



Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and the Postcolonial Discourse on Nigeria's Civil War Experience

¹Shouket Ahmad Tilwani, Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, 11942, Saudi Arabia., s.tilwani@psau.edu.sa

²Azeez Akinwumi Sesan, Osun State University, azeezakinwumisesan@gmail.com

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Abstract

Nollywood films have been responding to critical sociological, historical and national issues militating against sustainable national cohesion and unity. One of the film texts that have narrated a significant event in Nigerian history is Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Using the qualitative approaches of literature review and textual analysis, the article critiques the film. While adopting the tenets of postcolonial theory and deconstruction, the article establishes the situations of supplementation and melancholy as they affect socio-cognitive interpretations of the civil war across the ethnic groups in the country. The film text underlines the fact that Nigerians, across all the ethnic nationalities, still suffer from the postcolonial and postwar melancholy precipitated by the events before, during and after the war. Through the characterization and plot of the film text, the article shows that Nigerians now suffer from intrusion/re-experiencing as well as negative cognitions and mood, which have been affecting oneness, unity, and national cohesion of the country. Decades after the suspension of the war at the warfronts, the major actors of the war (Nigerian government and Biafra) still engage in a cold war, psychologically and ideologically as is evident in the national political scene.

Keywords: Half of a Yellow Sun; Biyi Bandele; Nigerian Civil War; Biafra; Nollywood; postcolonial cinema; postwar trauma; cultural memory



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Shouket Ahmad Tilwani

Azeez Akinwumi Sesan

Introduction

Nollywood has come of age as evident in the creative deployment of artistry and technologies in the art of filmmaking. The quality of the film in terms of artistic and technical values attests to the fact that Nollywood has come to maturation in fellowship with other global film cultures such as Hollywood and Bollywood. The present article bases its argument on Nollywood's qualification to fellowship with global cinema considering the aesthetic values and technological innovations displayed in recent Nollywood films such as *King of Boys*, *House of Gaa*, *Gangs of Lagos* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. These recent films, among others, usually reflect and refract Nigeria's socio-political, historical and psycho-cultural experiences thereby offering varying psycho-cognitive interpretations of individual and collective experiences. To this end, the characterization, subject matter and themes of Nollywood movies bear cultural marks which easily betray their "nativity" (the ethnic and tribal beliefs of the filmmakers). Among the cultural marks which have betrayed the 'nativity' of Nollywood movies are costumes, props, settings and historical/political landmarks overtly or covertly presented in the

film texts. This development has generated a new dimension to describing the nature and quality of films produced in Nigeria's film industry under the name Neo-Nollywood.

Neo-Nollywood is a concept used to indicate a breakaway from the traditional styles of filmmaking which focus more on the story and its plot. In this line of thought, Neo-Nollywood not only focuses on the story (what) but is also concerned with the telling of the story through the eye of the video camera (how). These Neo-Nollywood filmmakers are daring with the story and how this story is filmed. Neo-Nollywood filmmakers such as Kunle Afolayan, Jeta Amata, Tade Ogidan and Biyi Bandele¹ bring their experience and exposure to the whole process of filmmaking, from scripting to editing. One of the essential features of Neo-Nollywood film is that it offers an Alter/Native film tradition (following Funso Aiyejina's conceptualization of the term). The idea of Alter/Native film narrative is, therefore, mooted to mobilize a redemptive mission necessary for cultural reaffirmation and a validation of an emergent post-Afrocentric construal of Africa's historical peculiarities (Yeku, 2014, p. 166). One of the Neo-Nollywood films is Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a film roughly adapted from the novel of the same title written by Chimamanda Adichie. The film, like its source novel, centers on Nigeria's Civil War that was fought from 1967–1970. The war, since its suspension², has remained in the consciousness of Nigerians of all tribes and ethnic groups. Although the war was suspended, postwar tensions still stare us in the face.



Figure 1: A film poster of *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Biyi Bandele presents the pre-war events and the trends of the war in the film text. Unlike other feature and historical films, Biyi Bandele does not make any historical/political statement because, as it was believed at the end of the war, “there was no victor and there was no vanquished.” Biyi Bandele’s handling of the film differentiates him and his product from the traditional ways of making historical films. Prior to the making of the film, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, there were historical films in various indigenous languages of the country such as *Efunsetan Aniwura*, *Bashorun Gaa* and *Ogbori Elemosho* (historical films made in Yoruba language). Biyi Bandele is conscious of how he manages the textual formations of the screenplay from its source novel in order not to incur the wrath of the government that is one

of the principal actors in the civil war. Thus, Biyi Bandele's film aligns with Sagmon and Gomez (2024) view of filmic adaptation from a novel to a film text.

The film, first released in 2013, focuses on a critical period of Nigeria's political history. Although the title and the color of the film's poster suggest its adaptation from Chimamanda Adichie's novel of the same title, the content and the subject matter of the film differ considerably from the novel's overall ideology. This considerable difference might be connected to the seriousness of the film's content with its ability to greatly impact on Nigeria's psycho-cognitive interpretations of the war, a situation which may regenerate ill feelings among the ethnic groups that were actively involved in the war. The plot of the film, unlike its source novel, underplays the tragedy of war. Rather, it focuses more attention on the pains and gains of love through the complicated love relationship between Olanna and Odenigbo. In the presentation of Nigeria's political history, the film chronicles the events that characterized the country's political independence and the events that culminated in the civil war. Ultimately, the film visibly presents the trial and triumph of love in the midst of national turmoil. Considering the intricacies of the film's plot and the filmmaker's discursive strategies, one can say that Bandele has made use of hermeneutic phenomenology to re-interrogate the trajectory of the Nigerian Civil War. This hermeneutic phenomenology is precursory of improper analogy as seen in the textual fibers of the film and its source novel. Consequently, the improper analogy

of the text as evident in the film and novel's narration is incongruous to the actualization of the absolute meaning and absolute sovereignty of the texts. There is, therefore, infinite meaning, owing to displacement of meaning in improper analogy of texts which consequently generates deconstructive affirmations of meanings and historical essence of narration. On this point, Ryan (2019, pp. 5–6) states:

Both absolute meaning and absolute sovereignty (and the two are mutually conditioning) thus lose their generality and their power. Hobbes's absolute sovereignty itself is simply one displacement among others in a potentially infinite series. This is what he fears, and this is why Derrida speaks of the deconstructive affirmation of the ever-open possibility of displacement as hope or trust. The assertion of absolute sovereignty in meaning as in the state is always an economy of distrust, desire, and fear.

Bandle's deconstructive presentation of the trajectory of Nigeria's Civil War interrogates the absolute meaning inscribed on the genesis and the course of the war as evident in the revolutionary dialogue of Odenigbo, a university professor with a Marxist ideology. The film concludes with the idea that "the state is always an economy of distrust, desire and fear."

Can a Weak Foundation Sustain a Structure?

Through the dialogue of the film's protagonists, especially Odenigbo, Bandle introspectively queries the common knowledge about the formation of Nigeria, the journey towards political independence and the post/neo-colonial experiences of the country. The common knowledge among the majority of Nigerians across generations is that poor strategies for the country's amalgamation in 1914 were the genesis of its current predicament. This is a

sort of blame game that has no serious significance to the postcolonial discourse on Nigeria's socio-political realities. The reality of the matter is that there is a recurrence of issues that occurred in the pre-amalgamated years in the era of amalgamation and beyond, ethnocentric ideologies of deceit and bigotry. To this end, this article aligns with Sesan's (2015, pp. 291–292) view that:

If the amalgamation of the country had been done by Nigerians, it would have been a failed project from the start owing to the factors of ethnic intolerance, chauvinism and unhealthy ethno-religious solidarity. In the pre-amalgamation history of Nigeria, there were series of intra/inter-ethnic rivalries and wars across all the ethnic nationalities in the country. In the post-amalgamation period, the same problem still persists as shown in the militancy in the Niger-Delta region and terrorism in the Northern region of the country. Nigerians have not learnt to live harmoniously.

Sesan's observation underlines the fundamental issues that have been generating incoherence in the country's body politics. The foundation of this national incoherence was laid during the nationalist movement that ushered in political independence on October 1, 1960. There is a reflection of this general view of amalgamation in Odenigbo's dialogue. He states:

Odenigbo: I am a Nigerian because a white man gave me that identity and I am black because a white man constructed black as different from his white as humanly possible but I was Igbo before the white man came. (*HoYS*)

Two critical issues are inferred from Odenigbo's retort, the first is that he is not comfortable with white imperialism and presumed racial superiority and the second is that he is not pleased with congenital abnormality which characterized the 'birth' of Nigeria as an independent country. Odenigbo's statement also manifests deconstructive ideologies of absence

and difference as evident in the country's inter-ethnic relations. From the statement, one can also infer that he is not convinced of his Nigerian identity. This is a form of psychological distancing from the collective will of the country. Similarly, Odenigbo's statement is a sort of supplementation which is "the unstable relationship between two binary oppositions that keeps them from being totally separate entities" (Dobie, 2009, p. 169). The two binary oppositions, in the instance of this article, are the political actors at the ethnic and national frontiers. Also, the two oppositions have far-reaching impacts on national cohesion which caused the first military coup in the country. The film's reference to the first military coup reveals the ethnic sentiments of presumed victims of the coup, the northern military in the country. Odenigbo expresses his anger against the presumption of northerners that the coup was Igbo in its planning and execution. The consequence of this was a counter-coup of July 29, 1966 which brought the northern military leaders to power.

Prior to the military coups and the outbreak of the civil war, Nigeria has been making frantic efforts to rediscover itself but the problem is the historical dementia it suffers owing to the mismanagement of its political history. Nigeria and its political leaders have failed to critically interrogate the political formations and structures of the country to know where things have gone wrong owing to the problems of ethnocentrism. To this end, this article holds the

view that the political leaders of the country pretend that all is well as reflected in their ethnocentric attitude to governance. The resentment of one ethnic group against the other is not novel in the contemporary political structure of the country based on the fact that it started at the time the country was preparing for political independence. On this note, this article maintains that the problem with Nigeria started with the nationalist movement of the country consequent upon the influence of supplementation. This is because all the nationalist leaders did not operate with the philosophy of *united we stand, divided we fall*. The first generation of nationalist cum political leaders such as Herbert Macaulay, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo upheld their respective ethnic interests far above the national interest as evident in their political party structures and ideologies. These nationalists played religious and ethnic cards within and outside of their political parties to create a wide gulf among their followers. It is this gulf which has degenerated to feelings of physical and psychological displacement from the unifying center called Nigeria. The faulty process towards political independence generated a series of internal crises that culminated in the country's civil war. More than fifty years after the suspension of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, the events in the country are worrisome and call for concerted efforts to attain the dream of the Nigerian Project. The plot and the subject matter of the film interrogate some underlying factors such as ethnic sentiments which contributed to the outbreak of the war. If these factors, however, had

been properly handled, the outbreak of the war would have been averted.



Figure 2: A scene where Odenigbo discusses issues on national incoherence as a way of manifesting his situation of supplementation.

Although the film begins from the middle of the events with a specific focus on the Queen's departure from England and her arrival in Nigeria to grant the country political independence on October 1, 1960, the filmmaker foregrounds several salient issues suggesting that the foundation of the newly independent nation is shaky. From the first day of political independence, the filmmaker underlines the fact that dishonesty, self-centeredness and misplaced loyalty have been identified with the political existence of the country. On the day of the independence celebration, the Finance Minister is striking a contract deal with Olanna and Kainene's father with the hope of getting ten percent of the proceeds. This is unhealthy for

a newly independent country striving for economic advancement. This congenital abnormality in the political history of Nigeria has created two camps of the center and the margin. This situation forms part of Odenigbo's argument that there is a need to query the psycho-cognitive orientation of Nigerians to critically examine the country's illusion of national coherence. There is also a reflection of supplementation in Odenigbo's questioning of the rationale for the political structure of the country. In a discussion with his colleagues, Odenigbo states:

Odenigbo: The big issue we should be asking the people is that who put the Northerners in power to dominate everybody. If there are no men like Major Nzeogwu in this country, we will not be where we are in this country. (*HoYS*)

Odenigbo's resentment of the political empire of the country is a misplaced postcolonial revenge which sees "postcolonialism hegemonic in the sense of counter-discursive resistance to cultural identities authored by Western domination" (Klein, 1990, p. 397). Similarly, Odenigbo's view represents collectivism of the sectional opinion that Nigeria's political existence as a sovereign unit is negotiable. This opinion is informed by the film footage shown immediately after the first coup in the film. In the footage, the BBC news reporter classified the coup as an Igbo coup because 'most northerners were killed'.

What emerges from Odenigbo's stance and ideological formulations about Nigeria's unity and national structure betrays his learning and profession. He is misguided by his radical and revolutionary thoughts that harshness can bring the desired effects in a multicultural and

multidimensional entity such as Nigeria. He also fails to realize that power is seductive and this seduction of power always hampers the attainment of fairness, equity and justice. Based on this view, therefore, this paper corroborates Spivak's (1999, p. 199) view that:

The promise of justice must attend not only to the seduction of power, but also to the anguish that knowledge must suppress difference as well as *différance*, that a fully just world is impossible, forever deferred and different from our projections, the undecidable in the face of which we must risk the decision that we can hear the other.

Spivak's view summarizes the foundational problem which Nigerians failed to manage properly and this has led the country to the present situation. Like other ethnocentric Nigerians who display ethnic cards to curry favor, Odenigbo does not display a mindset which accommodates other views that are not consistent with Igbo ideological worldview. Since the commencement of Nigeria, as a postcolonial country, the nationalists and successive governments have been playing ethnic and religious cards to their advantage and in favor of their cronies. Like other members of the intelligentsia in contemporary Nigerian society, Odenigbo fails to engage in self-reflexivity and social-reflexivity of pre- and post-independence activities in the country. On this issue of self-reflexivity and social-reflexivity of pre-independence activities, this article makes a quick reference to Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* which underlines the ideological view, through the characterization of Half-Child, that

Nigeria's unity and peaceful coexistence after political independence requires critical inquiry.



Figure 3: A scene showing the dialogue between a man and Olanna at the airport.

The validation of Soyinka's thesis is seen in the series of events as presented in the film text of *Half of a Yellow Sun* that have negatively affected inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country. Before the coup of January 15, 1966, the whole country was complaining of corruption and insecurity which characterized the civilian administration. A logical reaction to the coup, therefore, should not embrace the ethnic jingoism that the coup was intended only for the Igbo simply because an Igbo man, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, became the head of state. Unfortunately, the Northerners played the ethnic card which later provided a prompt for [another] counter-coup of July 29, 1966. Owing to the significance of this situation to the actualization of Nigeria's national cohesion, Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow*

Sun reechoes this ethnic sentiment through the dialogue between Olanna and a man at the airport.

The Man at the Airport: Would you like to read this? (*Offers a newspaper to Olanna*). They have finally removed that Igbo Vice-Chancellor from the University of Lagos. It is on the back cover. Uhn, the problem with the Igbo people is that they want to control everything in this country. They own all the shops. They control the civil service even the police. If you are arrested for a crime as long as you can say ‘keda’, they will let you go. And now with this coup, they control the army.

Olanna: You say ‘kedu’ and not ‘keda’. It means ‘how are you’?

The Man at the Airport: Are you Igbo?

Olanna: Yes.

The Man at the Airport: You have the face of Fulani. (*HoYS*)

The dialogue is a subtle approach to the idea of power renegotiation between the Northern region and the Eastern region. The man is one of the Nigerians who utilized ethnic sentiments to create tension in the country. Besides, the dialogue reveals “the metaphor of decay and the active presence of imperial significances upon social relationships in the present” (Quayson, 2012, p. 360). The disruption of national cohesion has been engineered by ethnic sentiments. This disruption started with the counter-coup which allegedly aimed at all Igbo nationals.

‘The imperial significances’ are further portrayed in the film with the decree which eradicated regional government. The footage of the documentary in the film reveals that Major General Aguiyi Ironsi repealed regionalism in Nigeria’s national configuration in the month of May. A critical reading of the film suggests that the cancellation of regionalism, perhaps, does

not favor the northerners. This may inform the counter-coup and the riots which claimed the lives of Igbo people in the northern part of the country. There is also decay and an active presence of imperial significances as shown in the level of ethnic and regional intolerance in the country. The horror of the killings of Igbo people at the airport in the northern state clearly shows the imbalance in the political configuration of the state. The pendulum, to this day, sways consistently in no direction with no end in sight. This article upholds this view because the ethnic dominance and internal imperialism in the country have been perpetuated by state apparatuses of legislation and force, used singly or in combination. Although the counter-coup brought a northerner, General Yakubu Gowon to power, Hausa people in northern Nigeria still display mistrust and enmity to the Igbo people in their region. The situation becomes more problematic because the warring parties (Eastern and Northern Nigeria) feel uncomfortable with the level of disinterestedness of the Yoruba ethnic group in the impasse. The political history of Nigeria is represented in the film when Odenigbo accuses Miss Adebayo (a Yoruba lecturer and also Odenigbo's colleague) of neutrality and lack of compassion for the massacre of Igbo people in the northern part of the country. Odenigbo says further that it is reported in the news that most Yoruba chiefs thanked the northerners for sparing the lives of Yoruba people and their investments in the north. This is part of the postcolonial reality of inter-ethnic mistrust which still affects the country's national cohesion.

Is There an End in Sight?

The above question is necessary considering the complicity of Nigerians and foreign bodies in the attainment of the country's internal cohesion. The question also highlights the film's attempt to deconstruct national sentiments militating against the country's unity in diversity. In the film, Odenigbo suggests that the white imperialists acted in the background to execute the war between the Nigerian government and Biafra. Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, therefore, is an attempt to offer posterity an audiovisual representation of the war. This attempt, perhaps, aims to give a caveat that Nigerians should not engage in or condone activities that can plunge the country to another civil war. In order to alter the negativity of supplementation, Bandele deconstructs the collective consciousness of the war rooted in an ethnocentric narration of the event. To this end, "to deconstruct is to examine minutely in order to dismantle conventional hierarchies in the given system to arrive at an exactly opposite position" (Krishnaswamy et al., 2005, p. 37). The plot of the film and the characterization of Odenigbo contribute to how the filmmaker deconstructs ethnic perception of the war.

Although Bandele adapted the film from Chimamanda Adichie's novel of the same title, the film brings the history of the Nigerian Civil War closer to Nigerians' consciousness more than the novel. This situation is possible because "by its very nature, and the topicality of issues often treated, a film is normally made for immediate consumption, unlike literature, which can

afford to wait on the shelf for the right audience to emerge” (Ekwuazi, 2007, p. 130). The topicality of the film’s theme does not foreclose the fact that there have been documentary films on the events surrounding the outbreak and suspension of the Nigerian Civil War. The film, however, offers a comprehensive and detailed account of the circumstances of the war which ravaged the country for three years.

Since the suspension of the civil war, it has been difficult for the country and its people to obliterate the debilitating effect of the war from their memory and consciousness because the war’s “residues, echoes and indeed vivid practices still remain” (Quayson, 2012, p. 360). It (the war’s memory) remains with us as is evident in the way we interpret our inter-ethnic identities and national policies. How we currently interpret our identities and inter-ethnic relations reveals that Nigerians have not seen the country beyond a geographical construct. Even as a geographical construct, they do not see the country as a common legacy for all ,sectional interests override national interest. There is no doubt that the civil war memory has become a generational issue with its psychological impact on the national memory. This situation, perhaps, motivates the representation of the war memories in the genres of poetry, prose, memoir and film such as Biyi Bandele’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The film’s narrative underlines the fact that the successive postwar governments in the

country have demonstrated a lack of political will to address the postwar melancholy that Nigerians of war and postwar generations are subjected to. The failure of the three Rs (reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation) project is evident in the inter-ethnic relations, resource control and subjectivity in the administration of justice. Sadly, successive governments in Nigeria fail to realize that the postwar trauma and melancholy can be suppressed by ensuring that everyone has a sense of belonging. The country has not been reconciled because the political class still plays ethnic and religious cards to curry undue favor. On this note, the present article aligns with Oluwafunminiyi's (2019, p. 17) view that:

Despite not being wholly set on the civil war, at least within the context of its portrayal as the 'love story' of two sisters wedged in the wave of the Biafra war, fears subsist among the political class that such a film could trigger a nationwide conflagration. However true this may seem, the mishandling of the film has revealed the fact that the country continues to live perpetually in denial about the 1967 Biafra experience. The case has questioned the sincerity of the political class in tackling many of its inherited challenges since independence.

Oluwafunminiyi's submission also explains the postcolonial melancholy that characterizes Nigerian multi-ethnic society. The film, therefore, draws attention to the root of Nigeria's problem with a view to providing a psycho-cognitive solution through a worthwhile change in ideological orientation. This is because the postwar melancholy becomes more problematic with the assumption among Igbo people that the war was between Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups. The film also echoes this assumption when Odenigbo attempts to convince his

mother to flee with them to Umuahia. In order to convince his mother, Odenigbo says “Hausa soldiers are approaching”. This shows that reconciliation of the country requires serious efforts and this should go beyond Gowon’s ‘no victor, no vanquished’ pronouncement after the suspension of the war.

The statement, ‘no victor, no vanquished’, is no longer relevant in the contemporary post-civil war discourse in Nigeria. This is because individuals now have feelings of internal displacement in their own country. What has happened in Nigeria since the suspension of the war is displacement/dislocation along ethnic and political lines. The subject matter of the film and its thematic focus present the postcolonial political intricacies which have displaced a large number of Nigerians. Based on this, the classification of the film as a postcolonial text is consistent with Ashcroft et al.’s (2002, p. 9) description of displacement/dislocation in postcolonial literature:

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being: the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place ... A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model.

The film reechoes the displacement of some ethnic nationalities from the national matrix of events at the economic and political fronts. This displacement is evident in the economic and

political marginalization that some ethnic groups in the country have suffered. This marginalization at the macro level has degenerated to melancholy. This article's argument is derived from the film's concentration on Biafra. In the film, the emphasis is on the trials and traumas that Igbo people faced during the war. Only a few scenes focus on Northern Nigeria while no scene focuses on the western part. Again, the narrative of the film makes us understand that the Nigerian government does not want secession because of the economic strength of the Eastern Region. The inference from this argument is that the civil war was not in the national interest, some individuals and groups pursue personal interests within the framework of civil war. Sadly, Nigeria still battles with the melancholy of the war. Since the suspension of the war, there has been 'conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model'.

The concern of Nigerians, irrespective of ethnic groups and political affiliation, is how to stop the blame game as a way to resolve some critical issues in the postcolonial and postwar melancholy. The blame game is presented in the film text with Odenigbo pointing an accusing finger at the colonialists as the genesis of Nigeria's problems. The dialogue between Odenigbo and Michael is as follows:

Odenigbo: What do you think account for the success of white man's mission in Africa, Richard.

Michael: Success?

Odenigbo: Yes. Success I think in English

Odenigbo: Who brought racism into the world? The white man brought racism into the world. He used it as the basis of conquest. So easy at home, conquered among humane people. (*HoYS*)

The above excerpt is an instance of the blame game which has become part of Nigeria's national life. After the attainment of political independence, the problem of racism has been transformed into ethnicity and tribalism as a weapon of conquest and domination. With this situation, political power is concentrated in one region while the most valuable economic resources of the country are in another region. These economic and political structures of the country have not been helpful because the two regions still nurse the pains of the civil war. Our focus on how to redeem the nation should be on relative objectivism in the appraisal of the events in the country. The government and the people of Nigeria should learn from the history of the war. This paper, therefore, sustains Nwankwo's (1972, p. 22) view that:

The Nigerian Federation is at crossroads. Before arriving at this crossroads, we have stumbled along a tourous (sic.) path. We cannot afford to say, 'let us forget the past'. We must, in picking a new way, draw from our experience. And if we should forget the pains caused by the events of our recent history we must not forget the facts of such pains and the circumstances that caused them. Either we will digest the bitter fruits of our history or they will poison us.

Unfortunately, Nigeria's political leaders have unintentionally become forgetful of the evils of the north and the east dichotomy in the affairs of the country. This phenomenon further reveals that all the regions in the country have not been reconciled and properly integrated into the country's national life. The non-inclusion of the federated states/parts in the matrix of

national economic and political structures has generated sadism and hatred toward the country which are reflected in a series of violent insurgencies which have characterized the existence of the country in recent times. This development is expected because

Nourished by a sadistic, revengeful, yet fundamentally self-deluding and impoverishing fantasy of the 'restored' object, the melancholic ego must at the same time prevent, exclude or repress the possibility of the object actually returning, since this return would lead to an uncanny complication, and ultimately destabilization, of the pleasure-giving process of substitution. The melancholic ego would in that case become the ghostly other of its own fantasy. The melancholic fantasy thus to some extent acts as a mechanism of repression or exclusion. (Sorensen, 2007, p. 77)

Sorensen's view aligns with Odenigbo's reaction to the suspension of the war. In the film, Odenigbo is disappointed with how Biafran leader, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, handles the matter. This is expected of him because of his ethnocentrism (he never believes in another ethnic group except Igbo).

There is an uncanny complication in Nigeria's national life because of the repression, melancholy and presumed ethnic domination which are pervasive in the country. The situation becomes more complicated by every attempt made by successive governments to further disintegrate the country through the creation of states and geopolitical zones. This article is of the view that the current six geopolitical zones of the country have not resolved the lingering problems of ethnic mistrust, corruption and large-scale social and economic insecurity in the country. The film text suggests that the counter-coup of July 1966 was a covert reaction of

northern military officers to the abolition of regional government by the administration of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. The argument of these northern soldiers, perhaps, is that the abolition of regionalism will not properly integrate all Nigerians across their respective ethnic nationalities. If this hypothesis is correct, the division of the country into six geopolitical zones (North-East, North-Central, North-West, South-East, South-West and South-South) is not adequate to solve the country's problems.

The country's postcolonial and postwar melancholy can be resolved through the political will of the Nigerian government to reconcile all the differences across ethnic and political lines. The ongoing clamor for restructuring is a revisit of Gowon's 3Rs project (reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation). Like Odenigbo and other Igbo characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nigerians, especially the Igbo people, need psychological rehabilitation. The horrendous memory of the war still lingers in the subconscious of Nigerians, especially the Igbo people. The darkness which descends at the end of the film while Odenigbo and his family are in a moving car suggests that the hope for a better Nigeria at the suspension of the war is uncertain because all the factors that led to the civil war have not been resolved. The moving car also suggests that Nigeria is still in the quest of self-rediscovery for oneness, equity and justice despite the fact that the country is full of boundless opportunities for all the citizens irrespective of ethnic groups, tribes as well as religious and political affiliations. To achieve national

harmony and sustainable peace, the government needs to critically look inward to evaluate where things have gone wrong with the country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* contributes to the discourse on Nigeria's Civil War through the tenets of postcolonialism and deconstruction. The article also critiques the subject matter, characterization and themes of the film to underline the salient issues that prompted the war and how the country has been faring since the suspension of the war. It also highlights some of the major problems, such as lack of political will among successive governments in the country, ethnic and political intolerance and the blame game, which have been affecting national cohesion and sustainable peace. The country's leadership needs to critically look inward to reevaluate Nigeria's tortuous journey from October 1, 1960, to the present. Nollywood, therefore, has become a tool that can be used to raise national consciousness on the need to harmonize all differences to attain national cohesion and sustainable peace in the country.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ Biyi Bandele (born Biyi Bandele-Thomas) was a UK-based Nigerian novelist, playwright, and filmmaker. His debut as a film director was Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Since its production, the film has received critical attention. He died on August 7, 2022.

² The present writer uses the term suspension because the postwar restructuring and events do not show that all is well with the country in terms of inter-ethnic relations in political spheres and resource control. There are perceived and confirmed cases of economic and political marginalization of some ethnic groups in the country. This development has negatively affected the country's true federalism and the realization of the Nigeria Project.

³ [Editor's Note]: For directly relevant scholarship not cited in the submitted version, see Ademakinwa and Smith (2020) on memory, Biafra, and nationhood; Sagmon and Gomez (2024) on ecranisation and adaptation in CINEJ Cinema Journal; Onwuliri (2024) on the film's representation of Biafran history and trauma; and Kehinde and Kehinde (2026) on the novel-to-film adaptation. These works have been added to the references to situate the article within the current scholarship.

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Correspondence on this article should be addressed to ¹Shouket Ahmad Tilwani, Department of English, College of Science and Humanities, Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, 11942, Saudi Arabia.
s.tilwani@psau.edu.sa