

The Chimera of a Nigerian National Unity in Adichie's Selected Novels

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Introduction

Nigeria gained independence from England in 1960, marking the end of a century filled with “administrative” challenges (Peters 2012). However, the legacy of colonization persisted—not merely as cultural erosion but as an enduring transformation of value systems, social structures, and expressive forms. This reshaped Africa’s identity by imposing European values and institutions that marginalized indigenous cultures and disrupted traditional norms, effects that continue to influence post-colonial societies (Aluko & Larey, 2025). The imposition of European authority redefined indigenous life and generated new modes of cultural negotiations that shaped the nation’s modern identity. This significantly altered the distinctiveness and identity of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, producing both integrative changes and cultural disruptions. The postcolonial era, often conceived as a time of cultural recovery, reveals instead a dynamic process of adaptation and contestation. Nigeria’s colonial encounter produced hybrid identities and practices that complicate any romantic vision of a pure precolonial past. As Homi Bhabha argues, this colonial experience generates a “split” cultural space in which domination and resistance coexist (107), a framework that illuminates Adichie’s depiction of Nigerians negotiating identity within inherited contradictions. Hybridity, rather than reconciliation, becomes the “ambivalent turn” through which colonial and indigenous values continually unsettle one another (Bhabha 113).

Achebe, reflecting on language and identity, extends this hybridity into the linguistic realm, insisting that African writers must “use English in a way that brings out [their] message best” (5). This leads to creating a language “altered to suit [its] new African surroundings” (Achebe 7). Nigerian literature in English has emerged from this hybridity as it transforms the colonizer’s idiom into an instrument for local expression and critique. Adichie’s fiction inherits and extends this tradition in her literary works. In her story “The Headstrong Historian,” Adichie critiques how historical memory is fractured yet continually reclaimed. Grace, the granddaughter who writes “Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria,” revises the colonial archive through her own genealogy, transforming a record of subjugation into an act of reimagined

authorship (Adichie 21). Grace's literary act models the recovery of memory necessary to confront the chimera of Nigerian national unity. This portrayal shows that postcolonial consciousness depends on creative reconstruction within hybrid, global contexts for a lost authenticity. While Adichie's fiction shows moments of empathy and reconstruction, her novels, nevertheless, portray Nigerian national unity as a fragile, partial construct — a chimera produced and sustained by colonial legacies and contemporary elite failures.

This critical awareness frames Adichie's larger exploration of Nigeria's fractured national identity. The diverse ethnic compositions of the nation, disregarded during its amalgamation in 1914 by British colonial authorities, remains a structural challenge to unity. Ethnic rivalries and mistrust, shaped by colonial policy and later intensified by internal politics, erupted most violently during the Nigerian civil war, also referred to as the Biafran War. Following independence, regional imbalances in education and economic power sharpened tensions between the regions (Abba 2020; Schwab 1971). The war, fueled by both material and ideological anxieties, decimated the Biafran population and left deep moral and psychological scars (Schwab 1971). Challenges persisted even after the war ended. Nigeria has faced numerous issues, including religious conflicts, pervasive government corruption, and an unstable economy. Some ethnic groups still bear the lingering effects of the war, and attempts by subsequent administrations to suppress the memory of the war have often exacerbated rather than resolved the problems.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, whose title recalls the rising sun on the flag of the short-lived Republic of Biafra, depict the fracturing national unity brought about by this confluence of a forced grouping of ethnic groups, the intrusion of Western ideology, and the ill-advised successive Nigerian leaders. Her novels portray the ongoing negotiations through which Nigerians redefine identity amid historical dislocation. Adichie's characters inhabit a world of hybrid values—religious, political, and moral—where alienation itself becomes a site of critique. This alienation from indigenous ethics fuels the moral crisis and corruption in the present. The novels portray the inherent flaws in the notion of a unified Nigerian identity by highlighting pivotal events that fractured national unity, including the civil war. Through these narratives, Adichie exposes the tensions underlying the ideal of Nigerian unity while revealing how cultural hybridity persists even in the aftermath of division and loss.

Literature Review

In examining the complex dynamics of Nigeria's ethnic composition, scholars have highlighted significant factors contributing to the distortion of ethnology and challenges to national unity. N. M. Tembo asserts that introducing various ethnic groups into the same territory, where little to no

interaction existed before, has completely distorted ethnology (Tembo 2012). Atofarati (1992) claims that Britain's tragic error in 1914 when it merged Northern and Southern Nigeria had far-reaching effects. He emphasizes the fact that because each side had a different administrative structure, the only thing that over 300 diverse ethnic groups had in common was the name of their nation. This situation alone was an "insufficient basis for true unity" (19). Atofarati (1992) reasons that "under normal circumstances, the amalgamation ought to have brought the various peoples together and provided a firm basis for the arduous task of establishing closer cultural, social, religious, and linguistic ties vital for true unity among the people. There was division, hatred, unhealthy rivalry, and pronounced disparity in development" (19). Stressing the impact of colonial policies on Nigerian national unity, Olu Oguibe emphasizes the role of geographic, religious, and ethnic divisions that the British perpetuated during the colonial era. These divisions, according to Oguibe, reflect the ongoing crisis faced by the Nigerian state (1998).

In an interview with Michael Peel of the *Financial Times*, Adichie contends that Nigeria was intentionally set up to fail by the colonial forces, undermining the possibility of achieving true Nigerian national unity. This forced grouping of ethnic groups, Adichie asserts, has been a significant factor in the dissolution of national unity and has given rise to the destructive problems plaguing the nation (Peel 2006). Examining the concept of national unity, Emmanuel Ojo defines it as a process of bringing together various communities to establish a "harmonious metropolis," guided by a system of government that ensures equitable harmony (385). National unity is considered a comprehensive and all-encompassing endeavor promoting socioeconomic growth, peace, and stability. Onifade *et al.* also highlight the importance of institutions guided by respect for the unique "traditions and cultural backgrounds" of ethnicities sharing the same polity, seeking to balance the interests of all groups (79). In addition, Salihu Bakari characterizes national unity as the unity of the diverse ethnic groups within a country, promoting a perception of one another as "brothers and sisters" free from tribal sentiments and other divisive vices (361). It entails providing equal opportunities and rights to all sections of society, regardless of differences (Shah & Ishaque 2017). National unity implies a condition in which individuals from both majority and minority ethnic groups actively participate in nation-building processes and civic life, fostering a shared sense of identity. It signifies a significant majority of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds' conscious acceptance and adherence to rules and regulations.

Kehinde (2009) provides an insightful commentary on the ethnic content of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, suggesting that the narrative explores the potential clash between ethnic identity and national allegiance in Nigeria. Kehinde further asserts that the novel addresses the inter-ethnic rivalries, acrimony, and "disunity" that ultimately led to the civil war (140). Building upon this analysis, Susan Andrade highlights the

significance of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* as narratives that intricately depict family politics while subtly conveying the stories of the country (Andrade 2011). Although *Purple Hibiscus* approaches the Nigerian Civil War with a more delicate touch than *Half of a Yellow Sun*, both novels are firmly grounded in the Nigerian context. As Audrey Peters aptly observes, the colonization of Nigeria, which aimed to unify diverse ethnic groups under one country, played a role in the war and subsequent political uprisings that sought to redefine power dynamics among various ethnic groups (Peters 2012). Therefore, analyzing how Adichie's novels portray the events that shaped Nigerian mythical national unity in her works can serve as a valuable reference for understanding the repercussions of compromised unity.

Negotiating Identity and Power in Adichie's Fiction

1- Confluence of Forced Ethnic Grouping and the Crisis of Sovereignty

Nigeria continues to grapple with unresolved issues that were the root causes of the conflict during the Nigerian Civil War, considering its formation through the forced amalgamation of ethnic groups. As Chimalum Nwankwo emphasizes, war is merely a symptom of a deeper malaise that often goes beyond surface-level ethnic differences (Nwankwo 2008). The nation remains plagued by interethnic conflicts, the abuse of governmental and military authority, the erosion of social and moral values, power struggles among the three main ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo), and the fight for survival and self-determination of minority groups. Leaders and followers alike continue to promote ethnic and religious sentiments, undermining the shared humanity that should transcend ethnic affiliations and unite all individuals, regardless of their ethnic groups or creed. Building a nation free from the shackles of ethnicity and united by a sense of nationalism is a formidable task. This historical frame explains why Adichie treats narrative form as a site of contested authority and why literary voices matter for thinking about unity.

The title *Half of a Yellow Sun* symbolically reflects Bhabha's "hybrid" nation that is fragmented, ambivalent, and precariously held together (Bhabha 113). The novel portrays Nigeria as a collection of pieces forced into coexistence without cohesion, which may allude to its creation as a result of colonial authority merging numerous ethnic groups without the consent of the people. Consequently, the ethnic groups continued to vie for dominance in filling the power vacuum left by the departing colonial rulers after independence. Ezeka, supporting this perspective in the novel, suggests that the concept of tribe, as it exists today, is as much a product of colonialism as the notions of "nation and race" (Adichie 2009, 20).

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* focuses on the Nigerian Civil War, an often-overlooked chapter in international conflicts. As Willfried Feuser observes, "[the war] remains one of the least remembered modern conflicts, overshadowed by the Vietnam War and other global crises of the 1960s" (113). Adichie's narrative portrays the rhetorical strategies employed by the Biafran administration to assert its sovereignty. Biafra, for instance, claimed that Nigeria had violated the human rights of its citizens during the conflicts of 1966, justifying its bid for independence. Scholars such as Frederick Forsyth and Chinua Achebe note that the secession was framed as a moral response to state-sanctioned violence and the failure of federal protection (Forsyth 1969; Achebe 1984). Forsyth observes that "tens of thousands of Easterners were slaughtered in a campaign of organized terror that convinced them they could no longer remain part of Nigeria" (11). On the other hand, Peters argued that Biafra was an unruly state lacking international recognition (Peters 2012). In the absence of established norms for recognizing sovereignty, the Biafran characters in Adichie's novel grapple with forging their own identities and even embracing new identities, such as Biafran nationalism, Hausa, and Igbo, that are distinct from the previously imposed and negotiated Nigerian national identity. By staging these competing claims, *Half of a Yellow Sun* exposes that both Nigeria and Biafra perform rival myths of legitimacy. The moral rhetoric on each side dramatizes the central claim that Nigerian unity was never organic but a colonial construction whose contradictions simply re-emerged as civil war.

Olanna's and Kainene's diverging paths embody the fractured identity of a nation split between moral idealism and pragmatic survival. Though twins who once shared an instinctive closeness, they have grown apart and "never talked about anything anymore," a silence that reflects the breakdown of communication within a divided nation (Adichie, p. 31). Olanna's decision to leave her privileged life in Lagos for Nsukka and her involvement in Odenigbo's teaching demonstrate a movement toward nationalist consciousness, where she learns that there are "two answers" to what is taught about their land—the official one that serves colonial history and the "real answer" that affirms indigenous memory (Adichie, p. 13). Kainene, by contrast, takes control of her father's business and sustains a relationship with a "shy young Englishman infatuated with her," showing how she navigates power and access through global connections while remaining aware that his voice carries authority "because [he is] white" (Adichie, pp. 369, 382). These differences reveal Adichie's critique of how colonial education and class privilege produce divergent modes of survival and belonging in postcolonial Nigeria. While Olanna seeks meaning through teaching and care, Kainene operates through pragmatic adaptation to external power. Their partial reconciliation near the end gestures toward ethical repair rather than national harmony, showing that the dream of unity survives only in miniature, personal form. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays how claims to sovereignty force new forms of identity to be invented in response to political instability.

The characters respond by recalibrating political, ethnic, and personal identities in pragmatic ways. In the novel, public speech and everyday encounters work as laboratories of identity. On a flight, a man reduces an entire people to a stereotype, insisting that the Igbo “own all the shops; they control the civil service, even the police” (Adichie, p. 273). Earlier, roadside voices call out: “The Igbo must go, the infidels must go” (Adichie, p. 147). Here, speech itself becomes a political act in which gossip and slogan substitute for governance. The narrative converts ordinary talk into proof that national identity is manufactured through fear, not shared ideals—another sign of unity’s fragility. These moments also show how material anxieties and popular rhetoric cohere into boundaries that reorganize social life. They also help explain why many Igbo organize institutions as defensive measures, which in turn become sites where Biafran nationalism is rehearsed and taught (Adichie, p. 38).

Identity in the novel therefore emerges less from abstract allegiance to a preexisting nation than from contested practices of naming and narration. Richard’s desire to narrate the war and his later dismissal, “You must remember that you are not one of us,” reveal that the right to speak for the nation mirrors its politics of belonging, exposing unity as rhetorical rather than real (Adichie, pp. 282, 396). Ugwu’s rise from servant to chronicler and his plan to title his account *The World Was Silent While We Died* mark a transfer of narrative authority from outsider observation to insider testimony, suggesting that genuine nationhood exists only in lived experience, not in the state’s imagined cohesion (Adichie, p. 433). These scenes show Adichie’s narrative at once diagnosing the political conditions that generate new identities and dramatizing the epistemic stakes of who gets to name those identities. By transferring authorship from Richard to Ugwu, Adichie insists that genuine national storytelling—and therefore moral authority—belongs to those who suffered its fragmentation.

Through events that highlight the leadership’s failure to recognize and capitalize on the positive aspects of Nigeria’s history for the sake of national unity, the novel portrays the forced grouping of ethnicities as the main obstacle to Nigeria’s unity. For example, early in the story, before hostilities erupted, most indigenous people in the North refused to enroll Igbo children in government schools. In response to this persecution in Kano against the Igbo, the Igbo Union established its own grammar school to educate its children (Adichie, p. 38). Why should Igbo children not be allowed to attend public schools within the same nation? The Igbo are portrayed as a group that “wants to control everything,” and they are further characterized as proud, clannish, dominant in the markets, and similar to Jewish people (p. 154). When Olanna visits Mohammed, a wealthy Hausa man she once dated, she is warned not to go to Sabon Gari to visit her relatives because “Igbo bodies are lying on Airport Road,” illustrating the growing hostility towards the Igbo (p. 147). Even the military is not immune to the adverse effects of ethnic divisions, as the government’s “ethnic balance policy” involves a systematic approach to

identifying and dismissing Igbo officers (p. 141). The government's failure to defuse tensions gradually leads to Biafra's secession and, eventually, the war.

Adichie's novel refuses to present these events as a simple binary of oppressors and victims since she underscores the ambiguity of identification itself. The novel repeatedly reminds readers that those who claim belonging, like Richard, may still face rejection when an insider tells them: "You must remember that you are not one of us," a reminder that allegiance does not erase the boundaries of origin or privilege (Adichie, p. 396). Even affection, the narrative suggests, can mask the condescension of observation when one "loves" a culture yet treats it as spectacle rather than lived reality (Adichie, p. 368). Through these moments, the story anticipates the question of who can author the Biafran story, transforming the struggle for independence into a meditation on the ethics and ownership of historical narrative.

By staging both Richard's attempted appropriation and Ugwu's emergent voice, the narrative reframes authorship as an issue of situated knowledge and moral accountability. The narrative implies that the right to tell this history accrues not to the well-intentioned observer but to those whose lived experience and bearing of witness render them its ethical custodians. The contrast between Richard's aesthetic impulse and Ugwu's testimonial writing exposes the tension between representation and responsibility that defines postcolonial storytelling. In this way, the novel dramatizes how narrative becomes a site of reclaiming agency and rebuilding collective identity after violence. The act of writing is thus not merely personal healing but a political process through which memory contests silence and ownership of history is redefined. These tensions between political belonging and narrative authority set the stage for Adichie's broader interrogation of ethnicity and historical memory.

In this context, the novel turns to the question of who narrates history into a metaphor for who owns the nation's voice. Through Ugwu and Richard, *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays storytelling as both an ethical act and a contest over ownership. Even in Olanna's children's school, Ugwu teaches, and his movement from village boy to steward, soldier, teacher, historian, and writer marks an internal transfer of narrative authority as much as it records personal survival (Adichie, p. 433). Where Odenigbo grows more cynical and withdrawn under the pressure of war, Ugwu finds in speech and in writing a means to register what others may refuse to see, and the novel stages his acts of testimony as a form of ethical witnessing that outlasts the masters' theorizing. The story complicates the idea that literary talent alone confers the right to narrate suffering by repeatedly positioning Richard as an outsider to the events he desires to render. The narrative insists that he has "no right to tell the story." And that in attempting to aestheticize certain scenes, he becomes, in Adichie's terms, a "voyeur" rather than a responsible chronicler (Adichie, p. 282). By transferring authorship from Richard to Ugwu, the novel suggests that

genuine national storytelling—and therefore moral authority—belongs to those who suffered its fragmentation.

The narrative then turns from the struggle over voice to the struggle to rebuild community under a newly imagined identity distinct from the chimera of the Nigerian nation. The war, though devastating, also becomes a site where people rediscover connection and purpose within the emergent consciousness of Biafra. Olanna and Kainene set aside their differences and engage in open communication (Adichie, p. 414). Initially working as a food supplier in a refugee camp, Kainene later establishes an orphanage where she cares for the underprivileged (pp. 415-417). Olanna and Mrs. Muokelu establish a school for children who have been displaced. Although the school is later attacked, Olanna opens up her home to continue its operations (pp. 427-428). The resourcefulness of Nsukka intellectuals like Ezeka—who design weapons such as Ogbunigwe and produce medicines and gasoline—also reflects a new form of solidarity during crisis (pp. 358-359). These collective acts represent one of the war's unexpected legacies; not the restoration of the old Nigeria, but the tentative formation of a community bound by shared suffering and creative resilience. Olanna's collaboration with others to assist refugees and victims of the Kano pogrom (pp. 99-100) embodies a vision of hope that gestures toward moral renewal and self-definition beyond the broken framework of the Nigerian federation.

2- Rethinking Ethnicity, Stereotypes, and Historical Memory

Half of a Yellow Sun revisits the essentialist and Eurocentric concept of the postcolonial era as she explores this tumultuous period in Nigerian history through the intertwined voices of various characters and the third-person omniscient narration. Social differences play a dominant role, serving as a driving force behind the initial coup, which is followed by a counter coup (Adichie, p. 36). Many Igbo individuals sent their children to British universities, as is the case with most professionals and professors depicted in the novel, including Olanna and Kainene. Other regions also fiercely compete for “white salaries” and the “white way of life,” as the 1960 independence era witnessed a rise in Christian households and a strong desire for Western education (p. 51). Just as many Europeans hold negative stereotypes about certain ethnic groups, unintentionally, many Nigerians do the same. Thus, the Yoruba are often perceived as subservient to their long-standing British connections, the Igbo are viewed as driven by money, and the Hausa are seen as the dictatorial and self-righteous group from the North (Adichie, p. 184).

These stereotypes—of the Yoruba as dependent on colonial favor, the Igbo as acquisitive, and the Hausa as authoritarian (Adichie, p. 184)—reproduce colonial categories of difference while concealing the material

anxieties that fuel them. In Fanon's sense, such discourse transforms economic competition into cultural blame, legitimizing exclusion by recoding structural inequality as ethnic character (*The Wretched* 35). Adichie's narrative shows that prejudice in postcolonial Nigeria is not merely psychological but ideological. This turns to a means of defending privilege and explaining deprivation in a nation still governed by colonial habits of thought. Consequently, the colonial seeds of distrust, intolerance, political inequality, and a yearning for all things Eurocentric germinate in the soil of the independent nation.

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* mirrors the real tensions that led to the Biafran conflict, portraying ethnic suspicion and leadership failure as consequences of colonial fragmentation. As Frederick Forsyth observes, ethnic politics had already deeply affected Nigeria, undermining the fragile sense of unity that existed during colonial rule and the early years of the First Republic (1963-1966) (Forsyth 1969). The novel uses this historical context to challenge the notion that hostility among ethnic groups is natural or preexisting. Rather, it suggests that stereotypes about ethnicity and race emerged from colonial manipulation and the postcolonial leadership's inability to manage diversity. Stereotypes in this sense as "socially shared beliefs about traits that are characteristic of members of a social category" (Greenwald *et al.* 14), reflect socially constructed biases rather than inherent divisions. In Naomi Ofori's recorded examples of such learned prejudices in Nigerian society, she explains that the Igbo people commonly use the phrase "ndiofemmanu" to refer to the Yoruba people as weak and foolish, while the Hausa people use "inyaminri" to describe the Igbo people as unruly and mischievous (24). In a humorous but telling manner, both the Igbo and Yoruba people call the Hausa "aboki," implying violence and stupidity (23).

Adichie's novel, however, undermines these entrenched stereotypes by depicting instances of empathy and solidarity across ethnic lines. Major Madu, an Igbo character, is saved by Ibrahim, a Hausa character, while Olanna, an Igbo character, is rescued by her ex-boyfriend from the Hausa people after her relatives are killed in the North. Through these instances, the narrative refutes the myth that the Hausa people are cruel and instead exposes the role of political manipulation and leadership failure in producing mutual suspicion. The willingness of the Igbo people to reintegrate into Nigeria after the war further demonstrates their capacity for coexistence and national healing. Their resilience and resourcefulness during the conflict further challenge the stereotype that they sought only to monopolize authority and material wealth. This portrays the ethnic tensions that culminated in war not as expressions of immutable hatred but as the tragic consequences of a nation fractured by colonialism and corrupted by misguided leadership.

Ethnic animosity, which arose from the forced grouping of diverse peoples, played a significant role in fueling the Biafran separatist movement that ultimately led to the Nigerian Civil War. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie's narrative reveals that the Igbo people, though

victims of persecution, are not exempt from acts of corruption or prejudice toward other ethnic groups. Olanna's reaction to the Hausa pogroms illustrates this moral complexity. Although she suffers deep trauma from the massacre of her relatives in the North, some Easterners later retaliate by attacking Northerners living in the East, showing that the Igbo, too, perpetuate ethnic violence (Adichie, p. 157-160). Likewise, the novel depicts Biafran radio broadcasts that dehumanize "vandals" — a term used to describe Nigerian soldiers, most of whom were Hausa — thereby exposing the prejudices embedded even within the Biafran struggle for self-determination (Adichie, p. 268-270). Through these reversals, the narrative proves that ethnic intolerance and corruption were not confined to one group alone as a fixed ethnic trait, but as a shared national condition that deepened Nigeria's postcolonial fragmentation. This exposure of prejudice as a learned national paves the way to understanding how Adichie's novel links social disorder to a failure of moral and political leadership in postwar Nigeria.

3- Advised Leadership

Through the scenario of failed governance, Adichie's fiction reveals how post-independence Nigeria repeats colonial patterns of domination, proving that its national identity remains a borrowed fiction. In the plot opening of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the conversations between Ugwu, an uneducated houseboy and his "master" Odenigbo reveal the uneven structures of power that mirror Nigeria's political hierarchy (Adichie, p. 171). Ugwu's speech, an Igbo inflected by English rhythms, reveals both the hybrid linguistic reality and the uneven access to education that mark Nigeria's social order (Adichie, p. 11). The narrative then moves forward a few years to a coup that topples the Nigerian government. Through this early dynamic, the novel suggests that the struggle between privilege and dependence within the household reflects a larger national crisis of leadership. As the narrative advances, a coup topples the government, and the Northern Hausa people blame the Igbo for the upheaval, leading to a counter-coup and the massacres that claim Olanna's family. In the face of this violence, Odenigbo, Olanna, and Ugwu flee to the East under Ojukwu's command, carrying with them the uncertainty of a fractured nation and the lingering question of what kind of leadership can hold it together. The coups demonstrate that without moral renewal, each regime merely repaints the chimera of unity in new colors of authority.

The narrative later expands this concern with authority beyond the home and the battlefield to the corrupt structures of governance that define postwar Nigeria. Through figures such as Chief Ozobia and Chief Okonji, the story shows how the postwar elite inherits and repeats the exploitative habits of colonial rule. Ogunmilade *et al.* note that Nigeria's ruling class remains absorbed in "power struggles" and the pursuit of state resources

instead of social progress (49). Utomi observes that politics has become a contest where “personal enrichment” determines alliance and loyalty (54). This world embodies Fanon’s “pitiful and shameful spectacle” of the postcolonial bourgeoisie that “takes over the colonial state and becomes its mimicry” (*Wretched* 152), showing how the novel’s elite replicate colonial power instead of dismantling it. Achebe makes a similar argument, claiming that the country’s failure “is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” because its rulers lack the “intellectual and moral capacity” to confront the problems of the nation (Achebe, *The trouble* 1-2). By linking private greed to public collapse, *Half of a Yellow Sun* suggests that the elite’s mimicry of colonial privilege hollows out the nation’s moral center, making any proclaimed unity a façade maintained by corruption.

The novel further shows that the failure is not abstract. It appears in the everyday behavior of the privileged class, such as Chief Ozobia’s willingness to trade his daughter’s marriage for business favors (Adichie, p. 32). A similar instance is his habit of never wearing the same outfit twice, which signals wealth built on public deprivation (Adichie, p. 34). The novel portrays a society where moral weakness, political greed, and economic inequality feed one another, suggesting that Nigeria’s instability persists because the logic of colonial accumulation continues under new hands.

Half of a Yellow Sun also depicts the exploitation of political and military power, particularly when armed troops intimidate defenseless individuals. Odenigbo and his family face harassment and mistreatment from troops at a checkpoint on their journey back to Nsukka. One soldier expresses his intent to persecute and seek revenge against intellectuals who supported the Biafran cause during the war. Later, soldiers raid Odenigbo’s residence in Nsukka under the pretense of searching for items that threaten national unity. They intimidate Odenigbo, seize his meal, and escape without repercussions. Odenigbo’s statement, “The war has ended, but hunger has not,” captures Fanon’s idea of a nation still trapped in colonial hunger — moral, economic, and political — revealing mimicry as Nigeria’s postwar condition (Adichie, p. 433). The *hunger* here, therefore, becomes a metaphor of a starvation of justice and ethics that reveals the emptiness behind postwar nationalism. As Feuser observes, peace in such a context “is expected to be a continuation of war through other means” (151). The end of open warfare therefore does not restore moral order but merely transforms violence into bureaucratic exploitation, showing how the postcolonial state perpetuates the same conditions that once tore it apart.

Building on the same context, Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* pictures the post-independence era of Nigeria, domesticating the nation’s authoritarianism as Papa’s rule at home reproduces Nigeria’s political tyranny. Through the perspective of Kambili, a teenage character, the novel sheds light on the socio-political landscape of Nigeria and its impact on the lives of its people. Papa, the dominant male character in the story,

is depicted as a contemporary and intelligent individual. However, despite his financial acumen and intellectual complexity, he mistreats his wife and children. He is stubborn and allows his whims and desires to override the suffering of his family. The novel suggests that his behavior is influenced and controlled by Western religion. Through this mirroring of home and state, the narrative shows that national unity cannot thrive in a culture where obedience replaces empathy.

In a deeper critique of home and state tyranny, the narrator's portrayal of Papa's authoritarian control over his family mirrors the mentality of Nigeria's military rulers. The story thus collapses the boundary between public and private tyranny, suggesting that the same impulse toward domination and obedience governs both the home and the state. In this sense, Papa becomes a symbolic microcosm of Nigeria's dictatorial leadership, revealing how tyranny in the public realm is reproduced through private authority. The military's actions in the marketplace, their cruelty toward ordinary citizens, and their laughter at the pain of others reveal how power thrives on humiliation. When soldiers whip a woman and destroy her goods while onlookers remain helpless, the scene shows how domination becomes a daily habit (Adichie, p. 26). The market, once a space of trade and belonging, becomes a place where fear replaces exchange. Fanon's view that the postcolonial elite "uses the people's poverty as a weapon for its own security" explains this logic of control (*The Wretched of the Earth* 126). The narrative suggests that Nigeria's instability grows not from temporary misrule but from a system that mistakes coercion for order.

Evidently, economic decay deepens this social breakdown, reflecting how political corruption extends into the material realities of everyday life. The fuel shortage that forces Auntie Ifeoma and her children to sleep at petrol stations becomes a sign of a nation exhausted by its own wealth (Adichie, p. 76). Nigeria, rich in oil yet poor in justice, cannot meet its people's needs because greed shapes its economy. The endless wait for fuel reflects the long wait for good governance. The decaying University of Nsukka, where earthworms crawl from old pipes and lecturers go unpaid, stands as another face of failure (Adichie, p. 232). When Auntie Ifeoma struggles to feed her children despite her work as a professor, the novel exposes a political class that feeds on public poverty. Strikes, power cuts, and poor infrastructure become forms of slow violence that drain citizens' strength and dignity (Adichie, p. 234).

This public collapse repeats itself in the private world of Kambili's family. Papa's rule at home reflects the state's desire for absolute obedience. His devotion to religion gives him authority, yet his cruelty reveals the emptiness behind it. The Big Man who governs the nation and the father who governs his house both silence those who question them. Each demands loyalty as proof of faith. The killing of journalist Ade Coker, inspired by the real death of Dele Giwa, extends this silence beyond the home. The "envelope with the state house seal" that kills him shows how easily power disguises its violence (Adichie, p. 140). This

murder literalizes how the postcolonial state devours its own conscience—silencing dissent while proclaiming unity. Adichie’s narrative thus equates censorship with the maintenance of national illusion.

Corruption, greed, and religious intolerance merge to create a society that continues the injustices of colonialism under a national name. The soldiers, politicians, and businessmen who claim to serve the nation instead protect their privileges. The silence of the poor becomes the price of the rich man’s comfort. Yet Auntie Ifeoma insists that her children speak the truth even when it is risky (Adichie, p. 228). Her laughter, her questioning spirit, and her refusal to submit mark a different path for a wounded society. Here, the novel confines redemption to private virtue while systemic change remains absent. This confirms that genuine national renewal exists only as an aspiration within individuals.

Colonial Religion and the Erosion of Indigenous Ethics

Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* illustrates what Bhabha calls cultural hybridity—the collision of colonial and indigenous values that reshapes moral life and divides both family and community (Bhabha 1994). The novel opens with Kambili’s observation: “When my brother Jaja skipped communion, everything at home began to fall apart. Papa flung his heavy missal across the room, breaking the figurines on the étagère” (Adichie, p. 3). This violent act reveals Eugene’s rigid understanding of Catholicism, inherited from colonial ideology rather than grounded in genuine spirituality. His faith is built on fear and control, alienating him from his family and his father, Papa-Nnukwu. Eugene’s rejection of his father as a “heathen” (Adichie, p. 84) shows how missionary teachings replaced tolerance with dogma. Though Papa-Nnukwu lives nearby, Eugene forbids contact with him, demonstrating how colonial religion undermines kinship and replaces respect with moral superiority. On the other hand, the narrative contrasts Eugene with his sister, Auntie Ifeoma, whose faith is open and compassionate. Ifeoma encourages her children to visit their grandfather and reminds them that “sometimes different was just as good.” Her actions model a Christianity that welcomes difference instead of condemning it. Through these two characters, the novel reveals how foreign religion created division but also offers the possibility of renewal through tolerance. She suggests that reconciliation in postcolonial Nigeria depends on faith that values humanity over rigid doctrine.

Purple Hibiscus depicts the alienation of the African mind through the misguided teachings of missionaries, resulting in moral dilemmas. The story portrays some Nigerians in the troubling tendency to forsake their parents, particularly in their old age, only to spend substantial amounts of money on extravagant funerals for these neglected parents after their passing. Influenced by the Christian missionaries, Papa rejects his father,

Papa Nnukwu, because he refuses to convert to Christianity and steadfastly holds onto his traditional Igbo religion. This shows a vehement condemnation of this practice as it embodies neglect, suffering, poverty, resentment, and anger. As observed by the narrator: “Papa-Nnukwu stopped, turned to look back towards our house. ‘Nekenem, look at me. My son owns a house that can fit every man in Abba, and yet, many times, I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries’” (p. 83).

Purple Hibiscus further reinforces the notion that postcolonial alienation has led to the erosion of traditional African values, resulting in aggression and rudeness. Some characters in the story are depicted as lacking moral grounding, which, in turn, has a detrimental impact on the societies they inhabit. Papa’s recurring acts of violence inflict pain and psychological distress upon his family. As Hope Lee notes, *Purple Hibiscus* seeks to uncover and confront the mechanisms of violence rooted in patriarchal authority (Lee 2015). Papa’s violence is exemplified through the scalding hot water he pours on his daughter’s feet and his so-called “love sips.” The paradoxical phrase “love burns” reveals how Papa’s violent religiosity shapes, though never fully convinces, Kambili’s understanding of love and virtue (Adichie, p. 51).

Papa’s violent behavior is evident from the beginning of the narrative, driven by his adherence to Western religion. On Palm Sunday, Jaja refuses to participate in communion, citing discomfort caused by the substances used as the body of Christ and the priest’s nauseating touch on his mouth. Papa becomes enraged by Jaja’s refusal and throws his heavy missal at him, narrowly missing him but breaking Mama’s precious glass “étagère” in the process (Adichie, p. 1). This opening scene portrays Papa’s violent nature, as Papa insists that his wife and children conform to the colonial religion he follows. As a devoted Christian, Papa’s tyrannical rule over his family is linked to his belief in Western religion. As discussed earlier, Papa’s religious authoritarianism mirrors the logic of military dictatorship, reinforcing the theme of power’s continuity from the state to the family. The disintegration of the family is attributed to Papa’s consistent use of violence, reminiscent of a tyrannical ruler in Nigeria. He controls every aspect of his family’s lives and prohibits them from seeing their elderly grandfather, whom he despises and labels a pagan. In another instance, he amputates Jaja’s little finger as punishment for skipping a Catechism class question.

The act of violence Papa commits against his wife—shattering a table on her abdomen and causing her to miscarry her six-week pregnancy—further illustrates the alienated ideology portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus*. In a moment of quiet confession to her sister-in-law, Aunty Ifeoma, Beatrice recounts the assault, saying: “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 even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it” (Adichie, p. 168).

Papa's loss of moral integrity and his distortion of both communal values culminate in the family's tragic unraveling. After his death, an autopsy reveals that he had been poisoned, prompting Kambili to confront her mother: "'Why did you put it in his tea?' I asked Mama, rising. My voice was loud. I was almost screaming. 'Why in his tea?'" (Adichie, p. 296). Beatrice's act stems from the knowledge that Papa would never share his tea with their children—a gesture she interprets as his rejection of them for their supposed sins. This ritual of "love sips," as Kambili calls it, had come to symbolize Papa's withdrawal of affection (Adichie, p. 51). Mama's decision to poison him reflects her desperate attempt to free herself and her children from his spiritual tyranny, which had silenced their voices and distorted their capacity for independent thought.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* explores how corruption within a community can lead to the marginalization and intolerance of those belonging to the lower social strata, deeming them as inferior and viewing their differences as inherently wrong. This is depicted alongside the portrayal of violence through individual characters. Papa, the protagonist's father, strives to reject Igbo traditions and culture practiced by his father, Papa-Nnukwu, drawing parallels to Salem's hatred towards Tituba in *The Crucible*, where fear of spiritual difference leads to persecution (Miller 2003). Similarly, Papa's rigid Christian faith, shaped by colonial influence, fuels his intolerance of traditional beliefs and cultural practices. Instead, Papa embraces British customs that were instilled during the 100-year British colonial rule in Nigeria (1861–1960). The imposition of Western education and norms during colonization fueled a disdain for traditional Nigerian practices. Papa supports these changes and continued to practice religion in the British manner even after Nigeria gained independence in 1960. In contrast, Papa-Nnukwu remains committed to Igbo customs, further alienating himself from his son's strong Christian beliefs and resulting in his grandchildren being forbidden from visiting his "heathen" home. The derogatory term "heathen" reflects the intense animosity towards Papa-Nnukwu and the rejection of his traditional practices. The imposition of Western education and customs during colonization contributed to a deep-rooted aversion towards indigenous African traditions (Ngũgĩ 1986). Despite Nigeria's independence, Papa persists in upholding British-influenced practices.

According to Naomi Ofori, the novel distances itself from Papa's rejection of Igbo beliefs and customs as "devilish folklore" (27). This postcolonial interpretation suggests that the message in *Purple Hibiscus* is to highlight the tragic consequences of Nigeria's colonial history and the conflicts that arise from the rejection of the often-empowering Igbo traditions. Auntie Ifeoma's belief that "sometimes different was just as good" embodies the hybrid tolerance Bhabha envisions, while also echoing Achebe's view that reclaiming language and multiplicity resists colonial singularity (Adichie 289; Achebe 7). This outlook parallels Adichie's own rejection of "the single story," arguing that recognizing multiple perspectives fosters empathy and open-mindedness (Adichie

2009). Her novel exposes how intolerance and alienation degrade individuals and lead to unnecessary isolation. Through this lens, *Purple Hibiscus* transforms personal faith into a metaphor for national identity—revealing that true unity can emerge only through pluralism and self-redefinition, not through the imposed homogeneity of the chimera-like Nigerian state.

Conclusion

Read through Bhabha's hybridity and Fanon's critique of mimicry, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* show that Nigeria's enduring instability grows from the hybrid legacies of colonial disruption and the failure of its elite to transcend them. The novels reveal how the postcolonial state reproduces the inequalities of the colonial order. The moral crisis of leadership reflects the disillusionment of ordinary citizens, while the search for unity continues to clash with unresolved historical divisions. What emerges is not a simple opposition between African tradition and Western modernity. Rather, both coexist in tension, shaping a nation still struggling to define itself. Adichie's novels allow for moments of private or local reconciliation, yet these acts remain fragile and personal. They cannot resolve the structural fractures that define Nigeria's imagined unity, revealing the chimera at the heart of the nation.

This study also shows that literature becomes a space where political disorder and moral dislocation are simultaneously exposed, and the private and the public collapse into one another. Domestic violence and national corruption grow from the same culture of domination, sustained by elites who inherit and preserve colonial hierarchies. A more humane society will depend on recognizing these structures and confronting them with moral clarity and collective responsibility. As Elleke Boehmer observes, postcolonial writing "reclaims the right to complexity rather than closure" (Boehmer 118). Adichie's reminder that "stories can also be used to empower and to humanize" ("Danger" 17:23–17:29) affirms that change begins through critical reflection and renewed imagination. The task of national healing, therefore, lies in understanding the depth of these entanglements and in reimagining Nigeria beyond inherited divisions. Her fiction thus reframes national healing not as the restoration of an impossible unity, but as an ongoing ethical project of acknowledging difference.

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