

# Adichie's Genealogies: National and Feminine Novels

SUSAN Z. ANDRADE  
University of Pittsburgh  
sza@pitt.edu

## ABSTRACT

Both of Chimamanda Adichie's novels name their relation to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. More important, they form part of a longer tradition of writing by African women, while at the same time, they extend that tradition. Like novels by Nwapa, Emecheta, Bâ, and others, Adichie's novels represent a politics of the family while quietly but clearly telling stories of the nation; this is especially the case with her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Adichie also tells more explicit tales of the Nigerian national imaginary, especially in her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. By appropriating some of the structural elements of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, as she did of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Adichie advances her storytelling in *Purple Hibiscus* by telling a domestic tale with yet stronger national overtones. By illustrating a crosscontinental set of inspirations and intertexts in *Purple Hibiscus* I reveal Adichie's exploration of the contemporary Nigerian political crisis.

True great realism thus depicts man and society as complete entities. . . . Measured by this criterion, artistic trends determined by either exclusive introspection or exclusive extraversion equally impoverish and distort reality. Thus realism means a three-dimensionality, an all-roundedness, that endows with independent life characters and human relationships. It by no means involves a rejection of the emotional and intellectual dynamism which necessarily develops together with the modern world.

—GEORG LUKÁCS<sup>1</sup>

The history of the novel in Africa offers repeated examples of a triangulation that joins two female writers to each other and to the politics of their times. In my forthcoming book, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958–1988*, I have treated a number of such cases, in particular, Buchi Emecheta to Flora Nwapa and Mariama Bâ to Aminata Sow Fall via the short fiction and films of Ousmane Sembène.<sup>2</sup> The anglophone female writer from Africa who has made the greatest impact in recent years, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, offers another variety of this structure. Adichie was brought up in Nigeria and now divides her time between Nigeria and the United States. She is the author of *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and the historical novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), both of which have won many international prizes<sup>3</sup> Her two novels illustrate the strength and coherence of my argument that earlier female writers' representations of national politics become most sharply visible through allegorical readings of familial structures and institutions and, more important, that over time, female writers have changed their writing style and now represent the national imaginary more directly. In fact Adichie's writing makes clear that the hesitancy of that earlier moment of women's literary history in Africa no longer defines female-authored novels.<sup>4</sup> Most exciting for me, she illustrates that in the hands of some, the realist novel in Africa can take some very interesting turns.

Adichie's relation to her male predecessor, Chinua Achebe, is notable in several respects: she continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and a Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States. She may be the first Nigerian author since Achebe to have comparable international fame at a very young age. *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie's first novel, pays homage to Achebe in its very first sentence: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (3). That the novel's title takes up only the first of the two clauses in that sentence, that the story Adichie tells is not limited by the reference to her predecessor-author, should alert us to the fact that she will take things in new and interesting directions.

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, ends with a literary twist on the conceit of a book within a book, one that echoes the ironical ending of *Things Fall Apart*. In Adichie's novel, set during the Biafran War, the author of the book we have been reading is revealed to be Ugwu, the servant boy who grows to manhood during the war. The authorial sleight of hand echoes and reverberates the ironical ending of *Things Fall Apart*. The reader's surprise upon learning of Ugwu's authorship of the fiction he or she has just consumed parallels the shift of perspective at the end of *Things Fall Apart*: from the familiar Igbo to the alien British, from Okonkwo to the District Commissioner whose writing constitutes the official view of the world. Achebe's first novel is a trenchant response to colonial anthropological discourse where the intent of the District Commissioner to give Okonkwo "perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph" in the book he intends to write is undermined by the novel that the reader has just finished, which has devoted an entire book's attention to the curious Igbo man. Similarly the reader of *Half of a Yellow Sun* might be forgiven for coming to believe that the book's author is Richard, the English lover of Kainene, one of the twins whose family relation structures the novel. Richard falls in love with Igbo pottery before he falls in love with an Igbo woman. In his aimlessness early in the novel before

he finds Kainene and adopts the Biafran cause, he determines to write a book about the Igbo art he finds both mysterious and captivating. The novel primes us; it implies that it will be Richard or perhaps Odenigbo who is the author, all the while offering a new piece of the story to distract us with more reading. In the end we are presented with the humble but perceptive Ugwu, who we now know has become an adult through the war, and whose servant's vantage, in proper Hegelian fashion, offers the most honest and clear-sighted view of relations within the Odenigbo household. Foregrounding Ugwu juxtaposes the making of a single person against the destruction of national hope. Ugwu is not only the author but has figured prominently as character in the story told; the novel herein reworks one of the fundamental tropes of novel-writing, enacting the claim that novels have a greater purchase on reality than any other discourse, including legal or anthropological. As I read the novel, Adichie must have authored this part with full and intentional knowledge of her reworking of Achebe here, just as she uses him briefly as a point of departure in *Purple Hibiscus*. What she might not have known is that Achebe himself participated (perhaps knowingly) in a discursive field shaped by the anti-colonial and anti-tax Igbo Women's War of 1929, the violent response to it by the British, and the subsequent British anthropological interest in Igboland, an attempt to make sense out of the Africans who they were to govern, in particular the women prone to riot. Rhonda Cobham has written insightfully of the relation of *Things Fall Apart* to the Igbo Women's Uprising of 1929.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere I have claimed that Flora Nwapa helped produce the feminism of writers such as Emecheta. This is especially visible in Emecheta's exploration of the conceit of motherhood, itself an important novelistic theme and characterization of the relation between older and younger authors, between the novels *Efuru* and *The Joys of Motherhood*. Achebe, for all his stature as the "father" of the African novel, I claimed, had not produced any literary offspring.<sup>6</sup> Having now made visible some of Adichie's narrative structures, and therefore, the influence of Achebe on her, I must revise my claim. Unlike Chris Abani in *GraceLand* for whom *Things Fall Apart* is a touchstone novel, Adichie does not merely echo Achebe's phrases or character names. She reconfigures some of Achebe's structural fillips, revealing her indebtedness and the greater importance Achebe has for the substance of her creative work. Adichie extends further in 2006 what Achebe was able to imagine and write in 1958. *Half of a Yellow Sun* proves my thesis that the prose of female novelists has increasingly become more nationally engaged the longer writers have been on the public scene of literary production.<sup>7</sup> Although the affective material is conveyed primarily through the tale of female twins who become estranged from each other, this novel foregrounds a story of the Biafran War, thereby a story of the ending of old nations and the making of new ones. Moreover, this novel makes it possible to claim that the best female novelists no longer hesitate to represent the nation in explicitly political terms, nor does doing so require abandoning a full sense of commitment to female characterization. Adichie was not the first important Nigerian woman to write about the war; Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) illustrates through its very title that there were predecessors.<sup>8</sup> Emecheta is pathbreaking, but Adichie is a writer of greater poise and ability, and her most recent novel demonstrates greater ambition in its reach and achieves greater success in representing complex characterization.

Despite its greater critical acclaim and embrace of the topos of the nation, I find *Half of a Yellow Sun* less compelling than *Purple Hibiscus*. Perhaps it is because it is in her first novel that I see Adichie's literary heritage reaching further across divides; perhaps it is simply because in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a novel inherently about division and structured to represent multiplicity, one is less free to explore the nuances of various differences: psychology vs. politics, domestic vs. public spheres, family vs. nation. In contrast, *Purple Hibiscus* calls upon a novel that is neither Igbo nor even Nigerian for its point of departure. Pan-Africanist in its sense of influence, it reaches across the continent to Zimbabwe and *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga. As this essay demonstrates, influence does not mean mere derivation. Rather, it refers to the fact that all texts and especially, all works of literature, are involved in conversations with other texts—and that a productive analysis examines points of conversation as well as potential or visible differences.

*Purple Hibiscus* is a compelling tale of daughterly love, paternal tyranny, and a girl's complex journey to selfhood amidst political turmoil in postcolonial Nigeria. Unlike most of the novels written by African women previous to its publication it names a relation between national and familial politics—and it organizes that relation around a developed female character, Kambili. I will argue that it articulates the relation between national, familial and gender politics more sharply here than does *Nervous Conditions*, which it resembles in many ways. Before exploring the relation between the two texts, let us return to the literary and political breakthroughs Adichie produces: an affecting narrative of the public world of the nation overlays the more important and more dramatic world of the family on which it focuses.

Early in *Purple Hibiscus*, Beatrice, Kambili's mother, tells her that she will soon have a brother or sister, and though Kambili is happy with the new information, she's also made nervous, since her mother lost the last baby she was carrying six years ago (20–21). When Kambili tells her mother's news to Jaja, her brother, he says that they "will protect him," meaning the baby from their father (23). Shortly thereafter within the novel, the Nigerian state suffers a military coup, and we are immediately made aware of the novel's rendering of the interpenetration of public and private: "It was during family time the next day, a Saturday, that the coup happened" (24). Despite Papa's rigid enforcement of domestic order as others might enforce military discipline, he denounces the coup: "[W]hat we need in Nigeria is more democracy, not less" (24). "Coups beget coups," says Papa to his children sorrowfully early in the novel before the reader has fully come to understand him as the family dictator. Kambili explains her father's thinking: "A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk" (24). At several later moments, the novel juxtaposes the father as dictator of the family, to progressive-minded public citizen who genuinely disapproves of and acts against political tyranny. Eugene owns *The Standard*, a crusading newspaper, and employs and supports its progressive, muckraking editor, Ade Coker, who dies for his bravery and honesty. This editor clearly seems to be modeled on the real-life historical figure of Dele Giwa, the editor of the respected Nigerian *Newswatch*, who in October 1986 was killed by a letter bomb.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in the novel, a political activist clearly based on Ken Saro-Wiwa is executed by the regime. Nevertheless, Eugene or Papa himself soon loses control. Beatrice feels nauseous some weeks later, and despite her saying so,

Eugene appears not to notice. Later that evening, the young narrator, still unable to imagine her parents' intimate relations, hears noises: "Swift, heavy thuds on my parents' hand-carved bedroom door. I imagined the door had gotten stuck and Papa was trying to open it. . . . Counting made it seem not that long, made it seem not that bad. Sometimes it was over before I even got to twenty" (32–33). Soon after, Papa carries his wife to the hospital, leaving a trail of blood that the children clean up. Beatrice returns from hospital a day or two later, having lost her baby. Kambili's narration makes clear the act of repression required:

We did not talk about Mama. Instead, we talked about the three men who were publicly executed two days before, for drug trafficking. . . . The men were tied to poles, and their bodies kept shuddering even after the bullets were no longer being pumped into them. (33)

Coming as this passage does after a scene ambiguously sexual and violent, one cannot ignore the echoes of sex in the men's death shudders. In a twist on the narrative styles of novels such as *Nervous Conditions*, where a girl's struggle over her own body might be read as native resistance, or *Une si longue lettre*, where a wife perceives her husband's betrayal within the home as of a piece with his betraying his people within the nation, in Kambili's house, it is easier to give voice to national crimes than to those committed within the family.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the force of the domestic drama, national politics lie very near the surface of this novel. Certainly *Purple Hibiscus* makes more explicit its representation of the national state than does *Nervous Conditions*. Elaborating on the insightful reading Charles Sugnet makes of *Nervous Conditions*, I find there only three references to the political world outside the structures of the family. In contrast, *Purple Hibiscus* asks far more explicitly whether and how Nigeria and Nigerians can live together democratically in a nondictatorial political system. Whether the novel's title stands for the elusive freedom that Kambili and Jaja seek to achieve as almost adults, or for the political freedom all Nigerians seek or deserve, it is no coincidence that the novel's title, an elusive flower, is said to be found only in the sphere of Auntie Ifeoma's garden, or that Jaja, who ultimately bears the heaviest burden for the novel's political action, should be most attracted to it.

Unlike *GraceLand*, *Purple Hibiscus* dares to represent the looming terror of the state as well as the intimacy of its violence—and it does so in a novel that remains resolutely realist in narrative mode. While the public political violence that characterizes nondemocratic life is made visible at several critical moments, the novel is less explicitly a national-political novel than a tale of domestic brutality. The household is tense: Kambili is always anxious that she, Jaja, or someone else will be punished for not doing what their father expects. Nor is her anxiety imaginary: failure to get acceptably high marks in school results in physical punishment such as beatings with a belt (102); for Jaja, failure to come first in religious instruction means his father breaks his finger (145); minor acts of transgression get boiling water poured on bare feet. Later, Kambili dares to bring home with her from Ifeoma's house one of her cousin's drawings of their non-Christian grandfather—her most important rebellious act against her father. Papa beats and kicks her so severely that she ends up in the hospital (210–11).

Adichie makes excellent and effective use of ironic juxtaposition in illustrating the parallels between family repression and national repression because she thematizes the division between public and private. In the case of the father of the family, the public, philanthropic Eugene is very different from Papa, the private, family monster. Above all, the earlier one-to-one allegorical models through which we read *Une si longue lettre*, *Nervous Conditions*, and other earlier novels do not work, since this father supports progressive change in Nigeria, and so a simple correspondence is impossible. Irony does much of the ideological work. In *Une si longue lettre*, Modou Fall's taking of a second wife (an intimate betrayal) is paralleled with the life of ease he becomes accustomed to once Senegalese independence arrives, and he sheds national idealism with his socialism (betrayal of the collective). Modou is not precisely corrupt, as is El Hadji, of Sembène's novella and film *Xala*, upon whom he is modeled.<sup>10</sup> Adichie moves beyond the one-to-one correspondences of *Une si longue lettre*. We may read a move away from the allegorical as away from the symbolic and towards the increasingly realist; in terms Northrop Frye might use, the move is away from the mythic pole towards the ironic, from the high mimetic mode of Bâ towards the low mimetic mode of Adichie, a move towards realism. Rather than a one-to-one correspondence (tyrannical father politically upholds national dictatorship) the novel enacts a relation of displacement between the two.<sup>11</sup>

*Purple Hibiscus* reweaves some of the material of *Nervous Conditions*, just as *The Joys of Motherhood* retells *Efuru*, and *Une si longue lettre* retells *Xala*. Adichie's creative work is not diminished in my reading, for the relation between *Purple Hibiscus* to *Nervous Conditions* is not theft but dialogue or elaboration. I see a conversation between the Nigerian and Zimbabwean authors, one that begins with the development of a girl into a woman but very soon includes the context that frames character subjectivity to include local patriarchy, colonialism, and the responses to it, different forms of local moral behavior, and, especially in Adichie's case, the relation of the young citizen to the state.

Both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions* set their national dramas on the smaller stage of the family, and it is through the family that they make the most compelling case for political action. In both novels, narration is first-person, I-protagonist, that of a teen-aged girl, recounted at a distance of about three years from the important events. Both novels begin with a forceful retrospective statement that sums up the problematic of each narrative: Tambu's acquisition of an education in relation to the women in her life; Kambili's father's violent response to an act of inappropriate behavior by one of his children. The paternal figures, Babamukuru and Eugene, are self-made men who rose through missionary education, worked for priests or ministers in their boyhood, and imbibed deeply of religion, moving to Christianity and away from the religion of their parents. Having risen from poverty, they are disciplined and work hard. Each man also understands that part of his success includes duty, and that duty involves providing for an extended family or the community at large through food and money. Neither hesitates to punish his children, believing that discipline constitutes part of love and the responsibility of parenting, though the difference in degree of punishment meted out is critically important in assessing each character's moral fiber, and ultimately determines the difference in each novel's direction and resolution. Both men are very stern; the effect is to diminish their wives through an excess of

disciplinary zeal, and in the case of Eugene Adechike, through sheer violence. The wives, Maiguru and Beatrice, become in different ways somewhat silly, and they lose some of what would be natural dignity. Though she chatters in baby-talk to her husband after his long day at work, Maiguru is far more self-possessed than Beatrice, in part because she and Babamukuru share the same level of education, in part because this husband genuinely deserves respect. Beatrice intervenes between her husband and children and attempts to protect them from his more brutal forms of punishment. She is meeker, made so by Papa's regular beatings, which at least once, though probably twice within the space of the novel, cause her to miscarry. One might read Beatrice as a conflation of the *Nervous Conditions* characters of Maiguru and Tambu's mother, a more passive and quietly angry woman. That Beatrice takes the initiative to poison her husband runs counter to her general passivity, but after that bold act she becomes passive again, allowing her son to take the blame, and she herself begins truly to "fall apart" at the novel's end. The possibilities for economic and individual self-sufficiency and the greater dignity that a modern woman might aspire to are best embodied in *Purple Hibiscus* by Ifeoma, who resembles Tambu's admired Aunt Maiguru, a family-loving female character with both education and social conscience. Ifeoma also bears resemblance to Lucia, the uneducated yet fearless woman of Tambu's family, in her own spirited belief that traditional structures of patriarchy nevertheless permit women spaces of resistance. Ifeoma shares the Roman Catholic belief of her brother Eugene, though not his zeal, his willingness to ignore their father, or his internalized racism. Like her brother, Ifeoma supports democratic social change for the nation; unlike him, her home life is more democratic and certainly less violent. The home she makes contains laughing children, and it offers refuge for her niece and nephew. Because it is impossible to speak freely and remain properly employed in Nigeria, towards the end of the novel, Ifeoma takes her three children and leaves for the United States.<sup>12</sup>

In each novel, one character closely counterpoints the protagonist-narrator, a close relative of the same generation, and by virtue of that, highlights differences between the two youths. In Dangarembga, cousin Nyasha plays this role to Tambudzai; in *Adichie*, brother Jaja to Kambili. Structurally, Nyasha and Jaja occupy the same narrative position. Each works contrapuntally with the narrator, serving as sometime guide or helpmeet. Both narrators claim they are slow to grasp ideas; Tambu is awestruck in her uncle's posh house, and Kambili often rendered mute by her father. Both protagonists reach the state where they can narrate their story only because of the help of Nyasha or Jaja, cousin or brother, through the course of the novel. But by end, each of these guides is to be found in a painful and uncertain state, having reversed positions with the narrator who, through the course of the novel, has developed into the full Bildungsroman protagonist. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's relation with Nyasha is sisterly. Nyasha is her mentor in matters intellectual and political. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the shy Kambili depends on the slightly older Jaja to speak for her. So close are sister and brother that in the first half of the novel, they convey thoughts and sentiments through glances, without language—an effective way of not having to name the constant threat of violence that looms in their home. In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha's diminishment of power, force, and verve over the course of the novel makes sharply visible the forms of political compromise that undergird Tambu's success as a bildung character, one

character rising as the other falls. Tambu reaches the threshold of young adulthood, but the novel ends without any clear sense of whether Nyasha will come out of a damaged and dangerous psychic state, her “nervous condition.”<sup>13</sup>

Something comparable happens to Jaja. By taking the blame for the murder of their father, he voluntarily becomes the family scapegoat. For him, taking responsibility is a principled act. He behaves as a man should by protecting the women of his family, as his father might have preached but did not practice. Once their father dies, Kambili no longer trembles in fear or speaks in whispers. Jaja’s self-sacrifice helps liberate Kambili, despite the fact that she remains strongly attached to Papa. Kambili’s narration of what we read is as much about Jaja’s imprisonment as is Tambu’s mature reflection on witnessing and understanding Nyasha’s breakdown. For much of the novel, sibling dynamic of *Purple Hibiscus* is comparable to that of the sisterly cousins of *Nervous Conditions*.

Endings are where the ideological commitments of novels become most visible. The conclusions of these two are quite different from each other, which draws attention to the questions with which each seeks to grapple. The ending of *Nervous Conditions* is dramatic but not melodramatic, I think, because the political questions Dangarembga poses are not as difficult to answer. Having repressed the tale of public politics in favor of that of the family, *Nervous Conditions* dwells on the uncertain fate of the family truth-teller, Nyasha, and of the relation of the bourgeois class to its history and interests. At the novel’s end Tambu stands on the threshold of a bright future, one she has wanted since the novel’s first paragraph. Yet her thoughts are not about the future but rather with Nyasha, who also formed part of the novel’s opening paragraph. In 1988 at the time *Nervous Conditions* was published, the then-new state of Zimbabwe was struggling successfully against entrenched racism and residual colonialism; its national future, and Tambu’s with it, seemed bright. This novel can afford to end on a reflective note, meditating as it does on the relation of the national bourgeoisie at the beginning of a new nation.

The politics of turn-of-the-century Nigeria as recounted in *Purple Hibiscus* are quite different. This novel sees no end in sight to political corruption, and as Adichie wrote her novel early in the new century, it was not clear that the then-recently elected government would avoid another coup. The ending draws attention to the tone of *Purple Hibiscus*, so resolutely—and falsely—affirmative despite the bleak facts and obstacles to resolution. The events of the story suggest that the lives of Kambili and those she holds dear are far from being settled, all of which makes the resolution less credible, I think. Kambili refers to a thirty-one-month gap between the earlier events she narrates and the novel’s final scene; this accounts for why Jaja has hardened; at the novel’s end he is marked by greater hunger, increasingly greater cynicism, as well as pus-filled scabs on his neck and thighs. He becomes a sort of wooden allegory (young man sacrificed on the national altar) that the novel’s realism has thus far resisted. If we were to continue developing an allegorical reading, we might see Mama as the passive Nigerian public who, because she does not act for so long and then, when she does act, does not claim responsibility for her actions, stands for a quiescent and corrupted body politic.

Extending this reading, Mama sacrifices her son, the nation’s youth, to her pride and lethargy. In fictional terms, Kambili notes but does not worry about Jaja’s misery. They grow so far apart that in the final chapter Kambili’s

intimacy with her brother has evanesced. She misses her father and has masses said for him (which she appears not to do for her brother in jail), and she worries that she cannot tell Jaja about this: "I even wonder if we had an asusu anya, a language of the eyes, or if I imagined it all" (305). To the attentive reader who remembers Jaja's importance to Kambili's peace of mind early on, this is self-indictment indeed by the girl we have seen grow up. In this way, *Purple Hibiscus* encourages the reader towards greater alienation from its protagonist than does *Nervous Conditions*. Here, the family member who serves as scapegoat is a young man, and those who benefit from Papa's absence are two women. One might wonder whether *Purple Hibiscus* also offers a quiet critique of women's failure to become political actors, to live up to their responsibility as citizens. If so, its reprimand stands in contrast to Achebe's more idealized representation of a national future headed by women in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), which begins with three male characters, and ends with a potentially large crew of political actors, most of whom are female: the educated "new women," students, and market women, those who have historically been excluded from national power.

The style of *Purple Hibiscus* as a whole is clear, taut, and often powerful, but its ending suggests a welter of contradictory sentiments in attempting a resolution. One reason for this is because the conclusion is shaped by the moment in Nigerian political history in which it was set, a moment of dictatorship, as well as the fact that Nigeria continues to be deeply troubled by political strife and a lack of political direction. Because it tells of the scattering of a family (Ifeoma in the U.S., Jaja in prison, Papa dead) the novel attempts to find a way of representing a happy ending for the family that's left. The success or neatness of the ending is symptomatic of the complexity of ideas and sentiments that the novel takes up. Most interesting to me is that it does wrestle with difficult, sometimes conflicting, sentiments while continuing to affirm a girl's right to tell her story in relation to her country.

The problematic I have sought to illustrate, the relationship between gender and politics as represented through the interaction of domestic and national spheres, takes on a new shape in Adichie. The politics of the nation lies nearer the surface of *Purple Hibiscus* than it does in *Nervous Conditions*; Adichie's is not a national-political novel as much as a domestic tale of brutality. Nevertheless, there is a relation here, in some ways more explicit, in others more allusive, between family and nation. By thematizing the schism between public and private, making the public man the opposite of the private monster, Adichie makes a simple correspondence impossible; the metaphor moves from out to in, and yet the interpenetration of the spheres is reemphasized.

## NOTES

1. This essay is dedicated to Jonathan Arac, in thanks for our illuminating conversations about literature and politics.
2. In addition to the chapters on these authors, there are chapters on the novels of Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nuruddin Farah, and Assia Djebar.
3. *Purple Hibiscus* has won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award 2004 for Best Debut Fiction; the Commonwealth Writers' Prize 2004 for Best First Book, Africa and also for Best First Book (overall); it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for fiction in 2004, longlisted for the Booker in 2004, and longlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize 2004/2005. *Half of a Yellow Sun* won the Orange Broadband Prize, 2008; it was longlisted

for the International Impac Dublin Award, 2008, nominated for the Annual National Book Critics Circle Prize 2008. It was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize 2007, as well as Best Book (Africa).

4. For a summary of some of the arguments in my book, see "Rioting Women, Writing Women." Having briefly outlined an argument for the making of a feminist literary history there, I turn my attention primarily to the relation between literary history and political history by women, comparing the public sphere across classes.

5. See Cobham's essay, "Making Men and History."

6. I make this point in "The Joys of Daughterhood."

7. In fact, one might trace a trajectory of explicitness of the relation between nation and family from *Une si longue lettre* to *Nervous Conditions* to *Purple Hibiscus*.

8. Nwapa too wrote about Biafra, including *Never Again* (1975) and *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980); of course, many non-Igbo Nigerians wrote compellingly about the war. Soyinka is only the most famous.

9. I am indebted to Jane Bryce's essay, "Half and Half Children," for recalling Dele Giwa to me.

10. See ch. 2 of *The Nation Writ Small*.

11. I have no space to explore here whether one might chart Eugene Adikiche the neocolonial man in relation to Okonkwo, the violent man of precolonial days; both are remarkable for his success and prowess, strong in their commitment to traditional religious beliefs; both are harsh and violent towards members of their family.

12. In this way she resembles Elvis Oke; *GraceLand* was published at about the same time. However, within the female authorial tradition I have been charting, Ifeoma also resembles Aissatou of *Une si longue lettre*, who leaves her polygynous husband and takes her sons to Washington, DC, where she makes a better life for herself.

13. For elaboration of this argument, especially concerning the relation of Nyasha's bulimia to her political perspective, see my chapter 3 in *The Nation Writ Large*. See also an earlier form of this argument in "Tradition, Modernity and the Family as Nation."

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