New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novels

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Abstract. One of the major schools of thought in anthropology is cultural materialism. It's a relatively new area in anthropology. It raises people's standards of conduct in public. British critic Graham Holderness described "Cultural Materialism" as a "politicised form of histography," or the study of historical material within a political framework. There are those who feel the economics and technology play a crucial role in improving society, and this is a fundamental tenet of cultural materialism. First used by Marvin Harris in his book The Rise of Anthropology (1968), the phrase "cultural materialism" has now entered the common lexicon. In her fiction, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts strong, independent women who aggressively oppose the patriarchal systems that hold them back. Education, Adichie argues, is a powerful force for changing one's life and moving forward in the world. The women in Adichie's books work hard to educate themselves so that they may participate fully in their communities and question established standards. Adichie's depiction of historical power conflicts, which are mostly fought by men, reflects a universal desire to be at the top. Throughout history, men have exploited their superior numbers and abilities to define cultural ideals and keep themselves in positions of leadership. Because of this, women are oppressed and repressed; they have less access to resources like education and employment. Adichie's female protagonists, however, do not passively accept these restrictions, and they use knowledge to liberate themselves from them. They want to dismantle stereotypical gender norms and expectations by gaining independence via education. Adichie's depiction of women's liberation via education emphasises the value of education and individual agency in breaking down social obstacles. In addition, Adichie's works illuminate the disastrous nature of power conflicts by probing their complexity.
Keywords: Culture, Materialism, Ecology, History, Marxism, Theory, and Tech

2834

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1. Introduction

In the modern era, Chimamanda Ngozi is one of the most powerful authors. In addition to Americanah (2013), her other notable works include Purple Hibiscus (2003) and Half of Yellow Sun (2006). Adichie is a writer who explores the intersection between culture and materialism. Adichie's work effectively depicts both the cultural and material trappings of modern life. The technical and economic development of the characters in Adichie's works is correctly portrayed in this study. Cultural materialists including Marvin Harris, Julian Steward, Leslie White, and R. Ferguson, Brian. In this investigation of Chimamanda's writings, cultural materialism is developed in more depth. Numerous hypotheses have developed in Anthropology. Major schools of thought include Marxism, cultural materialism, cultural ecology, cultural evolution, and post-structuralism. Cultural Materialism is a relatively new school of thought that first appeared in the 1980s within the study of literature. According to Graham Holderness, cultural materialism is a politicised history that allows for the examination of historical material politics. Cultural Materialism is a framework for understanding how cultures develop, evolve, and are sustained. The sum of a people's shared values, practises, rituals, and expressions is its culture. On the other hand, idealists often equate materialist beliefs with privileged and enlightened societies since they stand for the unfettered, original thinking of talented people. History, theory, politics, and close reading of texts are the four basic tenets of cultural materialism.

The first is information from the past. The goal of historical content analysis is to locate these histories inside the text itself. Liberal humanism, structuralism, and post-structuralism are all examined as possible theoretical frameworks for this time period. The Marxist and feminist perspectives on political dedication are analysed. Textual analysis finally puts the conventional methods to work. Together, cultural materialism and Marxist critique demonstrate that culture is more than just a mirror of the political and economic system, and that it also has the capacity to exist independently of it. Cultural materialism is far more optimistic about the possibility of change and much more open to the idea that literature might serve as a source of binary values. Cultural materialism's suppression of the past reveals the politics of that civilization. For Robert Young, "really only amounts to a way of describing British EX-Marxists" (Young 1990:88) is all that Cultural Materialism is good for.

2 Cultural Materialism

Cultural materialists try to draw parallels between human cognition and behaviour by studying the material limitations of human beings. It is said that culture is "the language, belief, values, norms, behaviours, and even material objects that are passed from one generation to the next" (Henslin 1995, pp. 35). Producing enough food, housing, tools, and machinery, and reproducing human populations within biological and environmental restrictions, are all examples of such material constraints. According to cultural materialists, variations in the monetary costs and advantages of meeting fundamental wants in specific habitats are probable sources of vibration in the mental or spiritual components of human existence. Factors like technology, the economy, and the environment are crucial in shaping how a society's cultural norms and values evolve over time. According to cultural materialism, environmental shifts in the sociocultural system give rise to three distinct patterns in human societies: the infrastructure, the structure, and the superstructure. Culture, as argued by Rothkopf (1997), is very fluid and often results from the purposeful promotion of ritual and habit. That is to say, people continuously reestablish their cultures depending on what they chose to accept, therefore there is no such thing as a "pure" historical or political origin for any culture in existence today.

Physical realities like those in the fields of technology, economics, and reproduction are what make up infrastructure. However, they have an effect on the first and third pillars of culture. A society's material infrastructure consists of the tools and customs it employs to thrive in its environment. The infrastructure consists of people and technology. These two controls act as a brake on population expansion and resource depletion in a closed system. Creating new technologies is a form of production in and of itself. A mode of production is an approach to doing things that is essential for survival. Agriculture, pastoralism, and industrial civilization all play a role in the creation of food and energy. The means by which a population grows is sometimes referred to as its "mode of reproduction." Managing the growth and decline of the human population is an obligation. The size of a given population may be increased or decreased by means of fertility, mortality, and natality, among other methods.

The structural element of a socio-cultural society consists of the organised patterns of social life governed by the members of the community. Relationships between individuals, between groups, and between societies are essential to the functioning of any civilization. This section consists about the home country's politics and economics. The military, schools, law enforcement, social stratification, and caste are just some of the sociocultural systems that fall within the purview of these organisations' production, distribution, consumption, and exchange policies. The home economy is made up of tight-knit communities that know each other well. They manage everything from the rate of birth to the quality of education to the strictness of household rules to the makeup of neighbourhoods and social groups.

The superstructure of a civilization incorporates its ideologies and symbols. Both mental and behavioural forms are possible. Examples of behavioural activities include the creative arts, performing arts, athletics, hobbies, and scientific pursuits. The mental superstructure is made up of the shared beliefs and norms of a society, including ideologies, religions, aesthetics, mythologies, and values. As the infrastructure evolves, the superstructure and structure may also undergo transformations. Every part of civilization depends on advances in technology, energy, and the environment. Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1992), Radcliffe Brown (1881–1995), Julian Steward (1902–1972), and Leslie White (1900–1975) are among the most well-known names in cultural materialism.

3   The Perspective of Anthropologists

Cultural ecology is a field of study developed by Julian Steward, "emphasising the interrelationship among the natural resources in the environment rainfall, soil, temperature, technology, social organisation, and attitudes within a particular sociocultural system" (Scupin and Decorse 2005: 309). It makes an effort to zero in on how distinct social and cultural groups react to their surroundings. His framework for cultural ecology distinguishes between the "culture core" and "secondary features" of a society. Core cultural aspects include things like the natural environment, technological advancements, and economic structures. Politics, religion, society, organisational structures, and so on are all examples of secondary aspects.

The lack of water on the Basin Plateau in the southwestern United States is the cause of an episode that Julian describes. According to Steward, the Shoshoni do not have any formal, bigger social groupings save their immediate families. According to him, in the pre-colonial era, each family had to roam the ranges separately in order to collect the sparingly dispersed wild seeds they needed to survive. During the colder months, many households made their winter home in the same Pinyon pine forest; however, the trees in these groves yielded fruit inconsistently, so each year, a new group of households would gather in a different grove. Therefore, the type of social organisation for these people is significantly influenced by the environment and available resources at various times of the year. Steward used these and other examples to stress the need of environmental protection.

Multilinear evolution is an idea pioneered by Steward. According to him, all civilizations evolve via a series of phases. The parallels in the histories of these ancient civilizations stunned him. Some examples of such ancient cultures include the ones in China, Peru, Mexico, Egypt,

and Mesopotamia. The cultures of these ancient civilizations exhibit amazing similarities, yet he found that they developed in separate places and at different times. He set apart his cultural evolution hypothesis from the evolutionism of the 19th century. Steward argued that there are other, non-linear, pathways to development dependent on factors such the starting environment, technological level, and neighbouring nations, as opposed to the one emphasised by unilinear evolutionists who emphasised a linear series of social stages.

Furthermore, he came up with the concepts of "central" and "peripheral" culture. Core culture and periphery culture are the two pillars of Steward's cultural ecology concept. Core cultural elements include the environments, technology, and economic systems most essential to maintaining life. Culture also includes other characteristics such as social organisation, politics, and religion that function on the periphery. Marvin Harris argues that communities with a lot in common tend to form in the same ways because their production and distribution systems are so similar. Similar to how he divides culture into a centre and a perimeter, Steward separates sociocultural systems into a foundation, a framework, and a superstructure. The theoretical stance taken by Harris expands upon the work of White and Steward.

4   Neo-evolutionism and Leslie White

Leslie White developed the concept of energy capture as a means of gauging the complexity of a culture. His view of social change, known as neo-evolutionism, has gained a lot of attention. His methodology was inspired by both Mark and Durkheim. White argues that the quantity of energy gathered and consumed by each member of a community is what ultimately led to that culture's evolution. The harnessed energy is then utilised to produce necessities. When more energy is put to use or when the efficiency of the instrumental means to put energy to work grows, culture progresses. The rate of cultural development correlates with the annual rate of energy capture or the efficiency of instrumental methods of energy capture. He made an effort to clarify the differences in energy production technology and the degree of social development.

White argues that because early societies relied only on human physical energy, they were doomed to remain structurally primitive. Plants and animals were tamed during the Agricultural Revolution so that their energy could be harnessed. This led to the development of new cities, empires, and ideologies. Changes occurred all over the world at that time because of the discovery of new fuel and the subsequent industrial revolution, which necessitated the usage of new energy sources like coal, oil, and natural gas. Since White only used one criterion—energy collection and how efficiently it is utilised—his assessment of cultural variety was limited to a linear scale.

5   Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun

In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars and critics of literature began to investigate the ways in which anthropology, history, and literature overlap. They came to see texts as products of particular social situations, where power dynamics and ideology play a role in shaping the final output. New historicism (sometimes called cultural materialism) is a school of thought that argues that analysing texts and their settings together is essential for identifying the underlying structures of power. From this vantage point, the social circumstances and ideologies reflected in every piece of literature may be examined, from historical accounts and poems to recipes and medical textbooks. These works are considered intertextual because they interact with one another via allusion and reciprocal influence. Critics and theorists may reveal prevalent power hierarchies in literature by tracing these relationships. A historical record, for instance, may be scrutinised for the biases and prejudices it upholds, just as a cookbook can be dissected for the ways in which it upholds the status quo in the kitchen. Theorists may learn more about the ways in

which power is maintained via different styles of writing by comparing and contrasting these writings.

The novel's protagonists are affected deeply by the carnage of war. They have to deal with external threats to their wellbeing, such as being uprooted from their homes, experiencing food scarcity, and bearing witness to the horrors of war. The psychological struggles the characters are already facing are made much more difficult by this exterior battle.

Cultural materialism provides a framework for analysing the personalities and the social and cultural factors that drive them. The Biafran war may be traced back to greater political and social challenges, like as ethnic tensions and power conflicts, that plagued Nigeria at the time. Adichie delves into these ideas, showing how they affect the choices her characters make. Adichie's depiction of African cultural inventiveness in the midst of the struggle also illustrates the tenacity and perseverance of the people. The characters keep sharing stories, writing poems, and playing music, despite their difficult circumstances. As a counterpoint to the postcolonial story of decline and instability, this cultural inventiveness is a kind of resistance. In conclusion, the Biafran war in Half of a Yellow Sun is portrayed by Adichie in a way that delves into both the internal and exterior struggles of the individuals. Historical and cultural contexts shape these conflicts, which the protagonists must solve with varied degrees of success. Understanding the social and cultural dynamics that determine the characters' experiences and reactions to the conflict is facilitated by looking at the story through the lenses of new historicism and cultural materialism.

Adichie, a renowned author, makes excellent use of historical context to probe the nuances of power in the context of her own life. She has a gift for writing about Nigeria's history, culture, and politics, and she does it well in her works. Adichie examines the current problem of violence and internal turmoil in Nigeria, using historical precedents. She explores the past to explain the complexities of power, its inherent paradoxes, and its effects on Nigerian culture. Adichie's use of historical allusions not only helps her to provide a deep and thorough grasp of the country's history, but also to emphasise the interdependence of power, history, and individual experience.

Adichie examines how the Nigerian and Biafran people's battles with their own identities were affected by war and colonialism in her novel Half of a Yellow Sun. The story demonstrates the complicated interplay of social status, ethnicity, and military might that fuels hostilities between communities. The novel is set in the 1960s and provides a fictitious account of historical events, providing insight into the lives of those going through those years. The story focuses mostly on an examination of the differences between the Hausa and Igbo civilizations, which sheds light on long-standing tensions and hostilities between the two peoples. Despite the differences, Adichie stresses the interconnectedness and common humanity of the two groups. The book is also an examination of the difficulties confronted by emerging countries and the long-lasting effects of past events on contemporary culture and people. Ugwu, a young Igbo child sold into slavery, represents the exploitation and injustice endured by Africans throughout slavery and colonialism. In the end, Half of a Yellow Sun provides a nuanced examination of post-colonial Nigeria's intricate power relationships, cultural disputes, and individual hardships.

Adichie discusses authors' responsibility to face the colonial past in Nigeria in her book Half of a Yellow Sun. She claims authors have a responsibility to document the evils of slavery and colonialism and provide diverse perspectives on their effects. Those who shirk this obligation are generally seen as indifferent to political and historical realities. Adichie examines these themes via her protagonist's journey through time, focusing on the effects of conflict, death, and a fractured national identity before and after slavery. There is a danger, however, that the novel's depiction of violence in Africa would reinforce stereotypical Western views of the continent. Adichie counters this anxiety by exposing and debunking these prejudices in her literature. She adds layers to the story by including several points of view and showcasing her characters' strength and independence. The author Nadine Gordimer writes in her article

2838

"Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony" that.... The writer's social duty is central to her function, and this obligation is seen largely as a calling to bear testimony. The ultimate litmus test for a work of fiction is how faithfully it reflects the reality of the society it depicts. (15).

Education in Nigeria began to lose its religious and cultural foundation when the exploitative revolution and violent political change overtook the country. Conflicting political priorities have diverted attention and diminished the significance of religious and cultural norms. The development of Igbo nationalism as a motivating element in this war is indicative of this change in emphasis. The book Half of a Yellow Sun centres on a battle between the Igbo and other Nigerians, but it's important to look at the story from more than one character's point of view. These individuals provide nuance and perspective to the story, and they stand in for the wide variety of responses felt by the Igbo people at the time.

6   Conclusion

Adichie explores the cultural forms that highlight power relations in Nigerian culture in Half of a Yellow Sun, eventually calling into question long-held beliefs. By recounting these events, she challenges the accepted historical narrative that sees the current state of affairs as inevitable. Adichie delves into the negative repercussions of dictatorship, which she views as a manifestation of imperialism, power games, cultural suppression, racial prejudices, gender disparities, and even the repression of human emotions and sexual impulses. By illuminating imperialism's materialistic underpinnings, she hopes to allay concerns about the survival of democracy in Nigeria. In doing so, she draws attention to the real, if often hidden, factors that contribute to the formation and maintenance of oppressive structures.

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