

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309213128>

Reflections of Postmemory and Trauma in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Article · September 2016

CITATIONS

0

READS

1,147

1 author:



Sunday Joseph Ayodabo

Elizade University

10 PUBLICATIONS 4 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



CONTEMPORARY MARRIAGE PROCESSES IN NIGERIA: WILLING LOVE, PERILOUS BUSINESS, POST-MARRIAGE PROBLEMS [View project](#)

ISSN: 2349-2147



Modern Research Studies

Editor-in-Chief
Gyanabati Khuraijam

**An International
Journal of
Humanities and Social
Sciences**

An Indexed & Refereed e-Journal

www.modernresearch.in

**Title: Reflections of Postmemory and Trauma in Sade
Adeniran's *Imagine This* and Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun***

Author/s: AYODABO SUNDAY JOSEPH

**Volume 3, Issue 3
September 2016**

pp. 548–565

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the articles/contributions published in the journal are solely the author's. They do not represent the views of the editors.

Email: editor@modernresearch.in
mrsejournal@gmail.com

Managing Editor: **Yumnam Oken Singh**

Reflections of Postmemory and Trauma in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

AYODABO SUNDAY JOSEPH

Department of English

Faculty of Humanities

Elizade University

Ilara-Mokin

Ondo State, Nigeria

Email: sunday.ayodabo@elizadeuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract: This essay attempts a critical reading of two third-generation Nigerian novels – *Imagine This* by Sade Adeniran and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In these texts, the writers weave past and personal traumatic history with fiction. Adichie documents the violence inflicted upon the Igbo people in Nigeria in the 1967-1970 war while Adeniran's novel is a narration of the trauma of battling with migration from Britain to a village, in Southwestern Nigeria. Using the doctrines of Postcolonial, Psychoanalysis and Trauma theory and with emphasis on the child protagonist in the novels, the essay demonstrates that apparently because of the impact of the lived Nigerian history in its stark and crude realities on the writers, their painful experiences as child in Nigeria are assumed to commensurate with the portraits of their characters, and to some extent, their works. The essay also argues that the ability of the writers to successfully reincarnate their 'postmemory' and traumatic experiences represent a continuous creative struggle by the writers to formalise the search for selfhood, and to demonstrate that writing is an important process of unburdening, healing and dealing with inassimilable forms of history and memory.

Keywords: Postmemory, Trauma, Nigerian novels, postcolonial, Autobiographical, *Imagine This*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Introduction

A recent and interesting period in Nigerian literature is the emergence of the third generation Nigerian writers who seem to be drawing on the rich literary and cultural traditions by adopting what Bakhtin refers to the novel as a “genre-in-the-making” (3) or as “the genre of becoming” (22) to treat ensuing and challenging issues such as identity and displacement, political conflict, postcolonial disillusionment, multiculturalism and globalisation, cultural shock and poverty. Most of these writers are migrants and it is a period that is witnessing a proliferation of writings from the Anglo-American Nigerians in the diaspora. The new development in Nigerian literature is underpinned by the fact that Nigeria has transformed from a turbulent period of military governance, brutal civil war and religious crises that accelerated the migration of many Nigerian writers to Europe in the late nineteen-sixties up to the late nineteen-nineties. From this turbulent and oppressive political history, different writings about displacement, trauma and identity began to emerge. Moreover, these writings are also products of challenges that come with having to grapple with the writers’ troubled political and socio-economic historical and national backgrounds, their childhood experiences, the different places they have traversed and the continuous demand to re-negotiate what it actually means to be a Nigerian. They are indeed, from the perspective of Waberi “children of the postcolony” (8). These writings can be traced to the works of writers like Chimamanda Adichie, Seffie Attah, Lola Shoneyin, Segun Afolabi, Helen Oyeyemi, Uzodinma Iweala, Sade Adeniran, Segun Afolabi Chris Abani among others. Their conception of their time is therefore defined by the process of childhood experiences, identity, trauma and ‘postmemory’.

They (migrant writers) channeled in a new generation of Nigerian writers that are recently joined by local writers. Through self-publishing and the increase in publishing houses, a lot of gifted local writers are getting the chance to publish their works. Hence, third generation Nigerian literature is now an amalgamation of both migrant and local writings. Adesanmi and Dunton are of the opinion that two of the important differences between the second and third generations are the shift from poetry to the novel and the recognition its output received

from the international community (8). They state that some of the important thematic features of the contemporary Nigerian fiction include: urban setting; adoption of child protagonist and narrator, emphasis on deprivation, trope of trauma, denial of individual human rights and aspirations, degradation of social relations under a series of increasingly despotic and corrupt regimes (11).

However, a lot of critical works have been done to compensate these writers for their contributions to the recording and recreation of the socio-political experiences of their country (Kattanek 2011; Ouma 2011), with little studies relating the writers’ personal experiences to their works. By this, we mean that there is a need to examine the rate at which the authors’ past and personal experiences are assumed to commensurate with the portraits of their characters, and to some extent, their works. Since most of the writers had childhood experiences in Nigeria and also use the motif of ‘child protagonist or narrator’ to narrate their stories, the need to examine the link between the writers and their child protagonist/narrator persists. One sure thing is that the style of some of these writers are characterised by their experiences as children in Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s, when they experienced the brunt of the military regimes, including the oil “boom” of the 1970s; the “bust” of the 1990s and the various Nigerian political unrests. On the other hand, some of the writers had experiences that had no relationship with the socio-political crises of the country but personal wars they had to contend with in their individual lives. At the same time, other writers experienced cross-border/cultural shocks during these times, no thanks to their experiences, outside the country. Hence, what these experiences bring is trauma and the ways the experiences are narrated portray the novels as autobiographical, to certain extent.

Foregrounding Postmemory in Autobiographical Fictions in Nigeria

The notion of ‘postmemory’ is of particular importance in this paper as the authors’ personal experiences are being investigated in the fictions. ‘Postmemory’ is coined by Hirsch, whose work centres on memory and the Holocaust of January 30, 1933 to May 8, 1945. In her discussion of ‘postmemory’, Hirsch defines ‘postmemory’ as a

powerful and often traumatic experiences that preceded the births of Holocaust generation but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 128). In her analysis of ‘postmemory’, Hirsch uses the Holocaust as her historical frame of reference but also states that her “analysis relies on and ... is relevant to numerous other contexts of traumatic transfer that can be understood as ‘postmemory’” (120). Most of the third generation Nigerian writers can therefore be considered as part of the “second generation” whose own stories are shaped by traumatic events “that they can neither understand nor re-create” (10). Some of them experienced calamities while others inherited the experiences. Chimamanda Adichie (2007), for instance, inherited her experience because she is a daughter of survivors. She was not alive at the moment of the Nigeria-Biafra War, but “grew up in the shadow of Biafra”. Hence, the war is an event that permeates her life.

In the case of most of the third generation Nigerian writers, the narration of their ‘postmemory’ experiences often results to trauma. Trauma permeates different levels and has been modified by Sigmund Freud in his theory of psychoanalysis from indicating “physical injury” to “psychological injury” (Freud 1962). Given the fact that the formative years of the third generation Nigerian writers were marked by more than two decades of military despotism, war and ethnic enmity in Nigeria, it is no surprise that the writers resort to the genre or idea of autobiographical fiction to explore their ‘psychological injury’. Kunle Ajibade, Ogaga Ifowodo, Chris Anyawu, Chris Abani, Helen Oyeyemi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sade Adeniran, Chigozie Obioma, etc. are few examples of the generation’s foray into the trope of trauma.

Generally, a fiction can be considered autobiographical if it bears direct relations to the life of the author. In autobiographical fictions, names and locations are often changed and events are recreated to make them more fictional but the story still bears a close resemblance to that of the author’s life (Lejeune 19). While the events of the author’s life are recounted, there is no pretence at exact truth. In most cases, the narrator always bears the story because autobiographical fiction often conflates the lives of its writer and narrator (Lejeune 19). Hence, to be considered an autobiographical novel by most standards, there must be

a protagonist modelled after the author and a central plotline that mirrors events in his or her life. When it comes to Nigerian writers’ use of the idea of fictional autobiography, the key to understanding their intention lies in understanding the primacy of the writers’ perspective/eye and voice in the stories that are told. By presenting the writer’s perspective/eye, they underscore the writers’ subjectivity as a strategy and an approach which allows their stories to be told from the perspectives of the individuals who lived that history. When writers, who lived that history tell their stories using fiction as a medium, characters are given space to speak as insiders and participants and not as mere helpless subjects of narration but as subjects presenting the writers’ viewpoints. Mary Kolawole relates the idea of autobiographical fiction to the experiences of women when she observes that African women conceive writing “not as a synonym for elusive fiction but a source of self-actualization” (12).

Interestingly, most of the writers who reflect the element of autobiography in their novels do not shy away from stressing the recreation of their personal lives. For instance, Adichie (2007) reveals: “My parents’ stories formed the backbone of my research [for *Half of a Yellow Sun*]”. She further expresses her family’s deep and personal involvement in the Nigeria civil war and how the effects it had on her family reverberates in her own life:

... because I lost both grandfathers in the Nigeria-Biafra war, ... because my father has tears in his eyes when he speaks of losing his father, because my mother still cannot speak at length about losing her father in a refugee camp, because the brutal bequests of colonialism make me angry, because the thought of the egos and indifference of men leading to the unnecessary deaths of men and women and children enrages me, because I don’t ever want to forget. (Adichie 2007)

Adichie is involved in the trauma of her parents and grandparents, who were traumatized directly by the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Adichie inherited their traumas, and writing *Half of a Yellow Sun* is her understanding of their pasts, and of her own trauma. As a result, there is

verisimilitude in the work. She states that Ugwu, one of the narrators in the novel, is:

...inspired in part by Mellitus, who was my parents’ houseboy during the war; in part by Fide, who was our houseboy when I was growing up...When my mom spoke about Mellitus, what a blessing he was, how much he helped her, how she did not know what she would have done without him, I remember being moved but also thinking that he could not possibly have been the saint my mother painted, that he must have been flawed and human. (Adichie 2007)

In addition, Adichie (2007) adds that ‘Harrison’, another character in the novel, “is based on a real Harrison who lived with my family until very recently. What the character does with beets is, in fact, what the real Harrison told me he did during the war”. Therefore, the novel is a character-driven story in which personal experiences form the focal point of the tale. Adichie is able to present a vivid description of the war because she grew up in the shadow of Biafra; an experience that challenges her to engage with history in order to make sense of her past and treat many issues about the war that remained unresolved. However, her remarks suggest personal involvement because she not only wants to make sense of the past, but also of the sense of the relationship between the shadow of Biafra and the effect on her.

Sade Adeniran’s *Imagine This* is another novel on trauma. The novel is not foregrounded on the aftermath effect of a war as Adichie’s, but it narrates the trauma of battling with the idea of migrating from Britain to a village, in Southwestern Nigeria. The writer claims on numerous occasions that the story of Lola, the novel’s child protagonist and narrator is not entirely her own personal story. However, the novel is detailed with the descriptions of people, events and scenes which are so vivid that they make you think the story is factual in its entirety. The story is located in real places like Idogun and Lagos in Nigeria. All the characters are Yoruba and interject their English with Yoruba expressions. There are also detailed physical descriptions of characters such that, again, we feel they must have been inspired by or modelled

after real people. The answer that Adeniran gives when asked how much of the book is autobiographical did nothing to dispel the aura of personal experiences that enveloped the novel. She states: “I always say, ‘It is and it isn’t’. Some things in the book are based on real incidents. That village was where I grew up, but what happens to the character Lola is not what happened to me. My experience was not so much bad as a real culture shock” (Wilson par. 11).

During an interview with a newspaper journalist, in Lagos, Adeniran claims to have spent time with her grandmother in Idogun, the same village Lola was taken to in the novel. Adeniran admirably conveys the idea that her novel is inspired by her life experience, but the novel is also a creative, imaginative work, “I imagine my past,” she said. Further, she says that she looked back on how she lived with her grandmother in the village and thought that it made an “interesting . . . situation” (Adebisi 56).

It may be argued that some contemporary Nigerian writers often set their stories against the background of a troubled past in Nigeria. This personal involvement is articulated in their novels in the sense that parts of their lives are incorporated by basing some of their characters on family members, an idea that suggests that an author can never be entirely ‘distant’ from his/her own work. It is against this background that the paper examines the struggles, experiences and pains of the third generation Nigerian writers who are still undergoing the painful process of transformation from colonial through neo-colonial to wholly self-determining individuals.

Theoretical Framework

The analyses of the novels will be influenced by the following theories: postcolonial, psychoanalysis and trauma. They are relevant to this paper because of the relationship which exists among them. While the term and concept ‘postcolonial’ has come under discussion in numerous critical works (Fanon 1967; Said 1978, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989; Quayson 2000; Gaylard 2005), it is taken to mean the temporal locations of literary texts. Despite this acknowledgement, the theory itself remains notoriously slippery, and the field generative of

conflicting definitions and heated debates because some postcolonial theorists differ in their assessments. Most pressing of the argument is that colonialism has been chronologically superseded while old and new forms of imperialism are still very much with us. These new forms of imperialism in the guise of corporate globalization and its agents such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization require a new approach from Postcolonial theorists (Quayson 2000).

The study adopts the concept of ‘postcolonializing’ by Ato Quayson which suggests that in order to keep up with current practice in the field of postcolonialism, the non-hyphenated form is preferred to the hyphenated, reserving “post-colonial” for the much narrower designation of the period, immediately after colonialism. The concept of ‘postcolonializing’ will therefore assist in the analyses of process of the authors coming into self-realization through the narration of postmemory and trauma. Ato Quayson does not consider the idea of postcolonial to mean a period of time, but rather a process. Hence, he uses the term ‘postcolonializing’ to describe the process of a culture coming into being (Quayson 2000).

Trauma and psychoanalysis theories are also relevant to this paper because they overlap in interests and methods. Trauma Studies in Literature found their roots in psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century, when Sigmund Freud developed his theory of psychoanalysis. Freud changed the meaning of the term ‘trauma’ from indicating ‘physical injury’ to ‘psychological injury’ (Freud 62), an idea that stems from the study of the cause of neurosis in hysterical women in France and the psychological effects of the Holocaust in Germany. Psychoanalysts also developed trauma theories in greater details while studying combat victims of the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Vietnam War. Studies were done on the traumatic experience for a whole generation of survivors, and the way in which a trauma can be transmitted from parents to children and even from grandparents to grandchildren (Felman 1975; Laub 1993). Present studies on trauma do not focus only on Holocaust and hysterical women, but are also being applied to other traumatic events such as slavery, colonialism and

situations such as cultural shock, domestic abuse and childhood cumulative trauma (Cazenave 2005; Novak 2008).

In the novels under study, the child characters/narrators and other characters display different forms of “psychological” symptoms of trauma that are not only caused by war, but are as a result of private and personal events. The results of such events are often “psychological” and the symptoms include cyclical speech patterns, references to infantile and initial traumatic events, flashbacks, silence, psychological fragmentations, inability to locate words, dissociation or altered consciousness, sexualized anxieties, trembling, incoherent babblings, profuse sweating and violent outbursts. Hence, readings of the novels are primarily seen through the concepts of postcolonial, psychoanalysis and trauma discourse.

Revisiting Postmemory and Trauma in Sade Adeniran’s *Imagine This* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Sade Adeniran and Chimamanda Adichie may have had different childhood experiences, in Nigeria; one thing that is common between the two is having experienced two different cultures that have affected their understanding of their environments. Sade Adeniran was born in Britain, but was moved by her father to Idogun in Ogun State in Nigeria at around age nine, where she lived with her grandmother. Adichie was born in the city of Enugu, grew up as the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in the university town of Nsukka in South-eastern Nigeria, but at the age of 19, she left Nigeria for the United States. Though both had foreign proclivities, their novels are reflections of conditions in Nigeria. The conditions are not only socio-political concerns in Nigeria, but ones that bear collections of personal memories and traumas. Adeniran interweaves human concerns with cultural shock in a village in Nigeria while Adichie interlaces personal traumas with political anxieties experienced during the Nigeria Biafra War.

First, let us examine the writers’ personal inclination towards their writings. Adeniran’s passion for writing began during her childhood, although she says that she never dreamed of becoming a writer and calls

herself “an accidental writer” (Adebisi 1). She reveals that writing was mostly the medium of communication between her and her father:

We had this relationship where most of our communication was done through letters. When I still lived at home and we had a disagreement I’d send him a letter... I’d stick it on his bedroom door where he couldn’t miss it. It was the only way I could get him to listen to my point of view. He always calmed down after reading one of my missives. I guess that’s when I realized the power of the written word. (2)

The effect of this childhood experience on Adeniran no doubt controls the narrative style of the novel. The epistolary style merged with the first person narrative technique therefore permits intimate access to the heart, mind, and creative spirit, enabling one to actually experience the narrator’s experiences. Hence, Adeniran’s childhood letter writing style is a direct reflection of her child protagonist’s resort to diary in expressing her worries in the novel. It can be deduced that her resort to letter writing as a little girl is a hallmark of her insular space and an escape from a withdrawn father. Writing also saves her child protagonist. Therefore, writing for both (protagonist and author) allows for the healing of abused bodies, minds, and hearts in a ‘safe’ space of imagination.

Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* belongs to the genre of contemporary trauma fiction not only because it focuses on the Nigerian Civil War, but it also narrates the characters’ psychological collapse against the death and starvation of a million or more Nigerians, especially the Igbos. Adichie’s inclination towards this war is both personal and regional. She may not have witnessed the war, but she inherited the experience from her immediate family members and the larger society. This supports the earlier claim that trauma can be transmitted from parents to children and even from grandparents to grandchildren. For instance, Adichie stresses her family’s deep personal involvement in the war and how the effects it had on her family reverberates in her own life. She says:

I was born seven years after the Nigeria-Biafra war ended, and yet the war is not mere history to me, it is also memory, for I grew up in the shadow of Biafra. I knew vaguely about the war as a child – that my grandfathers had died, that my parents had lost everything they owned. [...] I was aware of how this war haunted my family, how it coloured the paths our lives had taken. (Adichie 2007)

Adichie obviously translates the trauma of the war into *Half of a Yellow Sun* (henceforth, *HYS*) through the experiences of her characters, narration of events and presentation of her concerns.

One unique way these writers have presented their stories is through their child protagonists. Like Adeniran, her child protagonist, Lola was born in London in 1968, abandoned by her mother at a tender age of eighteen months, lives in a foster home with Adebola, her brother and was eventually taken to Nigeria by their father. Adeniran denies that Lola’s story is her story, but her experiences no doubt influenced the journey of Lola. For instance, she reveals that she spent time in the village of Idogun in Ogun State in Nigeria where she lived with her grandmother (Adebisi 2010) and remembers Idogun as “a village with no electricity, running water or the basic necessities I was used to” (Adebisi 2010). In the novel, when Lola is suddenly thrown into the contrast world of the village, also in Idogun, she laments:

I suppose I have to get used to calling this place, — “home”. But I have to say right now –my real home is in London...I really hate it here...there’s no water, no electricity, no television... I can’t go to school because they teach in Yoruba and I can’t read, write or even speak it properly yet. (Adeniran 2007, 8)

Lola – the child protagonist – does not only complains about the same thing Sade complained about in Idogun, the quotation above is obviously the voice of the author trying to express her traumatic impression of Idogun as a child when she visited. Idogun, therefore, becomes a forced exile and “a state of mind and geographical space

from where physical and emotional traumas arise” (Jegade 276) for both Sade and Lola. During many interviews, Adeniran never reveals her experience with her grandmother. She only claims to have lived with her. However, a lot is revealed through Lola’s close examination of her grandmother in the novel; “when her grandmother cooks ... she gave most of it to her other grandchildren, that is her daughter’s children, which means they get to have two meals” (58), grandmother “says I can’t be taken anywhere and anywhere I go or anything I touch always spoils. She said that’s why my mother left Daddy” (58). Moreover, through the character of Lola, the reader is also exposed to several abuses Lola faced from other characters – Aunt Iya Rotimi (5, 40-41), Iya Foluso (178), Ronke (14, 121), Uncle Niyi (224-227), Wale (169-171) etc. This does not suggest that Adeniran’s grandmother is exactly what she portrays in the novel or that she actually encountered the abuses, however, they did nothing to dispel the aura of trauma she experienced in Idogun.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the story is partly told through an adolescent houseboy, Ugwu, whose voice is one of the three narrators in the novel. As a child narrator, Adichie uses him to provide us with an alternative perspective unlike the other narrators. His influence in the novel is partly due to the fact that he is modelled after actual houseboys of the Adichies’ household called Mellitus and Fide, who Adichie acknowledges: “Ugwu was inspired in part by Mellitus, who was my parents’ houseboy during the war; in part by Fide, who was our houseboy when I was growing up” (Adichie 2007). Mellitus was so influential in her life that Adichie’s mother spoke about how he was “a blessing...how much he helped her, [and] how she did not know what she would have done without him” (Adichie 2007). Therefore, the character of Ugwu is a part of Adichie’s life. Adichie uses Ugwu to describe her total hate for the war that consumed her family and also to reveal her inherited trauma. In the novel, Olanna and his friends describe the scene of murder of the Igbo people as incomprehensible because they were being killed like ants; “father and mother and three children lying dead on the road” (Adichie 2006, 14), “teachers hacked down in Zaria, a full Catholic church in Sokoto set on fire, a pregnant woman split open in Kano” (Adichie 2006, 15). Ugwu’s reaction to

these bloody and heavy words is a reflection of Adichie’s anger and fright:

Ugwu no longer listened. It started in Kano rang in his head. He did not want to tidy the guest room and find bedsheets and warm the soup and make fresh garri for them. He wanted them to leave right away. Or, if they would not leave, he wanted them to shut their filthy mouths. He wanted the radio announcers to be silent too, but they were not. They repeated the news of the killings in Maiduguri until Ugwu wanted to throw the radio out of the window. (Adichie 2006, 15)

Adichie also uses Ugwu to portray silence as a symptom of trauma. Ugwu is forcefully conscripted into the war as a child soldier. At this stage in the novel, the dimension of Ugwu is particularly interesting, as his consciousness rises, and as a speaking voice, he begins to claim an authorial stake in the narrative as he eventually gets scripted to represent the horror of the war. Ugwu’s authorial self begins to emerge as he experiences the war; he feels the urge to “write down what he did from day to day” (Adichie 2006, 360). The need to preserve the memory of his traumatic experiences through the act of writing gives him a new self-reflexive position and authenticity within the narrative. Therefore, the para-narrative book, “The World Was Silent When We Died,” written by Ugwu is a deliberate intertextual attempt by Adichie at representing the testimonies of victims of war. However, at some point, he is incapacitated of wording the horrors, a trauma symptom that causes the subject’s inability to locate the words to recount their experience. Ugwu remains silent about the traumatic events in which, as a combatant, he was forced to participate. By his silence, he distances himself from the collective rape in which he was part. Ugwu’s voice is so powerful that he makes accurate remarks about other characters in the novel. Through him, we are thrown into the world of Olanna and Kainene, the rich twins; Odenigo, his master and Richard, the English writer.

In *Imagine This*, silence also becomes a symptom of trauma. After the death of Adebola, Sade becomes silent for days and was taken to a

medical doctor for cure. Lola complains that the “doctor . . . just kept hitting me and pinching me” (113). Both the babalawo, and Lola’s dad put “three deep cuts” into her back that were filled with “nasty black powder” (119). This scene is a reflection of the idea that Nigerians are ignorant of trauma and instead treat it with laxity. Helen Oyeyemi, a Nigerian writer support this by claiming that she was traumatized the first time she moved to Nigeria and her parent didn’t understand her problems. She is of the opinion that because people don’t get depressed in Nigeria, getting the right help when traumatized is difficult.

One striking feature of the novels is the use of writing narrators. The platform for Lola’s healing is a diary while Ugwu’s para-narrative book, “The World Was Silent When We Died”, is an escape from the horrors of the war. This paper argues that the writers’ use of writing narrators is a way of allowing the readers to feel a close proximity to the intimacy perceived in the novels. Though the dairy and the book addressed social-political concerns, they are personal representations of larger issues that impact their lives and the Nigerian society. The writing narrators often isolate themselves to write in a way that represents Adeniran and Adichie’s personal addiction to writing, an escape to a safe place away from their trauma and an imaginative process of conveying such trauma. Moreover, this isolation leads to what Abbott calls “confinement of the reader to the internal world of a single ego”, a unique trait where “the will of the writer...is the central mystery and point of focus” (6). At the end, both writing narrators look back at their pasts, become more self-aware, confident and fully assertive.

The writers’ childhood as mirrored in these novels, continuously grapples with contemporary and human concerns such as ethnic intolerance, abuse of rights, family and gender issues etc. in the quest for identity formation. In *Imagine This*, in addition to dealing with culture shock, Lola experiences consistent physical and emotional abuse in both the private and public sphere consisting of food deprivation (7, 25-26,34, 275), molestation (31, 75, 169-171, 224-228), beatings (7, 8, 21, 30, 78, 113), verbal abuse (58, 122,178, 180), attempted rape (160-161), and labour exploitation (16). Although the setting of the novel is culturally very specific, Adeniran believes it has

universal appeal because “it’s about somebody’s life experience, so it doesn’t matter if you are a man or a woman, you just have to empathise with a character’s pain” (Adebisi 2010). Adichie discusses this as well: “But what was most important to me, in the end, was emotional truth. I wanted this to be a book about human beings, not a book about faceless political events” (Adichie 2007). Hence, both novels have no generational boundaries.

Lastly, the opportunities to present their stories provide them the joy and self-satisfaction of successfully reincarnating their ‘postmemory’ and traumatic experiences; an outcome the paper argues can be therapeutic for the writers and the readers. For instance, Adeniran feels the positive feedback she is getting from school students is more important to her. She says; “I was welling up with tears when one fourteen year old boy came up to me and said ‘I don’t read but I read your book and it really touched me’...To me as a writer, that’s better than any prize” (Adebisi 2010). Also, Adichie’s intense burden to deal with the memories of the war must have reduced through the process of writing just like how Ugwu’s horrors continue to worry him until he began to write and “the more he wrote, the less he dreamed” (398). Therefore, the act of writing becomes an important process of unburdening, healing and dealing with inassimilable forms of history and memory.

Conclusion

Clearly history, literature and trauma intersect in many different ways in the novels, and most importantly in the depiction of the central characters. The child narrators in the novel are the central elements. It is through them that the writers are able to blur the boundaries between history, literature and trauma. Adichie and Adeniran apply the historical events to the characters, and the historical dimensions are commensurate with the writers’ personal experiences. The emotional truth is what constitutes the core of the story, and what is highlighted the most throughout the novel. The characters live through the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, while Lola in *Imagine This* recreated a lived experience, but what takes precedence is how it felt to be there, and how it still feels. The writers make the literary (or

personal) and traumatic dimension intersect with the historical one to make the historical and political history felt.

In essence, the novels are the writers' discourse about the past, and they show their relationship to that past. As White (2001) points out, we can only access history through language, and its discourse must be written before it can be digested (83). Here history, literature and trauma converge, seeing as the writers use their literary works to mediate their own relation to a traumatic past. The novels thus also serve a therapeutic function on a higher level than the narration: it helps them deal with the trauma they inherited and witnessed. However, the novels also have a memorial function for them. The novels seem to oscillate between laying the ghosts of the past to rest and summoning them (Durrant 9). Perhaps this paradox is the writers' way of coming to terms with the past.

References:

- Abbott, H. Porter. 1984. *Diary fiction: writing as action*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Adebisi, Yemi. 2010. *Counting Gains of Nigerian Authors in Democracy*. *Daily Independent* (Lagos) May 30, 2010.
- Adeniran, Sade. 2007. *Imagine This*. New York: SW Books.
- Adesanmi, Pius, & Chris Dunton. 2005. "Nigeria's Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations." *English in Africa*, 32.1: 7-19.
- Adichie, Chimamanda. 2006. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. USA: Anchor Books.
- . 2007. The Story behind the Book: Q&A with the Author." *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Web. Accessed August 20, 2016. <http://chimamanda.com/books/half-of-a-yellow-sun/the-story-behind-the-book/>

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Cazenave, Odile. 2009. "Women Writers and Gender in the Sub-Saharan Novel." *Teaching the African Novel*, edited by Gaurav Desai, 87-101. New York: MLA.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Durrant, Sam. 2004. *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1995. "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by C. Caruth, 13-60. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1962. "The Aetiology of Hysteria." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893-1899): Early Psycho-Analytic Publications*. 187-221. UK: Vintage Classics.
- Gaylard, Gerald. 2005. *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 2008. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, 29.1:103-128.
- Jegede, Oluwatoyin. 2012. "Proverbial Space and the Dialectics of Place and Displacement in Sade Adeniran's *Imagine This*." *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 6.1: 275-286.
- Kolawole, Mary. 2005. *Text, Textuality [sic] and Contextuality: Paradigms Lost and Paradigms Regained in Literary Theory*. Obafemi Awolowo University Press.

- Kattanek, Sita. 2011. "The Nigerian Coming-of-Age Novel as a Globalization Device: A Reading of Chris Abani's *GraceLand*." *Rupkatha: Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 3.3: 426-33.
- Laub, Dori, & Nanatte Auerhahn. 1993. "Knowing and Not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 74: 287-302.
- Lejeune, Phillipe. 1989. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Novak, Amy. 2008. "Who Speaks? Who Listens?: The Problem of Address in Two Nigerian Trauma Novels." *Studies in the Novel*, 40.1: 31-51.
- Ouma, Christopher. 2011. "Childhood in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction." Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Quayson, Ato. 2000. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process?* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Waberi, A. A. 1998. Les enfants de la postcolonie: esquisse d'une nouvelle generation d'écrivains francophones d'Afrique noire. *Notre Librairie* 135: 8–15.
- White, Hayden. 2001. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." In *The History and Narrative Reader*, edited by Geoffrey Roberts, 81-100. London: Routledge.
- Wilson, Mary-Claire. 2011. "Imaginary World: An Interview with Sade Adeniran." *Spike Magazine*. Web. Accessed August 16, 2016. <http://www.spikemagazine.com/imaginary-world-an-interview-with-sade-adeniran.php>.