civil War. He notes that contemporary Igbo novels, by extension the contemporary Nigerian novel, which he describes as "a refraction of an imagined nation" (8) typically embody "a radically ambivalent and ironic stance" (8). He unpacks this ambivalence as containing "the grammar of simultaneous time" (8) which combines a stretch of historical time and "the vernacular present" (8). He sees the Igbo as reflecting through contemporary Nigerian fiction "an ambivalent desire to imagine and constitute a nation within and outside these margins" (8). Of particular interest to this article, Nwakanma notes how allegory is deployed by some of these novelists to explore the complexity of the postcolonial nation. Although, he does not directly connect Adichie with this use of the national allegory, he provides a means to connect her work with the technique as a means of exploring the national ambivalence of which he speaks. According to Hamish Dalley, "Adichie dramatises the ambivalent status of Nigerian subjectivity for an Igbo population first expelled from, and then forcibly reintegrated into, the national community" (125).

To explore the images of national ambivalence in the novel via the allegorical, it would be in order to establish the idea of national or political allegory, especially as taught by Frederic Jameson. A wider employment of allegory as a critical tool can be traced to the European Middle Ages. While the allegory was indeed a narrative or creative tool, in which characters and events signify ideas beyond themselves, such as in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, it was also a critical tool in the hands of those who sought to enter interpretive engagements with the literature of the day. In the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, William Cain et al observe that the "dominant technique of medieval gloss and commentary is allegory, a method of reading texts for their underlying esoteric meaning" (10). They note that due to the dominant interest in religion, medieval scholars took the allegory further from a mere figure of speech to an interpretive method of

unraveling spiritual meaning embedded in the sacred scripture, a method later applied to secular literary texts.

In this article, I narrow down my interest in the allegorical to what has been called national or political allegory. Although I do not embrace Jameson's idea uncritically that "[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as [...] national allegories" (69), I find the link between personal or domestic narratives and national narratives quite useful for this study[1]. Singling the 'third world' under the experience of imperialism and colonialism, Jameson claims that connections of the private and public are unique in third world culture when compared to European and American writing. Therefore, according to him, all third world texts, even those that are plainly centred on private spheres "necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69, emphasis his). Of course, this reading of Adichie will use this framework solely because the text invites such an interpretation by the way in which the author has configured both domains of the private and the public, not because every piece of literature from former colonies can be conveniently interpreted allegorically as political. However, how can this framework be applied to *Half of a Yellow Sun,* seeing the novel is clearly not a traditional allegory? In other words, is it possible to conduct a neat allegorical analysis that connects every element in the novel to the history it fictionalizes? Jameson, helpfully, argues that instead of viewing allegory as a frozen correspondence between symbol and idea, "the allegorical spirit is [actually] profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" (73). He further argues that instead of "some one-to-one table of equivalences [...] such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text" (73).

We can further look at national allegory as a means of concretizing abstractions such as the concept of nation. Benedict Anderson has famously referred to the nation as an "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6). This view of the nation as an imagined entity is based on the perspective that "the members of even the smallest nation will never

know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). In the formation of modern European nations, Anderson points out the role of print capitalism in shaping this national imagination, or visualization in the minds of citizens, by its ability to disseminate information and standardize language through its networks across the language community. The nation, therefore, exists not primarily as a geographical entity, but essentially in the consensus of peoples to live together and share an identity. But this imagination of the limitation, sovereignty and community of the nation has to be concretized or visualized in some way, that is why over time tropological tools have been used to embody the nation. Employing analogies provides a means of containing the expanse of the complex entity known as the nation so that the mind can accommodate the community in less abstract ways. One common trope used in visualizing nations is the family image that makes citizens talk about their founding fathers or of the nation in maternal terms.

In his famous essay, "What is a Nation?", for example, Ernest Renan wrestles against the idea of nation that is linked to race, religion, language and geography, and pushes the idea that the nation is solely a product of the will of the people. This view can be said to be influenced by the French Revolution, in which every form of transcendence is stripped from the picture of nation and power. To capture that view, Renan uses a metaphor to give shape to the abstraction, defining a nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in two are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present" (261). This metaphor, though not concrete in the strictest sense, affords Renan the room to depict the heterogeneity and ambivalence of the modern nation in ways the mind can picture.

Having seen the place of allegory in writing the nation, we can now proceed to the idea of ambivalence. We can already see the ambivalence of the nation in Renan's definition, the reference to the past and the present coexisting. This is where this article is heading. The nation not as a simple linear progression, but as a multiplicity in transition. Bhabha provides a concentrated focus on this idea in his essay, "DissemiNation." His argument is to divert attention from solely conceiving the modern nation from the nationalist or historicist formulation that seeks the certainty of a progressive linear historical

time instead of seeing the nation as also existing within the present temporality of the everyday. While people exist within the present moment of the nation, nationalists are obsessed with the narrative of the nation that is based on historical narratives of origin and progress connecting one major event with another. This does not provide a complete picture of the nation. Bhabha thus views the nation as existing in double time, "the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal" (293). He also names the everyday and epochal as the performative and the pedagogical respectively. The epochal or pedagogical time of the nation refers to the nationalist narratives that think of the nation in terms of major historical events at the expense of everyday experiences of citizens; the everyday or performative, on the other hand, refers to the day-to-day lives of the citizens in everyday spaces. The epochal time is rooted in a teleological connection between events that assign a sense of transcendence to the progress of the nation, while the everyday time takes in the disjunctions and discontinuities of events within the spatial limits of the nation.

Adichie's Twinhood as a National Allegory

While the likes of Habila and Evans celebrate mostly the oneness of twinhood, Adichie exposes us mostly to rivalry between the twin sisters Olanna and Kainene. Though she does not provide clear clues for this treatment to be approached from the mythic point of view, the pattern the story takes certainly suggests a mythic groundwork reminiscent of the Igbo folktale "The Two Sisters"[2]. Twin myths either suggest oneness or strong enmity between twins. The depiction of Olanna and Kainene easily fits the 'good and evil' or 'beautiful and ugly' twin myths, showing them as opposites in both appearance and character, and in a relationship characterized by conflict and jealousy. Olanna is considered the beautiful one by their parents and others outside the family, and Kainene is considered the 'ugly' one. Kainene says to her boyfriend Richard, "Her name [jealously referring to her sister Olanna] is the lyrical *God's Gold*, and mine is the more practical *Let's watch and see what next God will bring*" (58, emphasis Adichie's). Kainene is also carved in the image of the 'evil' twin for her strongly self-willed and deviant outlook. Richard "didn't think she was some wealthy Nigerian's daughter because she had none of the cultivated demureness. She seemed more like a mistress; her brazenly red lipstick, her tight dress, her smoking" (57). Kainene's placement

in the 'bad' category is shown mainly in her relationship with her parents as a rebellious and independent-minded child. That is not to say the twins have not had their experience of oneness. In fact, we have a glimpse of that from their childhood days:

> Olanna wished she still had those flashes, moments when she could tell what Kainene was thinking. When they were in primary school, they sometimes looked at each other and laughed, without speaking, because they were thinking the same joke. She doubted if Kainene ever had those flashes now, since they never talked about such things anymore. They never talked about anything anymore. (31)

Their estrangement is however accompanied by the subtle realization of their differences. Kainene discovers she is not as 'beautiful' as Olanna. It is a sign that she grew up being treated as such, providing her with a unique experience which affected who she has become as an adult. For instance, this difference in nature and, subsequently, treatment is responsible for the cynic that Kainene has become. Their conflict manifests in their inability to know each other's thoughts as before, their inability to converse or relate freely with each other and Olanna's betrayal of her sister by sleeping with her sister's boyfriend, Richard. The peak of the conflict is the last action, in which Olanna seduces Richard, Kainene's boyfriend, as a retaliatory act against her own boyfriend, but with no regard for her sister's feelings.

With this background, if *Half of a Yellow Sun* is considered a "national novel" (Hawley 23) that "broadly reconstructs a series of historical events and the spirit of a past age" (Nnolim 145) in order to "consider Nigeria's chances of attaining genuine constitutional and participatory democracy" (Anyokwu 179), and to "apprehend the historical forces that have confluenced to shape [...] Nigeria as a product of modernity, and its inheritance of the conditions of postcoloniality" (Nwakanma 2), what role does twinhood play in connection to the political dimension of the novel? I propose that the twin characters of Olanna and Kainene play an allegorical role that disrupts the idea of the nation as homogenous and unproblematic. Whether we agree with Abayomi Awelewa that the novel is actually about Olanna who is portrayed as "a pair of twins with an alter ego,

Kainene" (106) or about literal twins, we have in our hands a complexity of twoness and oneness that points outward to a story beyond itself.

The story beyond is that of the nation, which in this reading is seen as allegorized by the twins and their differences. However, instead of focusing on the twins' conflict as representing the conflict between Biafra and Nigeria, like Coffey has done, this section shifts attention to the complexity of time in narrating the nation, or Bhabha's idea of the ambivalence of the nation. Bhabha's interest is the existence of a double time in the life of the nation refers to the epochal and the ordinary, or what he also calls the pedagogical and the performative aspects of thinking about the nation. He writes that,

> In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*. (297, emphasis his)

In connection to this idea, I argue that we can read the twins as not merely representing geographical oppositions and political strife, but representing the double time of the nation as well. The portrayal of the twins as existing mostly in domestic spaces and relationships and the foregrounding of material culture and the corporeal evoke "the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (Bhabha 297), while the political and historical events, also mirrored by the twins' troubled relationship, fall under the nationalist narrative of the nation which covers nation-sized events such as the war and the coups. In other words, the twins' lives complexly allegorise national events while simultaneously providing a parallel everyday temporality. I will however take this discussion further to the allegorical element that exists in the differences between the twins. This is possible when we return to the remark Jameson has made about the "profoundly discontinuous" (73) nature of the allegorical form.

In this reading, Olanna and Kainene represent the ordinary and epochal time of the nation respectively. While there are intertwinements in the lives of the twins such as being in the same

home and sharing the same thoughts at some point in their younger lives, they loosely represent two different times of the nation – not sequential periods, but simultaneous time. Olanna stands for the ordinary time, being the less independent one, occupying more conventional roles such as the obedient child (except in the case of Chief Okonji) and the wife and mother whose habitat is the home space, despite being a lecturer. This intensifies during the war when she has to leave Nsukka with her family to another town where the most public function she can play is teaching little children for free. An early description of Olanna as resembling her mother and possessing "a more approachable beauty with the softer face and the smiling graciousness and the fleshy, curvy body that filled out her black dress" (74-5) situates her in the feminine and maternal role that later connects her to the domestic space in the narrative, to domestic activities such as cooking, entertaining guests and taking care of her adopted daughter, Baby. These repeated routines of her daily existence and dealing with mundaneness align with Bhabha's description of the everyday time of the nation as embedded in a "'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign" (299).

Kainene, on the other hand, cast as "almost androgynous" (75), more towards masculinity in both stature and mien, is a more public person and connects more with Bhabha's idea of the epochal time of the nation. To buttress this, the twins' father, Chief Ozobia, says, "Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two" (39). In other words, Kainene does not only look masculine; she possesses qualities that are viewed as desired for public leadership. That is why Chief Ozobia is confident in appointing her to manage his businesses, to "oversee everything in the east, the factories and [his] new oil interests" (39). This placement removes Kainene from the domestic space, and by implication, representation of the everyday time of the nation. Remember that the discovery of petroleum in Nigeria and its place in the Nigerian story is epochal. Kainene's relationship with Richard provides another angle from which to understand her as representing the pedagogical strand of national time. The relationship dramatizes an independent Nigeria relating with its former colonial master in a balanced relationship characterized by mutuality and respect instead of exploitation. This point is driven home when Major Udodi drunkenly, failing to understand the nature of this particular relationship, berates Kainene for her relationships with white men,

who are only interested in exploiting African female bodies. In this allegorical depiction, the text sets postcolonial Nigeria in what should have been its future, a truly independent nation able to relate with other nations of the world regardless of colonial past and earning the respect of the international community for how she permits herself to be treated. Kainene's friendship with figures like Major Madu is also instructive in regard to her allegorical function as a representation of the epochal or pedagogical time of the nation. Madu is an army officer, a position that represents power in the postcolonial experience of the young nation. He stands for historical junctions like the coups, counter-coups and the war, events that mark critical moments in the history of Nigeria. While her sister becomes more domestic during the war, taking care of her home and volunteering to teach children, Kainene renders public service to the Biafrans by running a refugee camp.

The allegory does not mean that the two strands are thoroughly insulated from each other. There are moments of deterritorialization in which each domain spills into the other to prevent a binarization or a static categorization. The novel demonstrates how the everyday time of the nation is not unaware of the national and political, or the other way round; they are in fact shaped by each other. According to Bhabha, by taking into recognition the ambivalence of the nation,

> the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pregiven or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process. (297)

In the narrative, apart from the closeness shared by the twins when they are younger and towards the end when they reconcile after a long period of separation, their activities are still shaped by the awareness of each other while estranged from each other. Olanna, for instance, is

inspired by Kainene's fearlessness to confront her father after listening to her mother complain about his open infidelity. At this time, Olanna and Kainene's relationship is still in crisis.

Beyond Twinhood: Narrative Twinning and National Ambivalence

In addition to the twins, *Half of a Yellow Sun* explores other forms of twinning that open up the ambivalence of nation. By twinning, I refer to a form of pairing that is both parallel and intertwining. It is clear that the depictions of these pairs are not necessarily binaristic or oppositional, but rather dialogic and even hybridizing. These are employed to challenge the idea of nation as homogeneous. Structurally, the novel is framed in four parts to convey two flows of time: the early sixties before the war and the late sixties during the war. This oscillation between two temporal streams depicts Bhabha's idea of the epochal and the ordinary, but not in simplistic ways that seal each perfectly from the other. They do bleed into each other to problematise the dichotomy. The narrative in the early sixties part of the novel focuses on not only life before the war, but more on life in the everyday domestic space, showing the characters in their everyday experience. Although the late sixties strand also focuses on personal action in domestic and interpersonal relationships, the war, a metaphor of the national, becomes dominant as a force that shapes the domestic and the personal.

There is also a manifestation of modern or contemporary times versus the traditional/indigenous past existing together in the modern national time. This is shown in the depiction of rural lives such as Ugwu and his family's and their response to urban and western-educated ways. For example, when Ugwu first comes to Odenigbo's house, he becomes conscious of the difference between life and material culture in his village and in the city. The cosmopolitan nature of the regular gathering in his Master's living room is also an encounter with the modernity of the country he has lived in all his life. This is important for understanding the complexity of the postcolonial nation as a patchwork of disjunctions and overlaps. It is this oscillation between past political or ethnographic formations and the modern western nation model that characterizes the postcolonial nation, and usually expresses itself in the tension between citizenship and

indigeneity. An example is the tension, the double consciousness, expressed by Odenigbo: "I was Igbo before the white man came" (25).

The novel details the events that led to the national crises, the crises itself and its resolution. The crisis is shown to be more deeply rooted in the events of the colonial past than it appears. Adichie twins this allegory of the twins with another narrative that offers historical explanation alongside, creating a play on the idea of doubleness. This second narrative strand is titled *You Were Silent When We Died*, in which Ugwu narrates the manner in which Nigeria was formed and the different attitudes of the British towards the natives in different parts of the country. The activities of Taubman Goldie are mentioned – how he was able to manipulate his way to capture the palm oil trade and the north and southern protectorates around the River Niger. According to Ugwu,

> The British preferred the north. The heat there was pleasantly dry: the Hausa- Fulani were narrow-featured and therefore superior to the negroid Southerners. Muslim and therefore as civilised as one could get for natives, feudal and therefore perfect for indirect rule. Equable emirs collected taxes for the British, and the British in return, kept the Christian missionaries away. (115)

In comparison to this, Ugwu details reasons why the southern area did not obtain much favour from the British colonialists. He mentions reasons such as the menacing preponderance of mosquitoes, animism, "disparate tribes" and the "non-docile and worryingly ambitious" Igbos who lived in "small republican communities" (115). The British had to set up warrant chiefs and allowed Christian missionaries to come in order to soften the people. After some time, both the northern and southern protectorates were amalgamated and named Nigeria by the Governor-General's wife. The obvious intention of this aspect of the novel is to trace the source of the Nigerian Civil War to the formation of the country right from the inception of colonial rule in the area. It however presents a national historicist narrative that dialogues with the everyday experience of the characters in the main narrative.

Conclusion

Adichie's historical war novel has presented us with an interesting way of engaging historical truth at both the literal and allegorical levels. This has served to reveal not only the kind of internal dialogical relationship that can exist between different narrative levels in the African novel, but also the intertwinement that exists between the micro and macro dimensions, the personal and the political, and the mythic and the historical in the postcolonial imaginary. This fluidity of imagination affords the author the opportunity to engage flexibly with the historical past and possibilities that the future holds, all intermingling in the present, and to move cleverly between the role of a historian and that of the imaginative artist who is free to interrogate and reinvent. As much as this is a novel in which the author has personal interest as a descendant of Biafra, her use of twinhood and twinning does not pander to mindless binarizations but opens up spaces of imbrications, overlaps and tensions that demonstrate a more complex picture than a simplistic oppositional one, offering an approach that can be adopted in turbulent postcolonial nations for negotiating their existence in the present.

Notes

[1]Frederic Jameson's idea of third world literature as necessarily allegorical has been refuted notably by Ajiaz Ahmad in "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'." *Social Text*, No 17 (Autumn 1987), pp. 3-25.

[2]In Romanus Egudu's *The Calabash of Wisdom and Other Igbo Stories* (NOK Publishers Ltd, New York, 1973), we read the story of two sisters, though not twins but represent the idea of duality that twinhood represents. These sisters disobey their parents and land into trouble. After some years the lucky one's husband buys her a slave who turns out to be her long-lost sister. But the 'slave-owner' sister maltreats her sister before the discovery. The story however resolves with a discovery and reconciliation. I see this folkloric pattern embedded in Adichie's novel.

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