Socio-cultural Dynamics of Displacement in Adichie’s Novels

Ouno Victor Onyango, Kitche Magak and Muhoma Catherine

Department of Literary Studies
Maseno University, Kenya

Abstract: Displacement is an all-embracing experience that has attracted global interest. Post-colonial countries in Africa and beyond are grappling with this experience. Literary discourse is alive to the socio-cultural dimensions that it exhibits and a number of literary writers have invested their artistic energies in exploring these trajectories. This study focuses on Adichie’s novels as literary platforms upon which the socio-cultural trajectories have been ventilated upon. Using a multi-dimensional construct of critical hybridity as a theoretical prism, the experiences of specific characters have been analysed to depict the dynamics of displacement from a fictional point of view. This study concludes that displacement is a multi-layered phenomenon, arising from several factors and Adichie explores a number of socio-cultural trajectories in her two novels, Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun. In both novels, the main characters, Kambili and Olanna assume dislocated states of existence and detached consciousness which reflects the indeterminate unfolding of events shaped around their senseless cognitive meandering within the novel.

1. Introduction

Displacement is an all-encompassing phenomenon and the contemporary society is facing up to this pervasion on an unprecedented scale, particularly in the fledgling democracies. In its most literal sense, it refers to the act of moving or being put out of the usual or original place. As such displacement may be perceived as voluntary or involuntary. It can take several forms depending on the contextual circumstances in which it happens: migration, desertion, exile, diaspora, exodus, travel, escape and imprisonment among others. These conditions share many traits. Displacement forces subjects to confront a sense of loss, alienation and disorientation. It may lead displaced persons to experiment a taste of newly gained power and freedom. In this scenario, the displaced subjects undergo a process of transformation and renewal that entails a re-fashioning of identity. As a metaphor, displacement can also describe a wide range of phenomena, from social mobility to imperialistic conquest, intellectual retreat, marginalisation and other forms of cultural peripheralisation. These are some of the potential metaphorical manifestations of displacement. Socio-economic and political factors compel a number of people to move out of their traditional homes. Literary works are mirrors of the society and dynamics of displacement have not escaped them. This section of the thesis stimulates a discursive dialogue about the nature and socio-economic dynamics of displacement. The theme of war and of its atrocities, in social dissolution, psychological trauma and the hardships of reconstruction, does not remain without echo in the twentieth century. The experiences of war, with their psychological scars, still haunt many generations of African writers and what is more deeply felt at a social level is not the direct effects of a conflagration (number of deaths, loss of property, political instability), but a sense of insecurity, a deeply felt psychological trauma which destabilises the entire structure on which the individuals caught in the conflict had constructed their identity. The impact of such a trauma is so powerful that it triggers nightmarish narratives years after the event, as the literature of the contemporary African writers proves. In reading Adichie’s novels, this study acknowledges that ‘beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics’; they have ‘emerged out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre [and] it is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2). The discursive practice of post-colonial theory and dialogism, as advanced in the conceptual framework of this study, forms the basis of the critical discourse in this chapter. This chapter specifically explores Adichie’s novels, mainly Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun, as imaginative platforms upon which the socio-cultural factors that compel characters to move out of their traditional locations are articulated.
2. Dynamics of Displacement

When displacement is brought to the civil population, the group as a whole bears the consequences. There is also a context of specificity regarding the experiences of different categories. This is especially the case with regard to those who otherwise are the most vulnerable within a larger group. For instance, women experience consequences of displacement more cruelly than men. Women displacement-related experiences are specific due to factors including, but not limited to, dilapidated settlements, poor health facilities, lack of privacy and proper sanitation facilities, and constraints on their mobility. In the absence of men folk, they shoulder the burden of feeding the family and rearing children even when aid and assistance is measly or practically unavailable. The breakdown of social fabric and disintegration of families affect them adversely. They become, in some cases, victims of sexual exploitation which ranges from rape to physical harassment. Spivak regards women dislocation as falling within the purview of ‘double displacement’ (90). The discussion in this chapter will draw heavily from Adichie’s first two novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The first novel, like the two others that follow, moves backwards and forwards in time in what is idiosyncratically Adichie’s narrative style, but there is clearly a chronological time sequence behind the asymmetrical structure of the novel. The protagonist of Adichie’s first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, is culturally dislocated. She rejects her father’s notion that Western culture, which is symbolically represented by Christianity, is superior to Papa Nnukwu’s. In her dalliance with Papa’s uniquely African views of life and a consequent denial of Eugene’s European preoccupation, she becomes a victim of cultural exclusivism. She realises that they ‘may have, without knowing, planted [themselves] right in the field of [the white man’s] grazing, and now [the white man’s culture] has come and eaten [them] out of [their] roots’ (Clark-Bekederemo 74). The cultural atmosphere in her father’s house with its ‘grave implications of an exclusiveness’ tends to ‘obscure for them the moral and spiritual risk in the process in which they are so clearly caught up, that of an active formation of an elite taking its intellectual and cultural bearing from the West and becoming disengaged as a result from its own cultural and human milieu’ (Abiola xvi). The use of Igbo, an indigenous Nigerian language, is regarded as a form of incivility so that when Eugene speaks ‘entirely in Igbo,’ Kambili considers it a ‘bad sign.’ Kambili has this to say of her father’s disregard for use of Igbo: ‘He hardly spoke Igbo and although Jaja and I spoke it with Mama at home, he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilised in public, he told us, we had to speak English. Papa’s sister, Aunty Ifeoma, said once that Papa was too much of a colonised product’ (HYS 13). Yet it seemed that Eugene’s obsession with Western values came in the form of slavery, hence Aunty Ifeoma ‘had said this about Papa in a mild forgiving way, as if it were not Papa’s fault, as one would talk about a person who was shouting gibberish from a severe case of malaria’ (HYS 13). This simile demonstrates that Oriental fallacy leads to mental ill-health of sorts; the victim is thus unable to think clearly and coherently. Eugene’s mental ill-health generates fear in Kambili and her father’s house ceases to represent peace and comfort that a home offers, instead the presence of her father terrifies her.

Food is another aspect of the Igbo culture that features in Kambili’s discovery of her socio-cultural identity. The food of her childhood has been very sweet and artificial. She is not allowed to cook even though it is part of the Igbo tradition for the women to cook. Thus, she has no control over what she eats and drinks. The treats such as biscuits and wafers and fruit juice have all been processed in her father’s factories. She describes the interaction with her father alluding to the sweetness of sugar. Kambili feels ‘as though [her] mouth was full of melting sugar’ when her father takes her hand in his (PH 26). When she arrives in Nsukka, she is unable to perform the simplest of tasks such as peeling yam but she soon learns how to use the knife and prepare the traditional *oruh* soup (PH 134). After she returns from Nsukka where she intimated with Igbo traditions and gains agency as an Igbo woman, she begins to abnegate the sweetness of the food of her childhood. Nsukka offers a sense of the ritualistic – rooted – quality of life in the village as opposed to the rootlessness of the life in the city. ‘Melting sugar’ metaphorically suggests the gradual weakening of her father’s hold on her and by extension the loosening of her initial attachment to Western values. She refuses, in Nyong’o robust terms, to let the ‘ghosts of an alien clan’ crush her roots in her father’s ‘half-lighted book-cave’ (12). Adichie, like Achebe, does not want ‘to be excused from the task of re-education.’ Achebe, in his essay ‘The Novelist as a Teacher,’ makes a sagacious observation in this regard:

> The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front ... I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be
Separated from her aunt, distanced from her grandfather Papa on account of this attachment’s potential to ignite nostalgic cultural nationalism and estranged by her father; Kambili embraces the diasporic existence. She is a victim of what Spivak calls ‘double displacement.’ She feels detached from her cultural heritage, which is embodied in the image of Papa. In her non-physical escape from a tyrannical and intolerant father, she is culturally dislocated. She cannot literally go back to her aunt Ifeoma; therefore, she physically lives with her parents but mentally occupies what Anderson calls ‘an imagined community’ or what Said calls an ‘imaginative geography,’ which ‘helps [her] mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatising the difference between what is close to it and what is far away’ (Anderson 15; Orientalism 55). Nsukka, Adichie’s centre of African folklore, offers Kambili a sense of cultural reawakening as she discovers how alien her father’s life is. Kral argues that the ‘kaleidoscopic quality of the world geography, its conditional elasticity, leave the contemporary subjective at a loss, on a shaky ground and struggling to find his or her bearings in a world where new territorialities have emerged at the crossroads between the actual and the virtual’ (75). Kambili’s dilemma is the struggle of a subject that is caught between two cultural territorialities. Kambili’s dilemma, like Toundi in Ferdinand Oyono’s Houseboy, is complicated by that her father’s religion (Christianity) has taught her to feel pity for herself as an African. Christianity, it is evident, acts in tandem with imperialism as it reinforces the cause of the coloniser by freezing the cultural enthusiasm of the colonised so that the colonial powers are able to rule with minimal opposition. To do this, it persuades the Africans that they are religious and therefore cultural savages. It is, in the opinion of the coloniser, the coming of the white man that ‘civilised’ them. As such, they are compelled to feel that uncritical acceptance of the white man’s culture is God’s will for the universe. Resisting this thinking alienates one from the white or Christian-civilised population. For Kambili whose father belongs to the said population, rejection of this creed only dislocates her and Nsukka, which gives her a feel of real life, one that is not sugar-coated like her father’s, becomes her ‘imagined geography.’ The artificiality of her father’s life pushes her away from the realities of her Igbo tradition, so that acquisition of simple hands-on skills like peeling of yams becomes difficult. Evidently, her father’s alien lifestyle (a life that is shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by the mainstream Western culture) estranges her from her people.

I did want to talk to Papa, to hear his voice, to tell him what I had eaten and what I had prayed for so that he would approve, so that he would smile so much his eyes would crinkle at the edges. And yet, I did not want to talk to him; I wanted to leave with Father Amadi, or with Aunty Ifeoma, and never come back. (PH 268)

The above paradox does not only depict Kambili’s mental displacement; it also shows Kambili’s dilemma where she must choose between the symbolic imprisonment of her father’s love and her new-found freedom. Kambili’s dilemma is the sensation of feeling as though her identity is divided into several parts (seeking Papa’s approval, rejecting Papa, leaving with Aunty Ifeoma and leaving with Father Amadi), making it difficult, almost impossible, for her to have a unified identity or cultural allegiance. This manifestation of displacement produces an alienation of vision and a crisis in the protagonist’s self-image. To this end, Purple Hibiscus displays a sense of dislocation which is invoked through a perpetually detached cultural outlook which contests the absolute notions of belonging. Living in an environment where Igbo tradition is stigmatised as savage, she relentlessly oscillates between her aunt’s house and her father’s so that she is completely disengaged with cultural solidarity because she is unable to conceptualise any real place to call home. Her father’s blind worship of Western cultural values pushes her to what Said calls ‘a double kind of possessive exclusivism ... the sense of being an exclusive insider by virtue of experience’ (Orientalism 106). Though born and raised in her father’s home, Kambili exhibits the affective experience of social marginalisation.

Constantly assuming an outsider perspective within her own father’s house, Kambili encompasses the peripheral and fragmented vision of Otherness. She, her mother and brother have lived in a family that has repressed and devalued them that it has become difficult for her to reconcile her Igbo identity with her family’s Western-oriented cultural inclinations. In the first instance, she appears to be turning down her true self. She is desperately yearning for a new life so that her thoughts are predominated by an emancipated psyche but she is afraid of perceiving herself from this unique
individualised perspective. She is occasionally compelled to look at herself through the alien cultural eyes of her father. America presents itself, albeit vicariously, as the new location of her displaced mind. Said’s arguments seem to suggest that displacement goes beyond the physical as he notes that it ‘is the unhealable rift forced between a being human and a native place, between the self and its true home’ (Reflections 137). This could also be seen in postcolonial Nigeria where the former colony still craves validation from her colonial master but also wants a complete break from the past. Papa symbolically represents the pure African cultural values yet Father Amadi also represents something that she desperately yearns for. The image of her father puts a wedge between her and her grandfather. She is looking forward to his approval because she regards him as a representation of her ideal values, yet the thought of her father’s Puritanism inflicts fear in her. The protagonist feels ‘a longing for something [she knows she] would never have’ (PH 165). Her traditional location is territorially fixed because she cannot rebel against her father, yet she feels culturally out of place. Though she does not physically move away from her father’s house at this stage, she feels mentally displaced. Kambili’s new location, it seems, is imaginatively constructed from the affective experience of detachment. Her internalisation of anti-West (anti-Eugene) sentiment from Nsukka (her aunt’s world) begins to shape her new experience. The excesses of her father’s demands prompt her to question the authenticity of Western values as espoused by Eugene. Her father, who ridiculously aims to escape his supposedly ‘savage blackness,’ associates her quest for a little privacy with the social worth of a religion that threatens familial cohesion and isolates men from their social consciousness. His estranged cultural consciousness generates tensions in his house, yet he remains blind to the reality of his own predicament. His subservience to the West (here represented by Christianity, a religion that he blindly worships) has not only barbarised his perception of the Igbo traditional society, but it has also distorted his view of the past. Fanon makes a critical observation about the capacity of colonisation that illuminates the situation and thus, ‘colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it’ (Fanon 170). Transcendental homelessness arises from this distortion, disfiguration and the consequent destruction of traditional values. The cultural hollowness of the protagonist’s life is sharply captured in the dream motif at the end of the novel; the figure of Eugene still terrifies her – she wakes up ‘screaming and sweating.’ She longs for the father figure as a child and she deliberately preoccupies her mind with thoughts about Eugene, yet she still finds it difficult to reconcile with him and thus ‘something jerks [her] up [whenever] he reaches out to hug [her].’ Papa’s cultural impositions had frustrated them yet she does not know whether she and Jaja ‘will be able to say it all.’ The substance of this dream is presented below:

I have nightmares about the other kind, the silence of when Papa was alive. In my nightmares, it mixes with shame and grief and so many other things that I cannot name, and forms blue tongues of fire that rest above my head, like Pentecost, until I wake up screaming and sweating. I have not told Jaja that I offer Masses for Papa every Sunday, that I want to see him in my dreams, that I want it so much I sometimes make my own dreams, when I am neither asleep nor awake: I see Papa, he reaches out to hug me. I reach out, too, but our bodies never touch before something jerks me up and I realise that I cannot control even the dreams I have made. There is so much that is still silent between Jaja and me. Perhaps we will talk more with time, or perhaps we never will be able to say it all, to clothe things in words, things that have long been naked. (PH 306)

Displacement is also orchestrated by an increase in domestic violence and, as a result, women confront gender-based violence perpetrated by misogynistic
members of the family (men). ‘The subaltern,’ it is evident, ‘cannot speak’ and ‘there is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item’ and unfortunately, Adichie suggests that this ‘representation has not withered away’ (Spivak 104). For women, who are socialised to believe that they have to show gratitude to monogamous men; it takes them too long to realise that ‘[w]hen a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head’ (PH 213). It is Eugene’s wife who bears the brunt of domestic violence and eventually decides to take refuge in her sister-in-law’s (Aunty Ifeoma’s) house. Defiance in Eugene’s house, which microcosmically represents revolt against the ruling regime, only exists in the family members’ figments of imagination and takes an experimental shape as analogically presented by the narrator:

Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup. A freedom to be, to do. (PH 16)

Eugene’s wife and her ilk do not realise that women have been pushed to the outer fringes of society; they have been conditioned to think that marrying socially well placed men is a favour and they have to remain submissive to them even in the face of unthinkable adversity which is manifested in the ugliest faces of chauvinism. It is such self-imposed vulnerability that makes it difficult for them to chart new destinies. Eugene’s wife wakes up to the realities of her society at a painful cost. She is physically violated by her husband and aborts. Against the doctor’s advice to take a rest, she takes ‘Eugene’s money and [asks] Kevin to take [her] to the park,’ hires a taxi and moves to her sister-in-law’s place. Her obsession with marriage and social status blinds her to Eugene’s violent tendencies. The outcome of this blind subservience is animalistic cruelty from a religious man she had conditioned her mind to trust absolutely. What she reveals to Ifeoma and her family members speaks of bestiality: ‘You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly.... My blood finished on that floor before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it’ (PH 248). Yet part of the blame falls fairly and squarely on her. Women, it would appear from this incident, move out of their traditional localities on account of extreme chauvinism and domestic violence.

Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus gives both explicit and implicit indicators of a hostile political climate at the onset. It begins with the description of a Sunday service, fraught with messianic epithets. This political hostility makes it difficult for liberal-minded people to conduct their businesses in Nigeria. ‘Big Men’ have ‘decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government [does not threaten their] businesses’ (PH 5). Eugene’s paper, Standard, which speaks the truth has ‘lost advertising.’ After the arrest and torture of Ade Coker, the editor of Standard, Eugene, the proprietor of the paper resolves that they ‘are going to publish underground’ for it was ‘no longer safe for [his] staff’ (PH 43). In a business environment where soldiers are always ‘milling around,’ it becomes dangerous for even small-scale traders to carry out their activities peacefully. ‘The real danger’ in a society like the one Adichie fictionalises in Purple Hibiscus, ‘is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire from all those virulent, misshapen freaks sired on Africa by Europe’ (Anthills 52). In the end, the offices of Standard are vandalised and Ade is shot ‘to make sure he would never publish anything again’ (PH 147). There are dehumanising acts of violence in the market; market women are physically assaulted and their property blatantly vandalised. The shocking description of the grotesque scene at the market accurately displays the inhuman face of military officers: ‘The whip ... landed on the woman’s shoulder. Another soldier was kicking down trays of fruits, squashing papayas with his boots and laughing’ (PH 44).

Professionals are forced to leave the country because of unfavourable working conditions, exacerbated by poor remuneration. America presents itself as a respite for disgruntled African scholars. University lecturers are forced to call off ‘yet another strike’ because the Federal Government claims it ‘has no money’ and lecturers have not been ‘paid their dues for the last two months.’ Aunty Ifeoma humorously narrates and thus, ’Ifukwa, people are leaving the country, Philipa left two months ago ... She is now teaching in America. She shares a cramped office with another adjunct professor, but she says at least teachers are paid there’ (PH 76). This paints a worrying trend of brain drain. Though Ifeoma puts on a brave face in the face of imminent adversity, the ruling regime’s disregard for plight of academicians cannot be gainsaid. It would appear that academic merit does not really pay in a morally depraved society. There are, instead, quick rewards for the corrupt. Consequently, the academicians live in pathetic state. Ifeoma, a university don, cannot afford to refill her gas
cylinder; she has to use her ‘old kerosene stove’ (PH 76). Ironically, in this face of this indignity, the words inscribed on the pedestal at the university’s gate are ‘To restore the dignity of man.’ This, ridiculously as it appears, is the university’s motto (PH 112). Universities, the highest institutions of learning, it seems, are founded on pretence and half-truths. The conditions that university lecturers are subjected to speak of nothing but indignity and inhumanity. It is the rhetorical question that the young thoughtful boy Obiora incisively poses that demonstrates the ingrained nature of the country’s political malaise: ‘But when did man lose his dignity?’ (PH 132). This characterisation presents what one would consider a serious textual flaw, particularly because this social commentary sounds too shrewd to be conceived of by a young mind. Yet it is undeniably true that the best path towards the restoration of man’s dignity should be one that endeavours to determine when man actually lost it. This resonates very well with Achebe’s opening remarks in his autobiographical work, There Was a Country, which is an attempt at establishing the beginning of loss: ‘The rain that beat Africa began four to five hundred years ago ...’ (Achebe 1). On account of military tyranny, the country’s public resources are misappropriated. ‘If some Big Man in Abuja has stolen the money, is the V.C. supposed to vomit money for Nsukka?’ At fourteen, Obiora cuts the figure of a very perceptive citizen, one who understands just too well what bedevils his country. Indeed it is difficult to understand why a country like Nigeria which is ranked as the third largest producer of oil would be hard hit by fuel shortage. Humorous and satiric as it sounds, ‘sucking fuel is a skill you need’ to survive in this economically turbulent African state (PH 150). In such a despicable environment of rudderless leadership, one that considers leadership as an opportunity for plunder; one would seriously be compelled to consider moving out in search of a reasonably sensitive political environment. The decision made by academicians is therefore not surprising; it seems like the most logical thing to do in an environment that is intellectually unrewarding. A different environment, in this case America, is the only hope for intellectuals whose dedication to work cannot be recognised at home. Here again, it is the young boy Obiora who voices the unarticulated thoughts of his mother; he says his mother ‘will have her work recognised in America, without any nonsense politics’ (PH 224).

Academic institutions in Africa are not free from political machinations of the ruling class. They are, in the young boy’s words, a ‘microcosm of the country.’ America might not be the heaven that disillusioned African scholars aspire to live in, but it offers a glimmer of hope. ‘At least people get paid when they are supposed to’ and Ifeoma stands a better chance of accomplishing her desire to become a senior lecturer. At home, ‘they have been sitting on her file’ for far too long. Yet the effects of inflation are bitingly painful. Nothing captivatingly captures the direness of the situation more succinctly than the humorous comparison that Ifeoma makes about her inability to afford basic commodities like milk and thus, ‘I just can’t afford milk anymore. You should see how the prices of dried milk rise every day, as if somebody is chasing them’ (PH 233). This simile, hyperbolic as it would appear, accentuates the frustrations of the country’s academics. In fact, to borrow Pollard’s words; ‘many a truth is spoken in jest’ (44). To afford a decent meal of chicken, she must hope for the lopsided thinking of her bird-brained student who has resolved to get married and probably have a child because ‘nobody [knows] when the university would re-open.’ The chicken is dramatically killed and ‘put in the freezer before it loses weight, since there’s nothing to feed it’ (PH 234). Interestingly, the frequent power outages cannot allow for this, so the whole chicken has to be eaten. The vultures have lost their prestige, as Papa-Nnukwu would say, but not because people no longer like them; sadly they have been supplanted with human vultures. The elevation of folkloristic wisdom is not in vain here; the greed and avarice that characterise the ruling elite has pushed the plebs to the economic periphery, the outermost fringes of the country’s economy. In the peripheral spaces that they occupy, they feed on the remnants of the country’s economy like the vultures. This animal imagery presents an unadorned and starkly disturbing picture of life in a materially craving Nigerian society. What Achebe sarcastically describes as ‘an insistance by the oppressed that his oppression be performed in style’ is no longer tenable in morally depraved societies (Anthills 139).

The dream motif employed in the novel demonstrates the collective disillusioned psyche of the Nigerian citizens. In her dreams, the narrator projects that her aunt’s condition would only worsen so that her only option would be to leave the country. Thus the ‘sole administrator [pours] hot water on Aunty Ifeoma’s feet [who in turn jumps] out of the bathtub and, in the manner of dreams, jumped into America’ (PH 230). The hot bathtub metaphorically represents the unbearable working conditions, which are punctuated by harsh economic and political climate, in the post-independence state. Adichie seems to be conscious of the attendant accusations that her critics would
level against what would appear to be a propagation of a defeatist attitude. Using the young voice of Amaka, she raises this very debate: ‘Why do we run away from our own country? Why can’t we fix it?’ Technically, running away is not the answer, but it also the only practical answer. This paradox represents the dilemma of post-independence African citizens; they understand just too well that they have a crucial role to play in nation building yet they also understand that part of the solution to the problems bedevilling the continent lies in abdicating from their responsibilities. To push the political elite to recognise their efforts in social transformation, they have to create a gap. One has to go against the grain and spearhead this revolt. Obiora’s answer, cowardly and escapist as it seems, is the only practicable one: ‘It’s not running away, it’s being realistic. By the time we get into university, the good professors will be fed up with all this nonsense and they will go abroad’ (PH 322).

The government, just like the mute professors, urgently requires a forceful push or so it seems. The so-called loyal academic staffs derive their pleasure from frustrating their disloyal colleagues. Loyalty earns one, ironic as it sounds, a special place in the power theatrics of the university administrators. This illusion blinds them to the frailties of the administrators. To compel them to discern the evils of the administration, it seems logical to get the disloyal faces out of the picture. To stave off ‘obsequious foolishness,’ to put it in Achebe’s robust terms; the loyal members of staff must be made to feel some sense of disaffection. In so doing, they would be forced to leave the country and consequently compel the administrators to appreciate the value of the university’s academic staff.

Universities are at the mercy of external political machinations; there is ‘a sole administrator’ imposed on the council by the powers that be. Taban decries this political infiltration when he postulates that ‘our intellectual leadership has been left to the politicians’ (4). This political culture of micro-management of academic institutions resonates well with Fanon’s projection that ‘after independence, this underdeveloped bourgeoisie, reduced in number, lacking capital and rejecting the road to revolution, stagnates miserably. It cannot give free expression to its genius that was in the past hampered by colonial domination, or so it claims’ (99). The hope that the intellectual space would open up upon the full realisation of self-rule has turned into a mere illusion. The governing council of the university does not control the affairs of the institution. The government has stripped it of its responsibility to vote in a new vice chancellor.

Lecturers who speak the truth about the ills of the university administration are considered disloyal and earmarked for dismissal. The sole administrator uses threats to cement his hold on power. Most university lecturers are afraid of speaking against the administration because they would want to secure their jobs; they have traded their minds for employment. They have sold their souls. Ironically, they believe they are doing so in the best interest of their families so that staying off this intellectual disaster becomes a herculean task: ‘Ifeoma, do you think you are the only one who knows the truth? Do you think we do not all know the truth, eh? But gwakenem, will the truth feed your children? Will the truth pay school fees and buy their clothes?’ (PH 223)

It would appear that ‘too many are only too willing to compromise and keep their political thoughts well hidden, even sometimes, one suspects, from themselves (Enahoro 239). In a morally depraved society like the one fictionalised in the novel, telling the truth is a revolutionary act and therefore a rare feat that calls for men and women of rare mettle. As a mother of two, Ifeoma understands just too well how the survival of her children matters; however, she seems to think that revolt should not be based on physical survival alone, but also the survival of spiritual values such as humanity, integrity, justice, and the need to preserve one’s mental wholeness. She discerns the need for a holistic survival of the society and to bend the social values upon which a community is built is injurious to its very fabric, the glue that gels it. She refuses to succumb to terror, injustice and loneliness. There is no opportunity for voicing concerns as ‘soldiers are appointed lecturers and students attend lectures with guns to their heads’ (PH 223). What infuriates Ifeoma is not the admission by her colleague that political resistance can only breed further frustrations; on the contrary, it is the palpable display of vulnerability by the country’s top intellectuals, their confession that protesting against the social ills of university administration would be too tall an order, that invites her fury. The narrator reveals that ‘she was angry at something that was bigger than the woman before her’ (PH 223). The woman is therefore a cog in the wheel, one woman in the corpus of African scholars whose ‘men have died.’ Perhaps one might argue that this is the main reason she decides to leave the country.

It would appear that Adichie, like Soyinka and Imbuga, suggests that when a society represses its citizens, it can no longer be regarded as home. The title of the volume speaks about the death of a Nigerian journalist, beaten to death for an alleged
attack on Gowon. His death acquires a metaphorical quality in Soyinka’s memoirs, the silence of conscience’s death, the silence of the human soul when confronted with pure evil and not daring to challenge it. Imbuga, like Soyinka, makes a critical observation about the post-independence Africa, which he anagrammatically calls ‘Kafira.’ He succinctly notes: ‘[In Kafira], it doesn’t pay to have a hot mouth. ... and silence is the best ship home...’ (Imbuga 24). Socio-political inaction had become a survival tactic in oppressive societies in Africa and ‘when a man plays with [political] fire, he gets burned [and serves] as an example to others that may have hot mouths like him’ (Imbuga 63). Those who challenge the existing regime are regarded as psychotic and ‘madness’ is a common motif in Imbuga’s oeuvre. In his play, Betrayal in the City, it is Jusper who plays the mad man’s role. This madness motif falls neatly into the thematic pattern of Soyinka’s writings as well. Madness is when society maintains silence, when all of them — wound their voices around our [silenced] innermost guts and made each man partake of the brotherhood sacrament of blood and guilt and pain (Soyinka, Season, 11) What saved Soyinka from insanity, as he himself declares, was his camaraderie with the other prisoners, and this shared experience kept their humanity alive. From his prison notes emerges an obsessive need to find a meaning to all this — attendant human suffering of war, because, as Soyinka shares with his readers, — [the war] must... be made to fragment more than buildings: it must shatter the foundations of thought and re-create (Soyinka, Man Died, 182). An organism caught in an anomic universe, in which the only certitude is death, must de-construct itself, in order to die or to be re-constructed, even if it will forever bear the scars of that tragedy. But The Man Died moves beyond being an artistic plea to humanism and compassion. It became the dais from which he took daring stands, making known his opinion about the futility of such a war, the great risks that his country was about to take on unsubstantiated grounds. A close reading of Purple Hibiscus demonstrates Adichie’s artistic affinity to the tragedy presented in Soyinka’s works.

The existence of a corrupt system of government makes it difficult for citizens to access basic necessities like education. Besides, political instability seems to be the order of the day as coups beget coups. The bloody coups in the sixties usher in civil war. In an unstable and corrupt political system, Nigerians are compelled to leave their homes in search of a stable political climate where education is uninterrupted. Kambili’s father, Eugene, had to leave ‘Nigeria to study in England’ because a coup always began a vicious cycle (PH 24). Military leadership is unpredictable; military men would always want to overthrow one another because they are all power drunk. The unbridled greed and avarice that characterises those in power gives very little room for proper management of the education sector. Cabinet ministers stash ‘money in foreign accounts, money meant for paying teachers’ salaries’ (PH 24). Private schools within the country are literally out of reach for poor and average families. Most youngsters ‘don’t go to school anymore because their families can’t afford it’ (PH 179). Fanon’s arguments distil the objectives of postcolonial leaders in African countries and the locus classicus of his vivid description of post-coloniality is contained in his famous book The Wretched of the Earth:

In an underdeveloped country, the imperative duty of an authentic national bourgeoisie is to betray the vocation to which it is destined, to learn from the people, and make available to them the intellectual and technical capital it culled from its time in colonial universities. We will see, unfortunately, that the national bourgeoisie often turns away from this heroic and positive path, which is both productive and just, and unabashedly opts for the antinational, and therefore abhorrent, path of a conventional bourgeoisie, a bourgeois bourgeoisie that is dismally, inanely, and cynically bourgeois. ... After independence, this underdeveloped bourgeoisie, reduced in number, lacking capital and rejecting the road to revolution, stagnates miserably. It cannot give free expression to its genius that was in the past hampered by colonial domination, or so it claims. (Fanon 99)

Fanon’s averment offers an incisive appraisal of the contemporary political class. The new vision of the political elite in contemporary African societies is to amass wealth by every means possible. Political leadership is predicated on material gains. In the furtherance of this cause, they deliberately deny their citizens opportunities to gain access to quality education. They regard intellectualism as a threat to the existing social order. They predate upon the ignorant masses and exposure to quality education is bound to ignite a social revolt. Parents flee from their homes because they fear their children would become what they cannot recognise. The story of Prof. Okafor’s son reinforces Ifeoma’s misgivings about Nsukka and Nigeria in its entirety. Perhaps, she too, like Chiaku implicitly impresses upon us,
is afraid to deal with the social cancer. Prof. Okafor’s son steals his father’s examination papers and sells them to his father’s students. Part of this indicting story is presented below:

Now that the university is closed, the students came to the house, to harass the boy for the money. Of course he had spent it. Okafor beat his son’s front tooth out yesterday. Yet this is the same Okafor who will not speak out about what is going wrong in this university, who will do anything to win favour with the Big Men in Abuja. He is the one who makes the list of lecturers who are disloyal. I hear he included my name and yours. (PH 243)

The rot in the country’s educational system is a reflection of the decay in nation’s top echelons of power. It is ridiculous for parents to expect their children to exude moral values yet they cannot resist the heavy tide of immoral filth in the national leadership. ‘The man dies in all of us who keep silent in the face of tyranny’ and this ill fate spreads to the younger generation (The Man Died 13). As a result, they bear a more devastating brunt of misrule. The professor’s misguided energy is a subject of public ridicule; his pretentiousness does not elude the novelist’s mockery. Instead of healing the cancer, he is fruitlessly treating cancerous sores that ‘will keep coming back.’ The commentary posed by Ifeoma’s friend epitomises a biting wit: ‘What I am saying is Okafor should not be surprised and should not waste his energy breaking a stick on his poor boy’s body. It is what happens when you sit back and do nothing about tyranny. Your child becomes what you cannot recognise’ (PH 244). Evidently, Adichie, as Soyinka’s student, draws from his cup of wisdom in The Man Died. She is developing a pivotal character in her story yet she does not blind the reader to her faults. She, in the spirit of her warning against the danger of a single story (her characteristic rallying call for pluralism), provokes the reader to critique the modern Nigerian intellectuals. The professor in question does not approve of dissidence in the university and has, in spite of the high academic pedestal upon which he stands, turned himself into a political stooge. He only acts at the behest of the university management, which is an appendage of the ruling dictatorial government. Ironically, his son’s conduct surprises him. He, at best, represents the hypocrisy of the ruling regimes in post-independence African states. The autocrats have a firm grip on political power and ‘continue to reign because the weak cannot resist’ (PH 245). The future of the continent is evidently bleak; the continent has been condemned to a vicious cycle of authoritarianism. Unfortunately and cynically so, the young members of the African societies have resigned to this fate. This is what Amaka, Obiora’s pale shadow, finds frustrating. In her view, her mother’s decision to leave the country paints a pessimistic picture of Nigeria’s future; ‘the educated ones leave, the ones with the potential to right the wrongs. They leave the weak behind.... Who will break that cycle [of tyranny]?’ Ifeoma’s decision to leave the country is largely, in her view, escapist. Yet there is a sense in this escapist move. A society that disregards intellectual input cannot sustain meaningful intellectual growth. Ifeoma is ideally intellectually displaced. Her social vision does not resonate with those of her colleagues like Prof. Okafor and his ilk, who have sold their conscience to the highest bidder (the Nigerian leadership). The objectionable conduct of the professor and other like-minded academics illuminates the vicious cycle of darkness which has gripped the neo-colonial African states. It evokes the image of disenchantment; the intellectuals, who should be the most steadfast shepherds of morality, do not have the commitment to spearhead the moral edict, thereby holding the nation at ransom and allowing for the propagation of political mediocrity. Perhaps nothing captures the reality of post-independence disillusionment than Achebe’s autobiography, There was a Country:

We, the intellectuals, were deeply disillusioned by the ineptitude of Nigeria’s ruling elite and by what we saw taking place in our young nation. As far as their relationship with the masses was concerned, Nigerian politicians, we felt, had slowly transformed themselves into the personification of Anwu – the wasp – a notorious predator from the insect kingdom. Wasps, African children learn during story time, greet unsuspecting prey with a painful, paralyzing sting, then lay eggs on their body, which then proceed to ‘eat the victim alive.’ (Achebe 108)

Achebe’s observation here is a damning indictment of his society. As suggested in the title of his autobiographical, Nigeria had ceased to exist, so that there was a country and not a nation. In an environment that stifles intellectual growth, the future of the youngsters is diametrically bleak. Ifeoma, therefore, fears that her children will be consumed by the moral decadence that defines Nigeria’s top leadership and she perceives a new location, in this case America, as a safe haven for her children’s moral growth. Nsukka represents her idyllic cultural desires but it also marginalises her. She feels proud of participating in the
enlightenment of her fellow Nigerians and strives to prosper from her intellectual sweat yet the future that she envisions seems so far away that she considers herself intellectually displaced. Her thought patterns do not resonate well with those of her colleagues. Adichie, in exploring this dimension of displacement, subscribes to Georg Lukacs’ submission in Theory of the Novel where he argues ‘with compelling force that that the novel, a literary form created out of the unreality of ambition and fantasy, is the form of ‘transcendental homelessness’ (qtd. in Reflections 144). Thus Ifeoma, though living in Nigeria and working in a local university, is transcendentally homeless. For Cabral, ‘culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated’ (65).

The same state of political chaos pervades Half of a Yellow Sun and the horrifying details of death circumvent a country bleeding innocent blood in pointless crimes and hunting scenes. Unlike Purple Hibiscus where there is a general feeling of civil inaction, the Nigerian citizens portrayed in Half of a Yellow Sun are socially conscious of the upheavals of the ruling regime. The second novel is dominated by Nigerian intellectuals who are not willing to play second fiddle to the country’s leadership. The characters feel they have a lot to play insofar as the political affairs of the country are concerned. The question that Odenigbo, one of Adichie’s main characters, poses to his new house servant summarises the philosophy that pervades the novel: ‘You are my houseboy. If I order you to go outside and beat a woman walking on the street with a stick, and you give her a bloody wound on her leg, who is responsible for the wound, you or me?’ (HYS 7). Though Ugwu does not respond to this question, the context of the debate makes the anticipated answer crystal clear. His attitude is different from the Nsukka university intellectuals who believe that their destiny and the destiny of their children are in the hands of the political leaders. He and other characters in the novel consider education as a critical tool for social revolution. Again, it is the question that the inquisitive Odenigbo poses to Ugwu that accentuates the significance of education: ‘Education is priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don’t have the tools to understand exploitation?’ (HYS 8). It is, in this sense, a continuation of the socio-cultural narrative in Purple Hibiscus.

Olanna, like Kambili, feels culturally displaced in her father’s house. Her parents’ preoccupation with material gain does not seem to excite her. When Chief Okonji, the finance minister, visits the family; her mother’s seemingly overly hearty guffaw over this visit irritates her. Olanna is asked to attend the dinner meeting ‘because of the building contract her father wanted.’ She is instructed to put on ‘something nice’ because her materialistic sister Kainene ‘will be dressing up too.’ She appears pigeon-holed in a cultural environment that is at variance with her social ideals and for a mother who imagines that ‘mentioning her twin sister somehow legitimised everything’ makes the situation even worse. She is compelled to think of the post-independence Nigeria, to put in Said’s words, ‘as spiritually orphaned and alienated’ and as such, ‘the age of anxiety and estrangement’ (Reflections 137). Olanna is subjected to undue family pressures and constraints but in the face of her parents’ material pursuits, she projects the self-consciousness of an individual who is committed to transcend familial and provincial cultural limits. It is not surprising, therefore, that she considers ‘acknowledging the humanity of the people who served them a simple thing to do’ in spite of her father’s suggestion that ‘he paid [his servants] good salaries’ (HYS 30). Olanna does not believe that material remuneration should be used as an excuse for disregarding the dignity of humanity. Servants and other low cadre employees deserve to be treated humanely. As opposed to her mother who says ‘thanking them would give them room to be insulting,’ she (Olanna) genuinely expresses her gratitude to Maxwell (HYS 30).

Olanna, it appears, still regards spiritual values highly and her parents’ acquisitive physical appetites do not agree with her testament. She reveals ‘there was something wet about Chief Okonji’s smile,’ a metaphoric and therefore euphemistic description of his sexual lust. In fact, the narrator notes that ‘the movement of his lips made saliva fill his mouth and threaten to trickle down his chin,’ suggesting an overwhelming and uncontrollable desire for physical satisfaction. As opposed to her mother who regards a favour from a senior government official as a privilege, Olanna finds it insulting as it demeaning. It is little wonder therefore that she loses her appetite (the avocado that she usually liked was bland now, almost nauseating) - a symbolically unspoken statement of disgust – and announces she has ‘decided to go to Nsukka’ and that she will ‘be leaving in two weeks’ (HYS 31). By placing her spoon down, she makes an explicit riot act and puts an end to speculations about the possibility of her future dalliance with materialistic men. She believes that the offer at Nsukka University is an opportunity for a great departure from her parents’ social climbing
mentality. She evidently prefers a decent and honest living as opposed to the quick financial fixes that come as a result of ‘spreading legs for elephants.’ Unfortunately for Olanna’s father, Nigerian maleness is equivalent to material greed: Kainene’s ‘excellent eye for business’ earns her the cumulative strength of two sons. For Olanna, however, her father’s conduct compels her to move out of the house. Her parents’ calculated move that is aimed at giving Chief Okonji an opportunity to make his predatory advances at her does not bear any fruit. During the after-dinner ritual (moving to the balcony for liqueurs), it is her recollection of Odenigbo’s first visit in Lagos that triggers her nostalgic cultural nationalism. She recalls that Odenigbo had, in his usual penchant for revolt, repudiated her father for belittling Nsukka University. Her ‘father said that the idea of Nsukka University was silly, that Nigeria was not ready for an indigenous university, and that receiving support from an American university – rather than a proper university in Britain – was plain daft’ (HYS 32). Odenigbo had raised his voice in response to this blatant propagation of ‘Oriental fallacy.’

Arguing that Nsukka is free of colonial influence, Odenigbo rejects, in Fanon’s terms, ‘the perverted logic’ of colonisation. He had characteristically raised his voice higher and higher and in spite of Olanna’s persistent signals to have him stop. After Chief Okonji’s futile attempt to initiate a false sense of intimacy, she experiences a form of detachment when she returns to her room. ‘Her room felt alien’ and it appears that the chief’s sexually exploitative tendencies rekindles her memory of ‘men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together’ (HYS 33). She gains a renewed sense of agitation and develops a feeling of ‘transcendental homelessness.’ Her confrontation with Chief Okonji makes her even more conscious of the artificiality of her room – ‘the warm wood tones, the tan furniture, the wall-to-wall burgundy carpeting that cushioned her feet, the reams of space that made Kainene call their rooms flats’ (HYS 33-34). The chief’s behaviour renues her resolve to leave Lagos. She says: ‘I don’t want to work in Lagos. I want to work in the university and I want to live with him’ (HYS 35). Besides, she realises ‘just how distant [she and Kainene] had become.’ Staring at the door, which is metaphorically suggestive of her desire to leave, the narrator, in a flashback, offers adequate background information to demonstrate that she had always felt transcendentally excluded.

She was used to her mother’s disapproval; it had coloured most her major decisions, after all: when she chose two week’s suspension rather than apologise to her Heathgrove form mistress for insisting that the lessons on Pax Britannica were contradictory; when she joined the Students’ Movement for Independence at Ibadan; when she refused to marry Igwe Okagbue’s son, and later, Chief Okaro’s son. (HYS 35)

Kano offers Olanna a respite from the choking cultural atmosphere in her father’s residence. Again, to delink herself from her father’s easy materialistic lifestyle, she chooses ‘not to fly up to Kano.’ She cannot hide her admiration of Uncle Mbaezi’s ‘earthiness’ (HYS 38). Earthiness here speaks of an ordinary life, natural and bereft of artificiality. It is Uncle Mbaezi who introduces her to the politics of Nigeria: the organisation, protests and discussions of the Igbo Union, and the discriminative policies of northern schools. The natural environment in Kano thrills her: the narrow market paths, small boys carrying loads on their heads, women haggling, traders shouting and Aunty Ifeka sitting by her kiosk. She, like Kambili Achike, finds a semblance of home at her aunt’s place. Though not well educated, Aunty Ifeka exudes the ‘earthiness’ of Aunty Ifeoma. She is facing similar economic challenges. That Odenigbo’s basic university house, with its sturdy rooms and plain furniture and uncarpeted floors’ fascinates does not come as a surprise. Interestingly, it is not ‘Mohammed’s red sports car, parked in front of the sprawling yard’ that strikes her; ‘what held Olanna’s attention was the house: the graceful simplicity of its flat roof’ (HYS 44). The oxymoronic expression ‘graceful simplicity’ demonstrates her admiration and natural preference for ordinary, unsophisticated lifestyle. Her simple life endears Olanna to her:

Olanna examined the plain face and wished, for a brief guilty moment, that Aunty Ifeka were her mother, anyway, since it was Aunty Ifeka’s breasts that she and Kainene had sucked when their mother’s breasts dried up soon after they were born. Kainene used to say their mother’s breasts did not dry up at all, that their mother had given them to a nursing aunt only to save her own breasts from drooping. (HYS 39)

The ‘artificiality of her parents’ relationship always [seems] harder, more shaming, when she [is] here in Kano’ (HYS 43). ‘[Olanna] had always been
separated from [her parents] by hallways that got longer and more thickly carpeted as they moved from house to house.’ Their relocation to the current residence does not make things any better for her ‘with its ten rooms’ and her parents choosing ‘different rooms for the first time.’ In fact, she confesses that she had never ‘heard her parents making love, never even seen any indication that they did.’ The distance, which symbolically represents lack of intimate attachment, is a far cry from her aunt’s small house, which seems natural. She imagines what growing up had been for her cousins ‘seeing their parents through the curtain, hearing the sounds that might suggest an eerie pain to a child as their father’s arms clutched moved and their mother’s arms clutched clutched him.

Adichie’s protagonist invents, in Said’s postulation, ‘an imaginative geography’ to give her mind a temporal home away from her father’s unnatural lifestyle. Aunt Ifeka’s house, Olanna’s new temporary location, re-ignites a yearning for lost origins. This gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the incessant desire to return to childhood, to be one again with Aunt Ifeka (the imaginary image of the mother she desires), to go back to the beginning of her life and start anew. The surge of an overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins is imminent. The sight of children playing the schoolyard and in the yard near the Ifeka’s house thrills her. She is captivated and engrossed with the children to the extent that they then substitute for the lack which she has felt from early childhood. Yet this return to childhood is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor requited and thus the yearning for childhood bliss amounts to a symbolic representation. The imaginary, according to Lacan, is the undifferentiated early state of the child, a fusion of subject and parent, which remains latent in adult life, manifesting when the child falsely identifies with others. This, of course, means that the child, Olanna in this case, is constantly in search of that lost self of completion that she imagined she had or shared with her parents in early childhood. The symbolic is, therefore, the demarcated world of the adult with its enforced distinctions and repressions. Olanna is in the process of attempting to get to the real world of childhood which she cannot fulfil yet she is caught up in the imaginary sphere of its representation. ‘She wished she were fluent in Hausa and Yoruba, like her uncle and aunt and cousin were, something she would gladly exchange her French and Latin for’ (HYS 41).

Nsukka, Olanna’s new location, offers her an opportunity to explore her crave for naturalness. The first thing she does, in the spirit of making peace with her fears in Odenigbo’s absence, is that she throws away ‘the red and white plastic flowers on the centre table’ and supplants them with ‘the African lilies and pink roses, freshly watered by Jomo’ (HYS 47). Ugwu, who looks horrified at the decision and cannot, ironic as it sounds, ‘believe her foolishness,’ says: ‘But it die, mah. The other one don’t die.’ This incident raises a pertinent question about mortality and immortality as projected in Westemised African settings. It foregrounds the hilarious remark that Okeoma later makes in the story: ‘My father’s brother fought in Burma and came back filled with one burning question: How come nobody told him before that the white man was not immortal?’ (HYS 50). Okeoma’s remark is humorous, but it captures the stark reality of post-independence African states where even simple notions like life and death have been distorted. Plastic flowers are lifeless and the impression that they have some immortal life is perverted logic. It is this artificiality of life that drives her away from her father’s palatial house. The glitter of European materialism – symbolised by the plastic flowers – do not appeal to her in any way and her revolt against Western-oriented and black-adopted materialism stems from the deepest part of her soul. To underpin her predilection for a simple life, she makes it part of her business to make Ugwu feel part and parcel of the Odenigbo family.

Richard Churchill’s decision to leave London is precipitated by emotional derangement and cultural alienation. In his own recollection, he reveals that he ‘was an only child. [His] parents died when he was nine.’ His parents had always been away and it is his grandmother, Molly, that had brought him up. Forced to stay with his aunt in London (an environment that was completely different from the ‘tiny village in Shropshire), he had contemplated ‘running away from the first day’ of stay at his aunt’s place. It is this tiny village, or so it appears, that had offered him a real and natural sense of homeliness. His physical displacement from this ‘tiny village’ shatters his comfort as the new location – London – only estranges him from a natural life, bereft of the sophisticating intimidation in London. The substance of this flashback is captured below:

‘[My parents] were often away. It was Molly, my nanny, who really raised me. After they died, it was decided I would live with my aunt in London. My cousins Martin and Virginia were about my age but terribly sophisticated; Aunt Elizabeth was quite grand, you see, and I was the
cousin from the tiny village in Shropshire. I started thinking about running away the first day I arrived there.’ (HYS 61)

Molly symbolically represents his idyllic lifestyle – natural and unsophisticated, perhaps more like Olanna’s. He, more like Olanna, had had to contend with distant parents who strangely ‘stared at each other when they talked, forgot his birthdays ... never knew when and what he ate.’ The narrator, in a biting sarcasm, observes: ‘His parents] had not planned to have him and because of that, they had raised him as an afterthought’ (HYS 115). After thinking about what he had been running away from for a while, he concludes ‘he knew he was running away from a house that had pictures of long-dead people on the walls breathing down on him. But he didn’t know what he was running towards.’ By stretching beyond traditional conceptualisation of the centre and the periphery, Adichie positions herself strategically in the mushrooming movement that is aimed at decolonising existing knowledge. This portrait markedly departs from the traditional territorial subjectivities associated with postcolonialism.

Richard’s fastened push to stay with Susan also presents a similar form of dislocation. Susan, it appears, is an embodiment of all the sophistication in his aunt’s place in London. His meeting with Susan, which is largely presented in flashbacks, had been purely based on convenience. His attitude to Susan’s residence had been more or less the same as his feeling towards his aunt’s place in London. Lagos, like London, invoked the image of artificiality, quite different from the naturalness that village life offered. He reveals that he did not like the idea of staying with Susan, much like staying in London, from the very beginning and like Olanna, it is Nsukka that presents an idyllic ‘imaginative location’ for him:

He had been in Nigeria for a few months when Susan asked if he would like to move in with her, since her house in Ikoyi was large, the gardens were lovely, and she thought he would work much better there than in his rented flat with the uneven cement floors where his landlord moaned about his leaving his lights on for too long. Richard didn’t want to say yes. He didn’t want to stay much longer in Lagos. He wanted to do more travelling through the country while waiting to hear back from Nsukka. (HYS 56)

Richard’s relationship with Susan starts on a bumpy road; Susan’s social circles diametrically put him out of place: ‘he felt out of place.’ It is, in this regard, not surprising that he ‘preferred talking to the women,’ for instance, he feels comfortable in the company of a university lecturer, ‘a timid Yoruba woman who seemed to feel just out of place as he did’ (HYS 53). Besides, her attitude to natives is stereotypically demeaning. She dons the domineering personality of a woman who believes that no else’s opinions matter but hers. In her presence, Richard remains a pale shadow. She cuts the figure of a control freak who believes that a man has to be heavily cordoned off, physically guarded against potential threats so that when talks to Julia March, ‘mostly about her research on the Asantehene in Ghana,’ Susan comes over and pulls him by the arm. Susan’s melodramatic response to his association with other women is not only baffling but also scary. She violently breaks a glass to show her disgust at Richard’s seeming cosiness with other women. She does this when Richard spends time with Clovis Bancroft, Julia March and the timid Yoruba woman. Richard is forced to apologise every time she does this. Ironically, he is sometimes compelled to say he is very sorry even when he is ‘not quite sure what he [is] apologising for’ (HYS 54). Having to play this ridiculous facade suffocates him.

The artificiality of their life in Susan’s apartment is even more ridiculously suffocating. It speaks of detachment, unnaturalness and superimposition. The monotony of his routine is strikingly comical. He occasionally looks out the window at the gardeners to break the boredom orchestrated by his humdrum life. He pounds at the typewriter and ‘although he [is] aware that he [is] typing and not writing.’ This paradox is a clear indication that the environment does not give him the impetus he needs to prod his artistic musings. This pretentious is exacerbated by Susan’s unnatural relationship. She is only too ‘careful to give him the silences he needed, save for the occasional whispers over ‘some water’ or ‘an early lunch.’ In a corresponding ironic response, Richard ‘answered in a whisper, too, as if his writing had become something hallowed and has made the room itself sacrosanct. He did not tell her that he had written nothing good so far.’ He puts on a false image of seriousness because he imagines that telling her the truth would hurt her. In reciprocation, he shows his ‘gratitude by attending the parties he disliked.’ After this pretense is not enough, he tries to be funny to please her. It is little wonder that Kainene’s natural smile attracts him: ‘she didn’t smile in that plastic way the mistresses did’ (HYS 57).
Kainene’s genuinely natural emotions, it seems, depart significantly from Susan’s superimpositions. His emotional attachment to Kainene is similar to what Lacan calls an imaginary return to childhood. Richard’s meeting with Kainene reawakens his natural emotions; he pulls down the facade momentarily so that when ‘Susan came back and tugged at him but he didn’t want to leave.’ Kainene offers him an emotional reprieve from Susan’s domineering and supercilious attitude. To spend more time with Kainene, he pretends that he and Kainene ‘have a mutual friend in London.’ The two ‘exchange small kernels of intimacies’ and when she leaves, ‘Richard’ who ‘was usually amused by Susan’s mini-autobiographies’ suddenly felt irked by Susan’s sardonic attitude to the ‘obviousness’ of Chief Ozobia’s riches. His interaction with Kainene puts a wedge in his relationship with Susan; he feels a rare connection to her and finds ‘himself talking in a way he usually didn’t, and when their time ended and she got up, often to join her father at a meeting, he felt his feet thicken with curdled blood. He did not want to leave, could not bear the thought of going back to sit in Susan’s study and type and wait for Susan’s subduedd knocks’ (HYS 63). Susan’s house no longer gives a semblance of a home to him; it triggers nostalgic memories of his childhood and he, for the first time, puts on a brave face and resolves to leave Susan’s house:

[Those short moments [of freedom from surveillance] had made it all worthwhile, these moments of pure planetary abandon, when he felt as if he, and he alone, were in control of the universe of his childhood. Recalling them, he decided he would end it with Susan. His relationship with Kainene might well not last long, but the moments of being with her, knowing he was not weighed down by lies and pretense, would make the brevity worthwhile. (HYS 66)]

What compels Richard to leave Susan’s flat, it is evident, is variance of interests. He is evidently trapped between a deprived rurality on the one hand and a deprecating urbanity which hardly offers him anything on the other. Lagos is an aberration, an artificial creation associated with the elitism of London; it is dominated by neo-colonial elites and as such, it bears the indifferent and decadent qualities of the metropolis. Their needs are different: ‘[Richard] hoped he did not sound insincere, but it was true; they had always wanted different things, always valued different things.’ The use of repetition here is deliberate as accentuates the incongruence of their relationship.

It dawns, albeit belatedly, on him that he ‘should never have moved in with her.’ There had been, it is shown, very minimal communication in this relationship; it ‘had been like an artless flow with little input from them, or at least from him.’ The employment of simile here conjures up a vapid image, dull and lacking in liveliness. ‘The relationship had happened to him.’ The use of italicisation foregrounds the emotional distance that had been exhibited in the affair. Kainene’s relationship does not offer emotional security. Perhaps because of the flashy suites that they temporarily occupy in the hope of attaining emotional fulfilment (consummating their love), the natural touch he [Richard] so desperately craves for is still missing. ‘Perhaps it [is] why an erection eludes] him: the gelding mix of surprise and desire.’ No matter how he wills his body and mind to work together, he remains ‘limp’ and does not ‘become hard’ and the ‘flaccid weight between his legs’ is a feeling that defies that his willpower. In her characteristic style - an idiosyncrasy, a (porno)graphic exposition of sexual scenes, thinly veiled lewdness, a writing style parallels Achebe’s and Armah’s; Adichie presents the burden of unrequited emotion as a compelling force behind characters’ displacement in her novels. When he ‘fails’ her again, he feels ‘a swift surge of irritation, towards himself for being uselessly limp,’ he sets out to leave for Nsukka University, the ‘little patch of dust in the middle of the bush’ (HYS 68). The ‘home of the roped pot,’ Igbo-Ukwu, his new location offers him a physical semblance of the tiny Shropshire village he had once called home.

The arrival of Odenigbo’s domineering mother, who perceives her presence as a possible deterrent to her son’s social progress, also occasions Olanna’s physical dislocation. The arrival of Odenigbo’s mother in Nsukka sparks a series of drama in the house. She does not hide her preconceived notions about her son; the notion that her son has not had ‘a proper soup’ because his meals are prepared by a boy who does not ‘know about real cooking,’ that her son has been wasting ‘money on expensive things’ and ‘her assuming that everything [in the house] belonged to [her son’] (HYS 95). That she does not respond when Ugwu tells her that Olanna had brought many things from Lagos speaks of unusual smug. She speaks so triumphantly about chauvinistic stereotypes like the idea that a ‘boy does not belong to the kitchen,’ setting the stage for speculation over the motive of her female companion, Amala. The arrival of Olanna reveals the old woman’s obvious arrogance. She literally keeps her ‘hands to her sides’ to avoid hugging her back. Her response to Olanna’s offer to help is bitingly sarcastic; she

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Emotionally drained and lacking in company, she decides to visit her neighbour Edna Whaler, ‘the pretty American black woman.’ However, she changes her mind and returns to her lonely house, to the ‘bland’ rice that tasted ‘nothing like Ugwu’s.’ Reaching out to her sister Kainene, out of frustration and desperation; she ‘felt a rush of melancholy; her twin sister thought something had to have happened for her to call.’ This call deepens the frosty relationship that she and Kainene had; it impresses upon her that a desultory talk between her and Kainene would not happen any time soon. Withdrawn and devastated, she resolves to travel to London.

The reunion of Olanna and Odenigbo is disrupted by the news about Amala’s pregnancy. At first, the presence of Mama (Odenigbo’s mother) unsettles her, but when Odenigbo reveals that his mother ‘and Amala are just leaving.’ Olanna becomes relieved. Odenigbo’s attitude to Amala prompts her to think differently about her return to Nsukka. She ‘noticed how scrupulously they avoided any contact, any touch of skin, as if they were united by a common knowledge so monumental that they were determined not to be united by anything else’ (HYS 223). As a result of the emotional pain occasioned by the revelation of Odenigbo’s dastardly act, she leaves and returns to her flat. It is not Odenigbo’s unfaithfulness that compels her to leave but Odenigbo’s inability to own up. Besides, by sleeping with young guileless girl, she assumes the personality of the Okonjis of Nigeria, men who believe that by virtue of their social status, they have the power to predate on vulnerable women. To shun loneliness, she travels to Kano to seek her comfort from her aunt. Aunty Ifeaka, though not as educated as Aunty Ifeoma, projects image of fortitude exhibited in the aunt motif that pervades Adichie’s three novels. Odenigbo, like ‘all [Nigerian] men,’ had ‘inserted his pen in the first hole he could find when [Olanna had gone] away’ (HYS 226). It is not this crude stereotyping of men that strikes Olanna; it is the radical feminist position that a woman should only allow their lives to change if they want to and she (Olanna) ‘must never behave as if [her] life belongs to [Odenigbo].’ Determined to cut her own niche, she leaves Kano.

The other cases of physical and transcendental displacement are prompted by the political tensions in the country. After the coup d’état spearheaded by Major Nzeogwu, ethnic profiling compels the Southern population to rethink their decision to remain part of the Nigerian society. The political anxiety in the country becomes deeper and bloodier; ‘the prime minister was missing, Nigeria

say's she wants to ‘cook a proper soup for her son,’ rubbing in the presumption that both Olanna and Ugwu cannot do it and to put her off completely, she scornfully says, ‘I hear you did not suck your mother’s breasts’ (HYS 96). She declares war against Olanna and the supposed witches that had sent her to her son that Odenigbo will ‘marry an abnormal woman only over her dead body’ (HYS 97). Olanna comes face to face with the ghosts of her childhood, a lost childhood intimacy. What appears to be more deprecating is that her parents’ apparent misconduct have warranted for the aspersions that are cast on her character. Interestingly, her university education plays out in Odenigbo’s mother’s stereotypical cards: ‘Too much schooling ruins a woman,’ she says, ‘everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband. What kind of wife will that be?’ (HYS 98). The reason for Olanna’s dislocation is two-fold; she is forced to confront the ghosts of her unpleasant childhood and to contend with a woman whose psyche is, ironic as it seems, deeply afflicted by male chauvinism.

Odenigbo’s reaction to his mother’s conduct compels her to stay away from him even further. His visit is punctuated by casualness, an obvious lack of seriousness that irks Olanna. Instead of consoling Olanna, asking her to return to the house and giving her assurance that ‘he would tell his mother off in front of her, for her’; he decides ‘to stay at her flat, like a frightened little boy hiding from his mother’ (HYS 102). Evidently, Odenigbo’s defencelessness leaves even more vulnerable. That he is not ready to tell off his mother and instead finds excuses for her unbecoming behaviour puts Olanna in an awkward situation. Odenigbo’s suggestion that something is ‘wrong with her’ when she rejects his idea of staying at her flat offends her emotional intelligence. This non-committal attitude speaks of an artificiality that is offensively distancing; it would appear that Odenigbo’s ‘overexalted intellectualism,’ seemingly Platonic, had robbed of the naturalness of emotionalism. Odenigbo’s intellectualism blinds him to his fiancée’s emotional needs:

She shook her head. She would not let him make her feel that there was something wrong with her. It was her right to be upset, her right to choose not to rush her humiliation aside in the name of an overexalted intellectualism, and she would claim that right. ‘Go.’ She gestured towards the door, ‘Go and play your tennis and don’t come back here.’ (HYS 102)
was now a federal military government, the premiers of the North and West were missing’ (HYS 124). Because of the political tension orchestrated by the dethronement of the government of the day, the Nigerian civilian population felt insecure. Olanna, for instance, postpones ‘her trip to Kano because of the coup’ (HYS 128). The BBC branded this ‘an Igbo coup’ and as expected, a number of Igbos were excited about the possibility of better governance, ‘the end of corruption’ (HYS 125). Ironically, the supposed orchestrators of the coup, the Igbo people, are harassed in the streets. Ibekie’s revelation demonstrates the height of the ethnic tension in the country: ‘My uncle in Ebutte does not sleep in his house any more since the coup. All his neighbours are Yoruba, and they said some men have been looking for him. He sleeps in different houses every night, while he takes care of his business. He has sent his children back home’ (HYS 133). For Kainene’s father, this coup presents an opportunity for amassing wealth and he does not ‘waste any time in ingratiating himself’ (HYS 134). Politically aggrieved by the possibility of losing the civil service positions as a result of economic marginalisation, the Northern population organise a countercoup ‘only six months after the first’ (HYS 138). The assassinations, the structure of the group of conspirators, and the politics of the military government brought to power nourished an anxious belief in ethnically orchestrated conspiracies — an Igbo bid to dominate Nigeria and the Hausa-Fulani factions (Northern Nigeria) of the army and the Northern population’s bid to diffuse the dominance of the Igbo. This political contest draws another scarlet scar in the face of Nigerian history. Numerous Igbo officers and civilians were killed in Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta. Several Igbo officers are killed in Kaduna:

Lagos was in chaos. [Olanna’s] parents had left for Igbo. Many Igbo officers were dead. The killings were organized; she told him about a soldier who said the alarm for a battalion muster parade was sounded in his barracks and everyone assembled, the Northerners picked out all the Igbo soldiers and took them away. (HYS 138)

The parallels between the bloodshed of this action and the ruthless army troops and the hordes of savage civilian lynching for pure pleasure in Season of Anomy are striking. The massacres of Igbo in northern cities, followed by a desperate retreat of the civilians, ruled out the concept of — one Nigeria, at least, from Igbo’s point of view.

Hatred and lack of trust replaced the openness of the past relations between Igbo and the northern Nigerians. Both ethnic and religious factors play significant roles in these clashes. The ritual murder of Colonel Udodi Ekechi is not only horrific and heart-wrenching; Northern soldiers put in a cell in the barracks and feed him ‘his own shit. Then they beat him senseless and tied him to an iron cross and threw him back in his cell. He died tied to an iron cross.’ This ritual killing demonstrates detestation, a deep-seated hatred, for Christianity. Most Igbo officers are murdered and the few lucky ones like Madu go into hiding after a narrow escape. ENBC Radio Enugu ‘reports that up to five-hundred Igbo people have been killed in Maiduguri,’ Igbo people are killed like ants, a mark of unmatched banality, ‘a whole family, a father and a mother and three children, lying on the road to the motor park,’ and ‘a pregnant woman split open in Kano’ are indications of the height of senselessness in military brutality (HYS 144). Olanna is forced to leave Kano after a spate of killings that leads to the murder of her uncle and her aunt. Religion is used as an excuse for violence; the announcement that comes from a Hausa voice in the face of this tension says it all: ‘The Igbo must go. The infidels must go’ (HYS 147). Olanna only manages to sneak her way out of Kano. This political mess is clearly captured in Fanon’s postulations:

...the people’s bitter disappointment, their desperation, but also their pent-up anger, can be clearly heard. Instead of letting the people express their grievances, instead of making the circulation of ideas between people and the leadership its basic mission, the party erects a screen of prohibitions. The party leaders behave like common sergeants major and constantly remind the people of the need to keep ‘silence in ranks.’ This party, which claimed to be the servant of the people, which claimed to work for the people’s happiness, quickly dispatches the people back to their caves as soon as the colonial authorities hand over the country. The party will also commit many mistakes regarding national unity. For example, the so-called national party operates on a tribal basis. It is a veritable ethnic group which has transformed itself into a party. This party which readily proclaims itself national, which claims to speak in the name of the people as a whole, secretely and sometimes openly sets up a genuine ethnic dictatorship. We are no longer witness to a bourgeois dictatorship to a tribal one. The ministers, private
secretaries, ambassadors, and prefects are chosen from the leader’s ethnic group, sometimes even directly from his family. These regimes based on the family unit seem to repeat the age-old laws of endogamy and faced with stupidity, this imposture and this intellectual and spiritual poverty, we are left with a feeling of shame rather than anger.

These heads of government are the true traitors of Africa, for they sell their continent to the worst of its enemies; stupidity. This tribalization of power results, much as one would expect, in regionalist thinking and separatism. Decentralizing trends surface and triumph, the nation disintegrates and is dismembered. (Fanon 126)

The post-independence Nigerian leadership had failed to unite the citizenry, setting the stage for rivalry. Military storm is a consequence of political disillusionment and a ‘pent-up’ anger against the ruling regime. Ironically, this anger is directed at innocent civilians who are directly responsible for the mismanagement of the country’s affairs. In a country where the citizens are intellectually and spiritually drained, igniting ethnic passions becomes the obvious political bait. The tribal narrative is swallowed hook, line and sinker by an unsuspecting civil majority. The result is what Fanon regards as the disintegration and dismembering of the nation and consequent displacement of citizens from their traditional homes.

Forced to live in a politically discriminating environment where the Northern leadership would rather pay foreigners twice than hire a Southerner, the Igbo nation is compelled to chart a new political path. Besides, wanton killing of Igbos continues and a number of people decide to run to refugee camps for safety. The Igbo people flee, Colonel Ojukwu takes over as the leader of Igbo and ‘people were talking about secession and a new country, which would be named after the bay, the Bight of Biafra’ (HYS 156). The secession plans come at a bloody price; Gowon capitalises on Nigeria’s military might to intimidate the newly formed Biafran nation. Olanna and odenigbo are forced to leave Nsukka University after an incursion. ‘The campus streets [remain] eerie; silent and empty’ (HYS 179). In their new temporary settlements, peace does not prevail. Odenigbo’s family finds itself holed up in a bunker most of the time to shield itself from the effects of bombing.

The declaration of ceasefire by the Biafran leader Ojukwu does not give any promise of peaceful co-existence. It ushers in an even more hostile intellectual climate for Biafran academics. When Odenigbo returns to Nsukka, he and his family are subjected to physical abuse by the Nigerian military officers. First, he is harassed on account of suspicion, the fact that his car still had a Biafran number plate. His observation that he intends to change the plate when he arrives at Nsukka gets him into further trouble. The officer says, ‘Ah, Nsukka University. You are the ones who planned the rebellion with Ojukwu, you book people’ (HYS 418). This affront demonstrates the delicate nature of the political situation in Nigeria and the seeming uncertainty about the future of the Biafrans in a temporally united Nigeria. This return does not offer a flicker of hope as the joy of the returnees is cut short and ‘in the briefness of too bright flares shrivels a heritage of blighted futures’ (Idanne 50).

There is very little hope that intellectualism will have a place in this new-found union. Odenigbo and his ilk had succeeded in keeping their men alive (protesting against the social injustices of ruling regime) but this artificial union of the two disparate nationalities (Nigeria and Biafra) dampens their hope of triumphing over the retrogressive social forces that define the neo-colonial Nigerianness. The agents of the new oligarchy, the Nigerian soldiers, are even bolder in their resolve to exterminate the book people who are responsible for igniting massive revolt against the Northern regime. Instead of starting the new journey of reconciliation with open minds, soldiers, who represent the militaristically futile North, are making it clear that they are not ready to accommodate divergent opinions. To demonstrate their disgust at intellectual revolution, they ransack Odenigbo’s house with a view to confiscating and obliterating seditious materials that might exist in his house at Nsukka. The intent of this military action is to instil fear among the Biafra-allied intellectuals. Cowed, intimidated and outnumbered, the Southerners, it is anticipated, would subserviently submit to the authority of Northern leadership. The return of Odenigbo to Nsukka does not offer any promise of peaceful co-existence; it offers an emboldened Northern population an opportunity to beat its political drums of war. Odenigbo’s return to his home does not give any form of respite from political woes of displacement; it ushers in a new form of dislocation. He, his family and their ilk acquire new statuses as ‘foreigners.’ Adichie’s choice of the title, Half of a Yellow Sun, provides an accurate metaphoric description of Nigerian state; there is no clarity of vision as the colour imagery
associated with the sun suggests opaqueness, haziness, obscurity or blurred vision. Adichie, it seems, proffers a much detailed version of what Saro-Wiwa articulates in his vignette, ‘Africa Kills Her Sun,’ a letter which he introduces by a paradox that serves as a critical cast as aspersions on the future, if any, of this content. He pities those ‘who are condemned to live in it’ yet he also regards Africa as a ‘beautiful world.’ ‘The disappearance of Kainene emphasises the political anxiety and uncertainty about the future of Nigeria. The permanence of the suspense at the end of the story reveals the complexity of this matter. In fact, the two rivals (Madu and Richard), who are both in love with her, ironically fight over her memories. Her unwavering commitment to community service, a sudden turnaround of social philosophy and a lucid indication of an intimate attachment to the plight of the underprivileged members of her (physically displaced and vulnerable) Igbo society endear him to readers as it, for the first time, awakens her parents’ long-dead conscience. But more importantly, the fight between the two archrivals is an indictment on the implications of the lip-serviced union of the two rival factions – the Northerners and the Southerners.

The confrontation between Richard and Madu captures the fragility of the new political alliance. For the Northerners, it seems a perfect opportunity for vengeance and chest-thumping has presented itself. The Southerners, on the other hand, have nothing to celebrate; all they have is memory – a reminiscence of a politically tumultuous past that offered them a semblance of peace and a chance to reassert their rightful place in the political destiny of their nation. Tangible bits of this memory are being trampled upon by the agents of Nigerian oligarchy and what remains is largely an abstract memory, more like the philanthropically charitable activities of Kainene. What is presented in this novel is, therefore, a delicate political situation. That the writer, Adichie, unceremoniously ends her story is not surprising; it is definitely a deliberate move – one that is aimed at demonstrating the future of the half-lighted, indeed translucently lit, Nigerian society hangs in the balance. What exacerbates the precariousness of the political scenario in the presumably united territory called Nigeria is the futility of predicating the unity of a nation on a Northern population whose psyche is heavily afflicted by Greco-African hubris and a Southern population that is transcendently homeless in a turbulent political marriage of convenience. Achebe makes an insightful account of this period in his autobiographical work, There was a Country:

The post Nigeria-Biafra civil war era saw a ‘unified’ Nigeria saddled with a greater and more insidious reality. We were plagued by a home-grown enemy: political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscriminate, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class. ... A new era of great decadence and decline was born. And it continues to this day. At this point, the intellectuals were faced with a conundrum. We could no longer pass off this present problem simply to our complicated past and the cold war raging in the background, however significant these factors were. We could not absolve ourselves from the need to take hold of the events of the day and say, Okay we have had a difficult past... From today, this is the programme we have: let’s look at what we have not done. (Achebe 243)

This damning reappraisal of the post-war era captures the disillusionment that Adichie demonstrates in her second novel. Achebe’s observation, it is evident, lends credence to Adichie’s deliberate decision to introduce a complicated social dilemma at the end of the novel. It would appear Adichie, like Achebe, noted that the political chaos in Nigeria was not coming to an end any time soon; ‘it continues to this day.’ The declaration of a ceasefire compels Biafrans to return to their forced marital status, a political marriage of convenience or what Magak calls ‘unmutual wedlock’ (Magak 131). This union depriv es the Igbo people of the cultural unity that the traditional ethnic community had enjoyed in its resolve to secede from the mainstream Nigerian society whose constitution, it is evident, is based on a presumed ‘common civic culture and ideology’ propounded by the West (Smith 11). The colonial powers had arbitrarily drawn borders on the atlas and thus lumped diverse groups of people together. Nonetheless, Adichie injects some at the end of the novel: ‘Above, clouds like dyed cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture from them. The new rains will come down soon’ (PH 307).

3. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that displacement is a multi-layered phenomenon, arising from several factors and Adichie does not disappoint for she presents rare literary innovation in this regard. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili assumes a dislocated state of existence and detached
consciousness which reflects the indeterminate unfolding of events shaped around her senseless cognitive meandering within the novel. Written as a first-person narrative from the subjective perspective of Kambili, Purple Hibiscus, Adichie’s first novel questions the authenticity and provisionality of constructed identity and displaced consciousness from the beginning. These experiences are equally evident in her second novel, Half of a Yellow Sun. The protagonists reject what Phillips calls ‘the cultural cringe,’ the perception that one’s own culture occupies a subordinate cultural place on the periphery. A sense of peripheral existence, which is engendered by cultural subservience, is expressed through the emphasis on exposition and descriptive detail tailored to evoke an atmosphere of lifelessness and monotony. Adichie, it would appear, therefore, strives to articulate a deliberately partial and fractured view of a culturally displaced character. Thus displacement is not a static phenomenon; it is prone to multiple meanings which are dependent on the new conditions and perspectives in the ever-changing world today. The characters in the two novels mentioned above are both physically and culturally dislocated; they are compelled to move out of their traditional homes physically and at the same time, they feel transcendentally homeless.
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