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Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood of Ugwu in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of A Yellow Sun*

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Abstract: This paper explores the dark-hidden story of Ugwu's adolescence life in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In Nigeria, the status of children is still worsening as disclosed by Adichie, since most of the families and the country are found to be disintegrated. The children have to struggle at home, school, as well as in public. Every child is accustomed to tyranny in many ways. They are prohibited to take up a traditional way of life. The family circumstances too restrict the children in attending schools and force them to earn some money for the family. Furthermore, when the child steps into the outer world, he has to face the people with authority appearing as terrifying figures, overcome the begetting coups that attack children and the public, understand the coded conversation of parents about tyranny, pass the despotic demolition of public properties on their way to school and yet more. At times, they might pass the corpse at the roadblock. The restlessness inflicted by the disintegrated home and country greatly injures the mind of the children. While many writers have drawn attention to the deprived state of the adolescents in their works, Adichie's intention is to chart out the happy and miserable days of adolescents in an integrated and disintegrated home rather than at the society.

Keywords: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, adolescence, adulthood.



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, born on 15 September, 1977, in Enugu. Her parents James Nwoye Adichie is a Statistics Professor in Nsukka and her mother Grace Ifoema who is the Nsukka University's first female Registrar. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the Adichie's second novel that explores the story of Biafra War in Nigeria through the five major characters namely Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene and Richard Churchill. The novel sets in early 1967- 1970 that shows the Nigerian Civil War. Adichie portrays one of her characters, Ugwu, an incredible complexed character, whose words and actions drag the novel forward notably, since he lives in an integrated family. Ugwu is the first protagonist of the novel, an young boy from Opi, who disintegrated from his family and work as an assistant in someone's place. Through a careful reading of this novel, the researcher has identified that the characters Olanna, Kainene and Richard live in a partially disintegrated home. Olanna, a privileged young woman and Richard, a shy Englishman have some unhappy memories about their adolescence as their parents cared less to shower love upon their children.

The physiological and psychological development in an adolescent introduces Ugwu to a strange psyche in himself, which stands far from adjudication. During this period of adolescence, Ugwu undergoes physical, cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral development. The transition to adulthood is critical but often misunderstood. During this period, emerging adults experience new life roles. While most of the theorists view adolescence as a period of transition, according to Eduard Spranger, a German philosopher and psychologist, adolescence is the age that is viewed not only as the maturity of the child's physical structure, but also the maturity of the child's mental structure. Among the seven stages of man, adolescence is a specific developmental period during which the characteristics stand to be different from childhood and adulthood exposes how some of Adichie's adolescent characters attain the expected development, while others lag behind.

As a highly politicized academic rich black man, Odenigbo believes in equality. He treats Ugwu as one of his family members. His contribution, in molding Ugwu, is more than that on his own family members. Ugwu is seen as an ambitious, devoted, scholarly, courageous, uncomplaining, resourceful and intuitive character. He is already a self-determined adolescent and his master ignites him very well. While both Ugwu and Kambili are adolescents and belong to the same country Nigeria, excelling in all the activities have become easy for Ugwu, only because he is brought up in an integrated family.



Ugwu is unable to believe that people eat meat every day. To eat meat everyday is an unbelievable pleasure for Ugwu, because he and his people hardly eat two meals a day. His expectations about his new life does not permit him to disagree with his aunt about eating meat every day. Ugwu does not seem to worry or mind about walking longer in the hot afternoon sun. He is delighted in the thoughts of residing in a new house and atmosphere which would be hundred times better than his own. When Ugwu's aunt describes him about his master he is going to work under, the boy comprehends his new life to be entirely different from his own at the village.

Ugwu finds books everywhere in his master's house. When Ugwu tries to read the titles of some books, Odenigbo's curiosity towards books and current status of the nation is revealed. Ugwu is unaware about a radiogram and Odenigbo explains him that it is unlike gramophone. Back at Ugwu's home, there are only lamps that burn of palm oil and at the master's house, the bulbs dangle from the ceiling. The fridge in his master's house is filled with oranges, bread, beer, soft drinks, roasted shimmering chicken and some other food. So far, the little boy has eaten only the dried fish which is shared among his brothers and sisters. When Ugwu gets an opportunity, he hurries to eat most of the eatables from the fridge, since he does not want to miss the chance of tasting it. He fears that his master would change his mind and ask him stop eating from his fridge. He enjoys eating bread and chicken whenever he has a chance. The sight of a whole chicken inside the refrigerator awes Ugwu, as chicken is a wonder in Opi. He preserves some meat in his pockets to be gifted to his sister and Nnesinachi, when he returns to the village. Thus, the young boy, soon after moving from his village to the city, tries to adopt himself to the new surroundings.

As Ugwu, an Igbo boy of thirteen years from an integrated family, arrives to the town of Nsukka to work as a "houseboy" for Odenigbo, few of his descriptions about the inmates of his home reveal that he has a considerate home where integration of the family members is well maintained. But for wealth, in no way Ugwu's is a gifted home. Even though born and brought up in the atmosphere of a village, Ugwu manages well in the intellectual and privileged world of his employer, because he does not find Odenigbo to disintegrate from him in any way.

Ugwu's intuitiveness helps him to learn to do things which he had no prior knowledge of. It is because of his intuitiveness, he identifies the fridge. He writes a list of food items, discovers the need for a



shelf to arrange the books, invents fried rice for the special guest, adapts to the changing circumstances occasioned by the war and assists Olanna in teaching a class. In spite of not knowing what fried rice is, Ugwu has tried to invent it out of his imagination. He has just fried the rice in groundnut oil. This shows the interest of Ugwu in creativity. In no way, one can find Ugwu giving negative reply to any of the questions nor orders. At all events, he replies that he could learn fast and “yes” is the only possible answer from him.

Ugwu’s ignorance towards the superstitious beliefs could be noticed at most of the times. The young boy’s wit and intelligence could not overpower his belief in irrational followings. When Ugwu curses one of the men and his offspring from the Works Department with diarrhoea, his immaturity is revealed. Ugwu’s stay with Odenigbo at Nsukka has not changed him. He has got hold of superstitious beliefs and he prevents Olanna from killing a lizard. He worries that she might suffer of a terrible stomachache if she does so. He is afraid that the cat which he saw near the garage might bring in some misery to Olanna and his master, Odenigbo. It is evident that Adichie’s characterization of the adolescent boys and girls in her novels is highly reasonable. She does not allow them to err at any situation. Ugwu, after burning Odenigbo’s socks by ironing, does not try to hide it from his master, he “wanted to hide the sock under the chair and dash to the drawer for a new pair but his legs would not move” (14). Adichie neither allows them to sin nor get distracted from their duties. Correspondingly, in no place Ugwu can be found complaining while performing his duties. Ugwu’s accepting nature and good housekeeping earns him the name “clever boy” (18) from Odenigbo.

The soldiers are widely corrupted. They abuse their power and bully the civilians. Unwillingly, Ugwu has to give up his humanity and be a victim of great injustice and suffering. Though he could not prohibit the injustice done, he could have prevented himself from contributing to that suffering of raping the bar girl.

The barmaid does not shrink back with fear or embarrassment; rather, she looks into the eyes of Ugwu in an effort to claim her own body, even though she cannot physically stop him, and to condemn his actions. Like the barmaid, Eberechi is manipulated by Igbo soldiers but chooses to use her sexuality to protect the people she loves. Eberechi sleeps with



a high-ranking military official to ensure her brother's safety and to prevent Ugwu from being deployed (Lauren Rackley, 17)

Ugwu is discomforted when he involves in the act of rape of the bar girl. He is more disturbed when he learns that his sister was also gang-raped. Ugwu loses his faith in Biafra and when he slaps High-Tech for having torn a piece of paper from the book which he read, he turns to alcohol, he loses faith in his own humanity as "He was not living his life; life was living him" (364). He realizes that he had dehumanized himself. Other than this act, Ugwu could be seen as a successful humanized adolescent.

Adichie has portrayed Ugwu as a scholarly character who had the opportunity of living in a home where the people believed in integration. Ugwu shows interest to study, and become an educated person. His eagerness to learn fast provides him the courage to master over the ogbunigwe, a scientific wonder of Biafran war and earns him a nickname. When Ugwu rightly hits his target of killing the Nigerian soldiers by burying his bombs, he earns the name "Target Destroyer" (362). When Richard reads Ugwu's manuscript, he finds him to be very ambitious. Ugwu is portrayed as a developed character towards the end of the novel. His transformation to a fully capable man has become possible only because of the encouragement from Odenigbo and his eagerness in learning everything fast. The illiterate village boy has developed himself to become an author of a book by living in an integrated home at his village as well as at his employer's house.

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