

Original Paper

Sociohistorical Derivatives of Conflict Related Thematic Foci in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

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Abstract

The debilitating smokes of sociopolitical conflicts re-enacted in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus are unpleasant derivatives of remarkable sociohistorical fires whose embers were fanned by certain political and socioeconomic conditions. After over six decades of independence from British colonial adventure, the fires are still burning while the firefighters and householders who are duty-bound to extinguish them pretend not to discern the infernos let alone direct proportionate efforts to either ameliorate or extinguish them. Thus while the fires continue to devour the House, the supposedly householders and firefighters rather compete in the reckless pursuit of elusive rats and rodents, ignoring the hapless lamentations of the citizenry who scream out the inherent and imminent dangers to no avail. Like some other indigenous creative writers, Adichie has just done so with the instrumentality of her literary rendition in the aforementioned fiction. The study postulates that the unamusing pretenses and prevarications, even indifference of the firefighters and householders portend grave repercussions for the present and for posterity. Deploying the critical machinery of New Historicism, the research demonstrates how the Nigerian State refuses to learn from certain costly and consequential sociohistorical conflicts, thereby allowing a continuous repetition of such sour manifestations to the detriment of many.

Keywords

citizenry, conflicts, dangers, debilitating, sociohistorical

1. Introduction

Etymologically, the lexical item conflict is Middle English, originating from the Latin verb “confligere”, from con—“together” + fligere—“to strike”. The noun form is “conflictus”, which means “a contest”.

It suggests struggle, disagreement, clash or incompatibility arising from opposing interests, goals or desires. Conflict in a dramatic or fictional narrative is a contention or opposition between characters which in one form or the other propel the development of the plot. Conflict can, however, be said to be internal when a character is inwardly unsettled as a result of a contravention existing between two or more simultaneous but antagonistic or incompatible feelings. Kakava (2001, p. 650) perceive conflict as “any type of verbal or non-verbal opposition, ranging from disagreement to disputes, mostly in social interaction.” Conflict is an unavoidable occurrence in the development and existence of human societies and communities. It is in recognition of this fact that Peace and Conflict Resolution studies evolved over time and has come to be established as a distinct academic discipline being offered by many academic institutions across the globe. In Nigeria, it has become an integral and compulsory component of General Studies in tertiary institutions; designed to expose and equip the learner with the requisite skills and knowledge for the resolution and management of conflict situations. Adichie’s thematisation of sociopolitical and socioeconomic conflicts in *Purple Hibiscus* reveal her in-depth understanding of Nigeria’s sociohistorical challenges as a postcolonial entity. Kehinde in Osunbade (2012, pp. 142-143) observes that: In terms of thematic context, Adichie’s writings reveal that, like most West African novelists, Adichie has got a number of thematic materials from the neocolonial experiences. In the main, her novels are a product of socio-political as well as historical incidents and antecedents. Her thematic concerns can therefore be seen in their right perspectives as reactions and counter-reactions to sociopolitical events.

Adichie’s derivation of “a number of thematic materials from neocolonial experiences,” and postcolonial encounters as reflections of “sociopolitical as well as historical incidents and antecedents” is an aspect of intertextuality. The concern of this study is to trace and evaluate the sources of a number of sociohistorical conflicts which are represented in *Purple Hibiscus*. Her recreation of conflicts from such precursor or initiate texts is a clear demonstration that creative works of art like hers are neither derived from nor exist in a vacuum, and once more amplifies T. S. Elliot’s assertion that “... no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.” For Haynes (1992, p. 126), “One text calls up an array of others, and each of these others calls up its own array... Intertextuality relates texts, and also forms the basis of the coherence of any particular text.” Adejare (1992, p. 124) also states that textual incorporation is “the reuse of portions or features of an existing text in the creation of a new text.” Particularly with respect to a number of conflict situations in Adichie’s novel, it is observed that she derived them largely from the features of certain sociohistorical circumstances in order to authenticate the veracity of her materials and most importantly raise “the complex question of responsibility and the possible consequence of failed responsibility and how this complex question has continued to plague the nation” (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 114).

2. Method

Qualitative research method is adopted for this study while the preferred theoretical anchor is New Historicism. Greenblatt (1980, p. 12) states that "...a work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions and the institutions and practices of society." This is why New Historicism operates by examining and analyzing the many discourses that affect both the author and the text. Instead of using historical context as a backdrop for the text, the theory sees these texts as in discourse or dialogue with literature. The theory is largely based on Michel Foucault's intertextual methods of examining knowledge and power and Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that cultural discourses shape the form of history and the literature that emerges from the culture. It is for this reason that texts are not ranked in New Historicism but are rather viewed in a linear pattern with each other - all influencing all other texts.

3. Result and Discussion

Although there is a dominant lingering domestic conflict in *Purple Hibiscus* which culminated in the unfortunate death of the autocratic but humane character of Eugene Achike from the gradual poisoning by his wife Beatrice, (p. 283), Adichie equally thematises certain major sociopolitical conflicts that can be said to be derived from remarkable sociohistorical circumstances. One involves a dictatorial military government which comes into power through the barrel of the gun as represented by the character of Big Oga (the Head of State) and the Nigerian press establishment symbolised by the *Standard* newspaper which is published by Eugene, with Ade Coker as its quintessential editor. The other involves the Nsukka University community and government on one hand over the appointment of a Sole Administrator to run the affairs of the institution instead of the conventional Vice Chancellor, and on the other hand between the Sole Administrator himself and the University staff over critical issues like non-payment of lecturers' salaries and non-availability of essential amenities such as water and light in the campus community. Adichie herself was raised in the same Nsukka University community by a father who at a time became the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the institution and a mother who rose through the ranks to become the first female Registrar of the institution, and of course witnessed those turbulent and historic moments at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as she once admitted in one of her public speeches. Again, these developments are mirrored to have occurred during a military government; a time when a Sole Administrator was once appointed to pilot the affairs of the university in place of a Vice Chancellor and was rebuffed by both staff and students; a time of intense and incessant students' rioting, vandalisation and burning of valuable properties belonging to the institution as equally portrayed in the fiction.

The conflict involving Big Oga's government and the *Standard* newspaper owned by Eugene stem mainly from two major factors. One is Eugene's deep-seated disgust for coups and military style of governance due to his perception of its operators as "Godless men ruling our country..." (p. 43). Secondly is the determination of the *Standard* to remain critical of the multifarious ills of military

governance. We first learn from Father Benedict during his homily at St. Agnes Catholic Church at Enugu on a Palm Sunday that Eugene refuses to be silent after a successful coup d'état and that the *Standard* is truth-oriented despite losing advertising on account of that. He states:

Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in this country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government did not threaten his business. But no, he used the *Standard* to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising. Brother Eugene spoke out for freedom. How many of us have stood up for the truth? How many of us have reflected the Triumphant Entry? (pp. 4-5)

Here, Eugene is presented as a fearless advocate for truth in a nation where "other Big men" choose to be silent in the face of tyranny and bad governance by men who control the instruments of violence and who ordinarily ought to have no business with civil governance. Eugene's courageous disposition pitches him against "government agents" (p. 9) and he becomes a prime target of their various antics and attacks; wherever it is possible for them to unleash such terrors on him and his establishments. Despite the dangers his criticism and opposition to military rule pose to his life and safety, Eugene remains undaunted although he knows that other people are being cowed by the system as Kambili observes:

In the following weeks, the newspapers we read during family time sounded different, more subdued. The *Standard*, too, was different; it was more critical, more questioning than it used to be. Even the drive to school was different. The first week after the coup, Kevin plucked green tree branches every morning and stuck them to the car, lodged above the number plate, so that the demonstrators at the government square would let us drive past. The green branches meant solidarity. (PH, p. 27)

The first significant move of the military establishment to retaliate Eugene's relentless scathing criticisms of their government is to arrest Ade Coker, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Standard*. Ade's wife Yewande arrives Eugene's residence with tears to notify him of the development. Kambili, again, narrates:

A few days before my first exam, I was in my room studying, trying to focus on one word at a time, when the doorbell rang. It was Yewande Coker, the wife of Papa's editor. She was crying. I could hear her because my room was directly above the living room and because I had never heard her crying that loud before. "They have taken him! They have taken him!" she said, between throaty sobs. "What will I do sir? I have three children! One is still sucking my breast! How will I raise them alone? (PH, p. 37)

Yewande's seemingly furlon wailing at this starting point of her husband's ordeals is prophetic because it actually marks the beginning of the brutal end of her beloved husband, a dependable man she had earnestly desired to raise her three children with and not alone as it eventually turns out to be. Ironically, the man she has come to weep on his shoulders does not seem to have the prophetic insight she possesses when she says, "How will I raise them alone" in reference to their three kids. In response, Eugene expectedly says, "Yewande, don't talk that way. Ade will be fine" (p. 38). Ade is arrested by

soldiers as he drives out of the editorial office of the *Standard*. The immediate cause for this arrest is stated by Kambili thus:

I know his arrest was because of the big cover story in the last *Standard*, a story about how the Head of State and his wife had paid people to transport heroine abroad, a story that questioned the recent execution of three men and who the real drug barons were. Jaja said that when he looked through the keyhole, Papa was holding Yewande's hand and praying... (*PH*, p. 38)

The reason for Ade's first arrest, in reality, is a historical political question that is yet to receive any formal clarification till date. Rumours were rife at a time in the nation's history that a certain Nigerian military Head of State whose regime Adichie largely historicises in *Purple Hibiscus* was a big time drug peddler with his wife. These rumours gained a significant historic amplification in the early hours of 22nd April, 1990 when Major Gideon Orkar woke a tottering nation up with the announcement of his almost successful coup d'état against the despotic regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, and in the opening paragraph of his speech states:

Fellow Nigerian citizens, on behalf of the patriotic and well meaning peoples of the Middle Belt and the Southern parts of this country, I, Major Gideon Orkar, wish to happily inform you of the successful ousting of the dictatorial, corrupt, drug baronish, evil man, deceitful, homosexually-centered, prodigalistic, unpatriotic administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. (Orkar, 1990)

It is worthy of note that before the attempted coup, Orkar was an officer well known to Babangida; both men belonged to the same constituency or unit known as the Nigerian Army Armoured Corps. Both maintained a level of closeness as armour officers in their respective capacities. In fact, Orkar could have been easily regarded as one of the famous "IBB Boys" in the Nigerian Army of those days. In the *Vanguard* newspaper interview of 22nd April, 2020, Duro Onabule, Babangida's Chief Press Secretary at the time of the coup in a response to the question: "It is claimed in some quarters that some of the plotters were close to IBB...were the plotters really close to IBB?" answered that, "Not some of them, virtually all of them, including Major Orkar himself." This is one of the reasons why the litany of adjectives with which he described the Babangida administration including the one in focus at this point ("drug baronish") seemed to have struck a chord of authenticity concerning the man who can well be regarded as his close boss or senior professional colleague and friend. So it is like a friend describing another friend he knows quite well. Orkar's testimony is corroborated by an anonymous report titled "Was Babangida a Drug Baron?" contained on *againstbabangida.com* which states:

Apart from Babangida and his wife, Maryam, top military brass and members of the diplomatic corps are some others identified in the international investigation of the drug ring that prospered from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s. Major Orkar, whose unsuccessful coup plot was the most successful attempt to dispose Babangida of power, also alleged that there was drug dealing going on during the regime of the dictator. Since Orkar called IBB a drug baron, many Nigerians have quietly accepted it as a fact. The military connection in the drug trafficking business is particularly noteworthy. Military officers have for long been suspected of coordinating the drug trade. The burning of the

Ministry of Defence building in Lagos during Babangida's regime, during which the *Sunday Guardian* showed IBB smiling right in front of the burning edifice, was believed to have been official arson executed to hide some sensitive information about the trade. The only case that has been widely linked to Babangida, which many thought could have exposed him is that of Gloria Okon, a Nigerian lady alleged to have been his courier and said to have died in detention but believed to have been resettled in anonymity. It is widely accepted that the murdered journalist, Dele Giwa, was about to unravel the mysterious disappearance of Gloria Okon when he was killed in circumstances tied around Babangida's neck.

These are the sociohistorical conditions that inspired Adichie's representation of the scenario of a serving Nigerian Head of State and his wife paying people to transport heroine abroad, and then Ade Coker being arrested for doing a cover story about it (PH, p. 38). Through Eugene's courageous efforts, Ade is released from detention after a week of torture and repression as Kambili informs:

The phone rang then; it had been ringing more since Ade Coker was arrested. Papa answered it and spoke in low tones... I wondered if he was too pre-occupied with Ade Coker's case, but even after he got him out of jail a week later, he did not talk about my report card. He did not talk about getting Ade Coker out of jail either; we simply saw his editorial back in the *Standard*, where he wrote about the value of freedom, about how his pen would not, could not, stop writing the truth. But he did not mention where he had been detained... or what had been done to him. (PH, p. 42)

Eugene, however, reveals a glimpse of what had been done to Ade when he says, "They put out so many cigarettes on his back" (p. 42). Ade's dehumanizing treatments in the hands of state security agents, for "writing the truth" prompts Eugene's decision, "We are going to publish underground now. It is no longer safe for my staff" (pp. 42-43). Again, "publishing underground" was one of the survival tactics adopted by a number of publishing firms in Nigeria in the 80s and 90s as a result of incessant state-sponsored attacks by military dictators that ruled the country then. Publishing underground implies the production of newspapers from a location hidden from public knowledge and from the prying eyes of security forces that could interrupt or forestall the publishing process. It was a critical strategy used by many newspaper houses during the repressive regimes of Generals Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha in the 80s and 90s; regimes that promulgated various obnoxious decrees to cage and control press freedom.

After the release of Ade Coker, neither Eugene nor Ade gives up the fight against the dictatorial military government which they consider illegal and immoral. Thus instead of being cowed by the attacks from the government, Eugene's vociferous advocacy against military despotism and Ade's fearlessly critical editorials even intensifies. The battle is decisively carried to a spiritual dimension when Eugene takes the matter to their family prayer altar as Kambili, the omniscient narrator intimates: "That night, when Papa prayed, he added longer passages urging God to bring about the downfall of the Godless men ruling our country, and he intoned over and over, "Our Lady shield of the Nigerian people, pray for us," (p. 43). This prayer point, among others, becomes almost a regular one in his family

devotion, for even in the first morning of their arrival in their ancestral hometown, Abba for the Yuletide, Eugene still directs a significant time of their devotion period to the same cause. Kambili says, "Papa read from the Psalms before saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory be, and the Apostles Creed... Finally, for twenty minutes, papa prayed for our protection from ungodly people and forces, for Nigeria and the Godless men ruling it, and for us to continue to grow in righteousness" (*PH*, p. 61). Eugene's ceaseless prayers for Nigeria and battles against her rulers, from the way he usually presents such issues before God as prayer points, can be truly said to be altruistic. His concerns for the nation are not in anyway predicated on any selfish end but rather on a genuine desire to see that things are done right in the entire nation, and that she ceases to be ruled by men he is deeply convinced are "Godless" and unqualified. Such patriotic fervor can only be compared to that of the character of Major Nzeogwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, when he states the reasons for sacking Nigeria's First republic in his coup speech. Even in historical reality as testified by some of his military colleagues like General Olusegun Obasanjo and Captain Ben Gbulie who dedicated his book *Nigeria's Five Majors* (1981) entirely to him, Major Nzeogwu's patriotism and genuine concerns for the well-being of the Nigerian state is never in doubt. His historic actions on January 15, 1966 can be said to be motivated by a sense of misguided youthful optimism, even exuberance, one can also say. Little wonder his assailants who killed him in the battlefield at the Nsukka sector during the Nigerian Civil war ended up carrying him back to Kaduna where they buried him with full military honours as approved by the Federal Government of General Yakubu Gowon. Killing one's opponent in a battlefield and yet respectfully carrying him for an honourable burial is a rare occurrence. Again, in his biographical account entitled *Nzeogwu*, Obasanjo (1987, pp. 2-4) states:

Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and I were genuine and close friends who shared a similarity of outlook on many subjects... We were idealistic young men inspired by the mood of nationalism that was sweeping through many parts of Africa at that time and as young army officers, we freely discussed the future of the Nigerian Army, Nigeria and Africa, and the condition of the black man in the world. We were not satisfied with the second-class status that he had almost everywhere, including the continent of his birth. We believed, just as I do now, that the black man everywhere had to struggle and indeed fight to break the shackles of oppression and exploitation, and to lift himself above the subhuman level he had been kept for so long. We were convinced that the black man's burden would only be lightened by good leadership, sweat and blood, and not by wishing that others do for him what he desires... We shared the same house as well as thoughts, hopes, aspirations and fears for the future of our country and continent. I feel I owe it to Chukwuma and to Nigerian posterity, to record what I knew about this idealistic and thoroughly patriotic Nigerian who in his approach to our political problems, has been described as exhibiting more enthusiasm and naivety than wisdom or prudence.

Undoubtedly, these motivations and proclivities are clearly demonstrated in his coup announcement. The character of Eugene in *Purple Hibiscus* is similar to that of Major Nzeogwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in that both men are motivated by genuine patriotism to combat the malaise of bad governance in the

Nigerian state. They have love and respect for the nation which make them to earnestly desire that she becomes a better place - free from corruption and all vices that retard her progress.

Ironically, the tyranny Eugene is fighting to wedge at the national level is what he ignorantly represents and perpetuates in his own home, particularly towards his wife and two children, Kambili and Jaja, largely on account of his wrongly held religious views. His consistent battering of his wife to the point of her having miscarriages and scalding the feet of his children with hot water for gratuitous reasons do not have any realistic justification, and do not tally with his fervent commitments to bring an end to military despotism at the national level.

When issues relating to Eugene, the *Standard* newspaper and Ade Coker are zoomed in again in the novel, it is through the eyes of Father Amadi at the University of Nigeria Nsukka Campus residence of Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's younger sister who teaches there. Coincidentally, Jaja and Kambili are on a visit. On realizing for the first time that Eugene is Aunty Ifeoma's elder brother, Father Amadi says, "I hear he's very involved in the editorial decisions. The *Standard* is the only paper that dares to tell the truth these days" (p. 136). Then Aunty Ifeoma responds, "And he has a brilliant editor, Ade Coker, although I wonder how much longer before they lock him up for good. Even Eugene's money will not buy everything" (p. 136).

The above conversation between Aunty Ifeoma and their family friend, Father Amadi first reveals that the solid reputation of the *Standard* as a focused and truth-oriented publication is widespread. Secondly, that the direct involvement of its publisher Eugene in editorial decisions contributes largely in its doggedness and consistency in telling the truth without wavering, even though other publications have already bowed to pressure not to tell the truth anymore and have probably turned sycophantic so as to be in the good books of the powers that be and avoid their persecutions. Thirdly, that there is the possibility of Ade's imminent re-arrest by the junta for his insistence in "writing the truth" no matter whose ox is gored. Aunty Ifeoma's comment about wondering "how much longer before they lock him up" (p. 136) again in reference to Ade Coker, however, turns out to be a prophetic statement. Kambili and Jaja are still in that same visit in her Nsukka residence from where that conversation and comment emanated when we learn that: ...soldiers had gone to the small, nondescript rooms that serve as the offices of the *Standard*. Nobody knew how they had found out where the offices were. There were so many soldiers that the people on that street told Papa it reminded them of pictures from the front during the civil war. The soldiers took every copy of the entire press run, smashed furniture and printers, locked the offices, took the keys, and boarded up the doors and windows. Ade Coker was in custody again. (PH, p. 145)

This is Ade's second arrest in the novel, and it is conspicuous that the devastations and damages done to the *Standard* at this point were greater than the former before they, again, snatched away their "priced trophy" Ade Coker, the quintessential editor. In the first arrest, Ade is taken to custody as he is driving out of the press office; meaning that the major damage done to the publishing outfit is mainly the denial of Ade's presence for about a week before he is released. But they did not destroy the

facilities of the firm as it is the case in this second arrest. Now, they not only arrest Ade to torture him but also wreck monumental havoc to the facilities of the *Standard*. This manner of Ade's arrest and mindless destruction to the publishing firm instills fear in the heart of Eugene's wife who over the phone tells Kambili, "I worry about your father," and Kambili observes that "Aunty Ifeoma seemed worried, too, because after the call, she went out and bought a copy of *the Guardian* although she never bought newspapers" (p. 145). It is from *the Guardian* that Aunty Ifeoma sees that "the story of soldiers closing down the *standard* was tucked into the middle page, next to advertisements for women's shoes imported from Italy" (p. 146). This under-representation of such a major occurrence by another newspaper which ought to have amplified it in order to attract the necessary attention and public condemnation does not please Amaka, Aunty Ifeoma's outspoken only daughter who complains that "Uncle Eugene would have run it on the front page of his paper" (p. 146).

When we encounter Ade Coker again, we discover that he has been released from detention for the second time, and is in the company of some other guests on their visit to Eugene's residence at Enugu. Eugene hurriedly finishes his lunch while his family members are still eating in order to receive the guests in the living room and to chat with them. Kambili hears their conversation from the dining, and it is clear that a serious crisis is at hand as she narrates:

The guests came in and sat down in the living room. I could not see them from the dining table, but while I ate, I tried hard to make out what they were saying. I know Jaja was listening too. I saw the way his head was slightly tilted, his eyes focused on the empty space in front of him. They were talking in low tones, but it was easy to make out the name Nwakiti Ogechi, especially when Ade Coker spoke, because he did not lower his voice as much as Papa and... He was saying that Big Oga's assistant—Ade Coker referred to the Head of State as Big Oga even in his editorials—had called to say that Big Oga was willing to give him an exclusive interview. (PH, p. 196)

This is an exemplification of Eugene's involvement in the editorial decisions of the *Standard* as Father Amadi earlier points out. His involvements, however, continues to contribute in making the publication thick, truth-oriented and focused. At this point in time, something is seriously at stake. They perceive "a foul odour" somewhere—something fishy when the personal assistant to the Head of State, the arrowhead of the repressive military government in power strangely calls Ade Coker to inform him that "Big Oga" is willing to grant him an "exclusive interview." This becomes a suspicious generosity from one's avowed adversary, even when the fight is still raging and there has not been any signs of reconciliation or resolution. Ade the committed editor does not in any way see that as a friendly overture but rather as a ploy by the government to suppress and cover the truth concerning an atrocity they had committed - the gruesome killing of an outstanding Human Rights and Pro-democracy activist Nwakiti Ogechi. So Ade sees the invitation by the Head of State for an exclusive interview as a way of indirectly bribing him to soft-pedal and be economical with the truth in writing about the sudden disappearance of Nwakiti Ogechi, especially now that the Commonwealth Nations are meeting (p.196). In response to the invitation for the interview, Ade retorts:

But they want me to cancel the Nwankiti Ogechi story. Imagine the stupid man, he said they knew some useless people had told me stories that I planned to use in my piece and that the stories were lies... you know what this means? My sources were right. They have really wasted Nwankiti Ogechi. Why didn't they care when I did the last story about him? Why do they care now? (*PH*, p. 196)

The character of Nwankiti Ogechi in *Purple Hibiscus*, as earlier discussed, mirrors the historical character of Ken Saro-Wiwa - a renowned Ogoni writer and environmental activist who was wasted by the military junta of General Sani Abacha on November 10, 1995 in Port Harcourt; a time which coincided with the fourteenth meeting of the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth of Nations held in Auckland, New Zealand between 10th and 13th November, 1995. The meeting was hosted by the country's Prime Minister, Jim Bolger. For unjustly killing Saro-Wiwa and his eight other kinsmen on trump up charges on November 10th, Nigeria was suspended the next day, 11th November, 1995 as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. These are some of the socio-historical circumstances Adichie drew her inspiration from when, among other things, Kambili says, "I heard Papa interrupt in a low voice, and the other man added something afterwards, something about the Big people in Abuja not wanting such a story out now that the Commonwealth Nations were meeting" (p.196). When Ade Coker asks: "Why didn't they care when I did the last story about him?," in reference to Nwankiti Ogechi, Kambili reveals:

I knew what story Ade was referring to, since it was in the *Standard* about six weeks ago, right around the time Nwankiti Ogechi first disappeared without a trace. I remembered the huge black question mark above the caption, "Where is Nwankiti?" and I remembered that the article was full of worried quotes from his family and colleagues. It was nothing like the first *Standard* feature I'd read about him, titled "A Saint Among Us," which had focused on his activism, on his pro-democracy rallies that filled the stadium at Surulere. (*PH*, p. 197)

When the other unnamed guest suggests: "I am telling Ade we should wait, sir. Let him do the interview with Big Oga. We can do the Nwankiti Ogechi story later," (p. 197), Ade fires back and gives reason for his insistence: "No way! They don't want Nwankiti Ogechi to become an issue now. Simple! And you know what it means, it means they have wasted him! Which one is for Big Oga to try and bribe me with an interview? I ask you, eh which one is that?" (p. 197).

Ade deeply believes that doing the Nwankiti Ogechi story at the moment is right and timely in view of the fact that the Commonwealth Nations of which Nigeria is a member are meeting. The logic is that such a story emanating from a Commonwealth member country at such a time will glaringly portray its human rights abuses, attract global condemnations as well as the appropriate sanctions to the erring nation and its leaders. In the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa which Adichie historicises through the character of Nwankiti Ogechi, the Nigerian press as symbolized by the *Standard*, through their courageous effort to tell the story to the world, really succeeded in attracting international condemnation and sanctions to General Sani Abacha's junta. Here we see Ade the indefatigable journalist insisting that the truth must be told, and timely too. He refuses to be cornered by the powers that be who are really working hard to

ensure that the truth about their unjustifiable wastage of Nwankiti Ogechi does not see the light of the day. Eugene's response to Ade's outburst and insistence that Nwankiti Ogechi's story should be the lead story in the next edition of the *Standard* and other actions that follow are revealed by Kambili thus: "Papa cut him short then, but I could not hear much of what he said, because he spoke in low, soothing tones, as though he were calming Ade down... They walked past us on their way upstairs. Ade smiled as he greeted us, but it was a strained smile. he teased me, making a mock attempt to swoop down on my food"(PH, p. 197).

While the editorial board of the *Standard* are meeting at Eugene's house to decide on whether or not to accept Big Oga's generous offer of an exclusive interview with him, as well as whether or not Nwankiti Ogechi's story would prominently feature immediately, the government of the day seemed restless and relentless in its pranks to cover up the homicide at all possible costs. Kambili informs that, "It was that evening, before dinner, that the government agents came, the men in black who yanked hibiscuses off as they left, the men Jaja said had come to bribe Papa with a truckful of dollars, the men papa asked to get out of our house" (pp.197-198). Eugene's refusal to be bribed even with "a truckful of dollars" from the government in order to silence the truth concerning Nwankiti Ogechi's murder is a clear demonstration of his genuine patriotism and sense of altruism. By this refusal, the conflict between him and the government intensifies. Eventually, Ade prevails on the editorial team to accept that Nwankiti Ogechi's sudden disappearance will feature prominently at the expense of accepting the invitation for an exclusive interview from the Head of State. Kambili, again, states: "When we got the next edition of the *Standard*, I knew it would have Nwankiti Ogechi on its cover. The story was detailed, angry, full of quotes from someone called the source. Soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead (PH, p. 198). The reactions that greeted the news of the gruesome murder of Nwankiti Ogechi are expectedly unpalatable and swift, and actually parallel the reactions that met the heinous murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995. Kambili informs:

During family time, while Papa and I played chess, Papa winning, we heard on the radio that Nigeria had been suspended from the Commonwealth because of the murder, that Canada and Holland were recalling their ambassadors in protest. The newscaster read a small portion of the press release from the Canadian government, which referred to Nwankiti Ogechi as "a man of honour." (PH, p. 198)

The brutal killing of Nwankiti Ogechi sends reverberating shock waves across the country and to the international community which perceives his activism as liberating and pro-democratic; on account of which he had gained enormous international recognition and goodwill. The portion of the press release from the Canadian government referring to him as "a man of honour" is an eloquent attestation in this regard. Just like the murder of Nwankiti Ogechi by state agents in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the pouring of concentrated acid on his dead body by agents of the Nigerian State under General Sani Abacha's junta was almost unbelievable. Not many Nigerians at that time thought that the General could snub and defy all entreaties coming from both local and

international voices, including the revered Dr Nelson Mandela of South Africa, not to harm Saro-Wiwa. Even the relentless plea from Saro-Wiwa's septuagenarian mother fell on the General's deaf ears until the man was taken to the gallows at Port Harcourt prison.

After the news of the murder of Nwankiti Ogechi spread across the globe like wild fire, Eugene's rhetorical question: "Do you think Godless men have any sense?" (p. 199) reminds the reader of Mandela's reference to General Abacha as a "mad man" after he learnt of Saro-Wiwa's execution despite his entreaties to the contrary, to which Abacha replied that Mandela had spent too long a time in prison to come to terms with current realities. To demonstrate the trepidation that grips the Nigerian populace on account of the assassination of the character of the activist Nwankiti Ogechi, Kambili reports:

Some men arrived just after we had dinner, and I heard Sisi tell Papa that they said they were from the Democratic coalition. They stayed on the potio with Papa... The next day, more guests came during dinner. And even more the day after. They all told Papa to be careful. Stop going to work in your official car. Don't go to the public places. Remember the bomb blast at the airport when a civil rights lawyer was travelling. Remember the one at the stadium during the pro-democracy meeting. Lock your doors. Remember the man shot in his bedroom by men wearing black masks. Mama...looked scared when she talked... (*PH*, p. 198)

The genuine concern for Eugene's safety by pro-democracy groups and other well-meaning individuals that thronged his residence after the assassination of Nwankiti Ogechi is on the basis of their knowledge of the enormous risks he takes in exposing the murder through the publications of the *Standard* newspaper, as well as his well-known stand against military despotism in the country, the operators of which he has consistently referred to as "Godless men." This is to show the extent to which the murder of the pro-democracy and human rights activist rattles pro-democracy forces and other well-meaning individuals. To say the least, pro-democracy forces and indeed the international community were scandalized in 1995 at the receipt of the news of the way and manner Saro-Wiwa and his eight Ogoni allies were murdered at Port Harcourt prison. Indeed, *Purple Hibiscus* gives a realistic portrait of a nation that is gradually collapsing; deviating from the path of sanity and sliding to anarchy. The Babangida and Abacha years which Adichie historicises in the novel were truly harsh and claimed the lives of journalists, activists and ordinary citizens alike. Those who survived it still tell the stories of torture, incarceration, hardship and close shave with death with hot tears in their eyes. People like Nwankiti Ogechi (Ken Saro-Wiwa) could not survive it. The killing of Nwankiti Ogechi in the novel symbolizes the flagrant wastage of a supposedly national asset on the altar of politics and politicking by a military dictator. *Purple Hibiscus* is indeed a literary work with profound artistic and historical merits.

When we meet Ade Coker again in the theatre of conflict, we are sadly informed that he is equally murdered like Nwankiti Ogechi he was writing to protect and project his predicaments in the hands of a despot when he was alive, and at his death wrote so courageously to present the truth about his

unlawful killing by state-sponsored agents. Even the elements are angry at Ade's gruesome assassination as Kambili tells:

It rained heavily the day Ade Coker died, a strange furious rain in the middle of the parched harmattan. Ade was at breakfast with his family when a courier delivered a package to him. His daughter, in her primary school uniform, was sitting across the table from him. The baby was nearby, in a high chair. His wife was spooning Cerelac into the baby's mouth. Ade was blown up when he opened the package - a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yewande had not said that Ade Coker looked at the envelope and said, "It has the State House Seal" before he opened it. (*PH*, p. 202)

Eugene is thrown to a state of agony at the killing of Ade Coker and in his lamentation reveals the unambiguous and doubtless reason for the obvious state-sponsored murder when he says, "I should have made him stop that story" (p. 202). This shows that Eugene is aware that Ade is actually killed by agents of the state on account of the revealing story he wrote concerning the way and manner government agents assassinated Nwankiti Ogechi. Ade's insistence not to be "bribed" with a generous exclusive interview by the Head of State and that the story of the assassination must not be swept under the carpet had cost him his own life.

The murder of Ade Coker in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* parallels the murder of Dele Giwa - the pioneer Editor-in-Chief of *Newswatch* magazine on October 19, 1986 at his Ikeja residence in Lagos. Also, the reputation of the *Standard* newspaper as a focused and truth-oriented publication equally mirrors that of *Newswatch* in the 1980s. These qualities endeared the magazine to many Nigerians particularly the proletariat who usually looked forward to clutching subsequent editions where they expected to see investigative journalism at its best; where they expected to see "truth" being hitherto suppressed by a tyrannical military government receiving courageous vocalizations and exposures to the admiration of the downtrodden. Even the protracted conflict between the *Standard's* publisher Eugene and Big Oga's government are reflections of the conflict between the military juntas of Generals Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha with *The Guardian* newspaper, *Tell* magazine and other press establishments that were, like the *Standard* newspaper, focused and truth-oriented. The trio dictators usually saw such newspapers and magazines as being antagonistic and subversive to their governments, and often directed state security agents to clamp down on them in a bid to silence them. Chronicling some of the ordeals of some outstanding Nigerian journalists/press establishments in the hands of iron-fisted dictators in the country, *Wikipedia* (2020) states:

During the administration of General Muhammadu Buhari, reporters Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor were both sent to jail in 1984 under decree No. 4 of 1984, which suppressed journalistic freedom. On 26 August, 1989 *The Guardian* published a long letter by Dr. Bekolari Ransome-Kuti, a human-rights activist, entitled, "Open Letter to President Babangida," in which he criticized what he saw as increasing government suppression of free expression of ideas. The owner, Alex Ibru, escaped an assassination attempt during the military regime of General Sani Abacha. On 2 February 1996 his

car was fired upon and Ibru was hit. He was rushed to the hospital with one of his eyes dangling from its socket. Following Abacha's sudden death in June 1998, legal proceedings began against his son Mohammed and his Chief Security Officer Major Hamza al-Mustapha. ("The Guardian-Nigeria")

Also, in his *Honour For Sale: An Insider Account of the Murder of Dele Giwa* (2013), General Babangida's erstwhile Military Press Secretary Major Debo Basorun substantiates these historical realities, particularly the conflict between Dele Giwa/*Newswatch* magazine and the junta which Adichie historicises through the character of Ade Coker. He states:

One of the journalists who spearheaded criticisms against government's recklessness was the Editor-in-Chief of *Newswatch* magazine, Dele Giwa. "Dele" as he was fondly called had earlier served as an executive in the government-owned *Daily Times*... a position that brought him in contact with influential people both in and out of government. And with friends in those high places, the journalist had a near-unrestricted access to privileged information which usually reflected in his writings. Dele was to become a favourite of the public for his satiric comments and penchant for investigating government excesses and abuse of office. His persistent demands that the ruling class submit itself for public accountability demonstrated the courage behind a congenial demeanour. Being no stranger to harassment as a regular guest of the security agencies, Dele showed up at my office one day to ask for my intervention on behalf of his colleague and friend, Yakubu Mohammed who was being sought by military intelligence for allegedly writing an offensive article about the government. His satiric commentaries...raised the stakes enough to warrant a decision from a frightened president. What Babangida did was... While the people were still thinking of what to make of the sweeping arrests, the nation was aghast with trepidation to learn that Dele had been killed under mysterious circumstances on Sunday, 19th October, 1986. (Basorun, 2013, pp. 186-187)

Basorun's statement that Dele Giwa "being no stranger to harassment as a regular guest of the security agencies" is reminiscent of the persecutions of Ade Coker in the hands of the same security agents in *Purple Hibiscus* until he is assassinated in like manner. These are, again, some of the socio-historical circumstances that really inform Adichie's representations of conflicts in this regard.

Eugene's handling of the shocking assassination of Ade Coker; how he relates with Ade's family and members of staff of the *Standard* afterwards really demonstrate his humanity, nobility and sense of altruism. Kambili says, "Papa organized Ade Coker's funeral; he set up a trust for Yewande Coker and the children, bought them a new house. He paid the *Standard* staff huge bonuses and asked them all to take a long leave" (p. 203). His life, however, does not seem to be the same as he grapples with the realities of Ade's death. Again, it is through the voice of Kambili that the reader sees that:

Hollows appeared under his eyes during those weeks, as if someone had suctioned the delicate flesh, leaving his eyes sunken in. weeks after Ade Coker died, the hollows were still carved under Papa's eyes, and there was a slowness in his movements, as though his legs were too heavy to lift, his hands too heavy to swing. He took longer to reply when spoken to, to chew his food, even to find the right Bible passages... and some nights when I woke up to pee, I heard him shouting from the balcony overlooking

the frontyard. Even though I sat on the toilet seat and listened, I never could make sense of what he was saying. (*PH*, p. 203)

The effect of Ade Coker's assassination is so devastating to Eugene that he does not seem to be in good control of himself and actions any longer. This is because Ade was an invaluable asset to the *Standard* and his loss, especially in the manner in which he was murdered, was indeed traumatic to the man who placed so much premium and confidence in his unquestionable capabilities. The above passage portrays that Eugene is losing a bit of his psychological stability on account of Ade's death in the hands of State Security agents who ironically were supposed to have protected him from harm. Even Kambili is not in any way spared from the psychological trauma associated with the gruesome killing of Ade as she says, "My nightmares started then, nightmares in which I saw Ade Coker's charred remains spattered on his dinning table, on his baby's cereal bowl, on his plate of eggs. In some of the nightmares, I was the daughter and the charred remains became Papa's" (*PH*, p. 203).

The silencing of Ade Coker with a mail bomb does not seem to pacify the perpetrators yet, and the conflict still rages. They are clearly aware that Ade was not the only source of inspiration and strength to the *Standard*, and are determined to subdue whoever or whatever remains as source of inspiration. The junta takes the battle to the dimension of economic sabotage as a way of crippling the publisher of the *Standard* economically and psychologically. And they seem to be winning because Eugene is losing a measure of his usual ebullience, composure, focus and courage. The junta knows that targeting and destroying the source of income for a man of Eugene's status will definitely weaken him, so they go for it. Again, Kambili informs:

Mama told Jaja and me often to remember to hug Papa tighter, to let him know we are there, because he was under so much pressure. Soldiers had gone to one of the factories, carrying dead rats in a carton, and then closed the factory down, saying the rats had been found there and could spread diseases through the wafers and biscuits. Papa no longer went to the other factories as often as he used to. Some days Father Benedict came before Jaja and I left for school, and was still in papa's study when we came home... papa never came out to make sure Jaja and I were following our schedules on such days... (*PH*, p. 204)

The prolonged stay of Eugene's parish priest Father Benedict in Eugene's study upon visiting him as a result of his being "under so much pressure" demonstrates Eugene's deep state of mourning and sadness on account of his losses and suppression by the junta. This is a portrayal of the fact that he is, after all human, and not necessarily superhuman. Although he can be said to be naturally courageous, Ade Coker's presence and dependability seem to be one of the main boosters of his morale and courage. Now that Ade has been wasted, a significant part of his life seemed to have equally died as he mourns and struggles to regain his composure. Eugene's life takes a tumbling dimension when the realities of Ade's death dawned on him.

The manner of Adichie's portrayal of Ade Coker's (Dele Giwa's) assassination in *Purple Hibiscus* as earlier elaborated is a matter worthy of investigation. In reality, the popular historical question that

emanated from the gruesome killing of Dele as often asked by many Nigerian private press establishments is “Who killed Dele Giwa?” This critical question has adorned the front pages of several newspapers and magazines for several years now. Yet no answer seemed to be forthcoming from official quarters to an obviously critical national question till date. The last time an answer could have been elicited from the right person; the very man under whose regime Dele was murdered was at the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission otherwise known as Oputa Panel. It was set up by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 at the dawn of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. One of the major cases filed before the Commission by the legal luminary Chief Gani Fawehinmi was that of the assassination of Dele Giwa and the circumstances surrounding it. As usual, the alleged principal perpetrator General Ibrahim Babangida snubbed the commission by refusing to appear before it although he was duly invited. The unwillingness of the authorities to either urge, direct or even compel him to go to the Commission to either clear his name or take responsibility and tender apologies demonstrates the abundant existence of Sacred Cows in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons why the system is failing and seems to be deteriorating continuously for whereas the law is strictly applied to some people, some are seen to be above the law; a demonstration of lack of strong institutions. President Barack Obama of the United States of America had once advocated and urged Africa leaders to work towards building strong institutions, not strong personalities. Although Dele Giwa’s age-stricken mother and their lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi were at the Oputa Panel on the scheduled day for the hearing of the case, the defendant, General Babangida simply refused to appear and that ended the matter. Yet the question, “Who Killed Dele Giwa?” continues to reverberate. This is why seventeen years after Dele’s assassination, Adichie who was still a child at the time of the killing is still raising the same issue through the noble instrumentality of literature. In her case, however, she does not seem to be asking or pretending to be repeating the same critical historical question that has been asked over the years by Nigerians. Adichie is not ambiguous in stating who she believes is the killer of Ade Coker (Dele Giwa) when Kambili says:

Ade Coker was at breakfast with his family when a courier delivered a package to him... Ade was blown up when he opened the package—a package everybody would have known was from the Head of State even if his wife Yewande had not said that Ade Coker looked at the envelope and said, “It has the State House Seal” before he opened it. (PH, p. 202)

Here, there is a description of certainty, not ambiguity—since the source of the mail bomb that nailed Ade’s destiny is clearly identified. This is one advantage literature as a humanistic discipline has over history; the liberty to manipulate the resources of history and project meanings in any manner that suits the artistic endeavour of the writer.

Other conflicts that can be said to be derived from certain remarkable socio-historical circumstances in *Purple Hibiscus* is the sociopolitical cum economic conflict involving the Nsukka University Community on one hand over the unconventional appointment of a Sole Administrator to run the affairs of the University in place of a Vice Chancellor, and on the other hand the conflict between the Sole

Administrator himself and the university staff over non-provision of essential amenities like water and sometimes for non-payment of staff salaries. It is these conflicts that really bring out the activist spirit in the character of Auntie Ifeoma to resist the ugly situations. The *Free Online Dictionary* defines the lexical item “activist” as “a proponent or practitioner of activism.” Activism itself is stated to mean “the use of direct, often confrontational action, such as a demonstration or strike, in opposition to or support of a cause.” For *Advanced English Dictionary*, activism implies “a policy of taking direct and militant action to achieve a political or social goal.” These consists of efforts to promote, impede or direct social, political, economic or environmental change. Activism is the action of the powerless or less powerful against the powerful. It is a peaceful form of conflict. Various forms of activism ranges from writing open letters to authorities, political campaigns, economic activism such as boycotts or rallies either for or against government policies, street marches/protests, strikes, sit-ins, and even hunger strikes. Ultimately, the activist aims to ensure certain positive reforms in society.

When on the second visit of Jaja and Kambili to Auntie Ifeoma’s residence at the Nsukka University Campus Kambili observes that “the woman seated next to Auntie Ifeoma had piercing academic eyes and humourless lips and wore no makeup” (p. 217) on a certain day, Adichie is already preparing the stage for a significant conversation and a sociopolitical conflict that would soon follow. It does not take long before Ifeoma’s voice of protest rings out thus: “We cannot sit back and let it happen, mba. Where else have you heard of such a thing as a sole administrator in a university?” (p. 217). And when the interlocutor does not seem to be in a hurry to give any response to her question, Ifeoma pushes further to reveal why she is taking a stand against the government for appointing a sole administrator to head a university instead of a vice chancellor. “A governing council votes for a vice chancellor. That is the way it has worked since this university was built, that is the way it is supposed to work, oburika?...” (p. 217).

In response to Auntie Ifeoma’s barrage of questions, the woman tries to thread with caution. Kambili, again, observes that “the woman looked off into the distance, nodding continuously in the way that people do when searching for the right words to use. When she finally spoke, she did so slowly, like someone addressing a stubborn child” (p. 217). In verbalizing her response, her words appear in form of counsels to a recalcitrant colleague: “They said there is a list circulating, Ifeoma, of lecturers who are disloyal to the university. They said they might be fired. They said your name is on it” (p. 217). Ifeoma does not delay in firing back when she says, “I am not paid to be loyal. When I speak the truth, it becomes disloyalty” (p. 217). It is then that the interlocutor elaborates on why she is advising, even counselling Auntie Ifeoma to be precautionary in her responses to the situation at hand when she says, “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 their school fees and buy their clothes?” (p. 217). But like most people possessed by the spirit and sense of activism, Ifeoma does not seem to care or prioritize most of the things the interlocutor is worried about; being fired from her job, securing the meal ticket for her family and being able to pay her children’s school fees. She rather

feels that with her level of education and enlightenment, she does not need to be a sycophant or a conformist in order to feed her children, pay their school fees or buy clothes for them, the very needs the interlocutor reminded she might not be able to meet up with if she continuous to be “disloyal” and consequently relieved of her job as a lecturer of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. For Auntie Ifeoma, taking care of those stated family needs is as important as fighting an unjust situation - the appointment if a sole administrator instead of a vice chancellor to head the institution. And she must speak against it even if it means relieving her of her job and obviously her means of livelihood at the moment. She believes that she must speak out, no matter whose ox is gored. This is what she considers of utmost importance to her, so that the anomaly can be rectified by appointing the right person to be vice chancellor of the institution after following the due process of allowing “a governing council to vote.” In response to the woman’s cowering counsels, Auntie Ifeoma fires back with a stronger intensity as Kambili observes:

When do we speak out, eh? When soldiers are appointed lecturers and students attend lectures with guns to their heads? When do we speak out? Auntie Ifeoma’s voice was raised. But the blaze in her eyes was not focused on the woman; she was angry at something that was bigger than the woman before her. The woman got up. She smoothed her yellow-and-blue abada skirt that barely let her brown slippers show. “We should go.” I watched Auntie Ifeoma and the woman walk slowly to the door, as though weighed down by both what they had said and what they had not said. (*PH*, pp. 218-219)

Auntie Ifeoma’s insistence and unyielding response brings the conversation to an abrupt end. And as her children reflect over the dialogue which they were listening to, Obiora would note that a sole administrator is “the university equivalent of a head of state” and that by such an appointment “the university becomes a microcosm of the country” (p. 218). Amaka’s take on the entire conversation is that “they are telling Mom to shut up. Shut up if you do not want to lose your job because you can be fired *fiam*, just like that” (p. 218). Obiora, however, sees the possibility of her mother, Auntie Ifeoma being fired from the University as an open door for greater and better possibilities when he says, “They should fire her, eh, so we can go to America. And Mom will have her work recognized in America, without any nonsense politics. Do you know how long they have been sitting on her file? She should have been a senior lecturer years ago” (*PH*, p. 219).

Amaka supports Obiora’s views when she says, “At least people there get paid when they are supposed to” (p. 219). Being consistently disillusioned by a series of anomalies perpetrated in their nation by a dictatorial junta, America is here seen as a land of promise, freedom and beautiful possibilities. It is portrayed as a place where merit and credibility are enthroned irrespective of ethnicity or nationality; a place where “nonsense politics” will not be allowed to prevail over a deserved promotion and, moreover, a place where workers’ salaries are paid as and when due. In reference to security of lives and properties, Amaka says, “I suppose we don’t need to protect our doors with metal in America” (p. 259). Then Kambili herself, in response says, “You will drink fresh milk from a bottle. No more stunted tins of condensed milk, no more home made soybean milk” (p.260). That is the America of their dream.

With the current turmoils orchestrated by racism and resurgence of white supremacy mentality in America, one really wonders if young people like Obiora and Amaka who are wishing to emigrate from Africa still perceive America from such beautiful perspectives.

It is worthy of note that it is on account of police brutality in America and their reckless killing of a black man, George Floyd, 46, on 25th May 2020 that “Black Lives Matter” protests erupted in the same land revered for its age-long advocacy for democracy and freedom. Even at that, more black people are still being recklessly brutalized and wasted in America, including the 29-year-old unarmed Jacob Blake who was shot seven times at his back (waist) by a racist American police man on 24th August 2020, the occurrence of which sparked off violent protests and arson in Kenosha, Wisconsin and beyond. Blake is already paralyzed as a consequence of that incident. These dastardly developments, no doubt, are gradually altering the hitherto global perception of America as a land where justice, democracy, freedom and equality flourish like rivers of living water. In no small measure, America’s global policing roles, which brought it a lot of dignity over the years, have come under serious questioning. America was further demystified when a mob descended on the symbolic and revered Capitol in Washington D.C. purportedly to obstruct the certification of the 2020 presidential victory of the president-elect Joe Biden on January 6, 2021, vandalising, fighting, maiming, even killing to the greatest shock of the whole world. These negative developments are making the United States to gradually lose its global reputation and regard, and should be checkmated by relevant institutional authorities.

The conflict over the appointment of a sole administrator by the junta to head the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is still raging between some recalcitrant members of staff symbolized by the activist Aunty Ifeoma and the appointee when students joined in the protest, demanding for the removal of the appointee as well as the Head of State who appointed him. It is still at the same period of Kambili’s second visit to Aunty Ifeoma’s campus residence that the incidents occur as she narrates:

It was too early when Amaka’s movement woke me up the next morning; the room was not yet touched by the lavender rays of dawn... Something was wrong; she did not tie her wrapper just to go to the toilet...then I heard the singing. It was the measured singing of a large group of people, and it came in through the window. The singing was clearer now, loud and resonant. There had to be at least five hundred people. “Sole administrator must go. He doesn’t wear pant o! Head of State must go. He doesn’t wear pant o! Where is running water? Where is light? Where is petrol?” The singing was louder but not closer. The students were invigorated now. Smoke was rising in the thick, blinding fumes that blended into the star-filled sky. Crashing sounds of breaking glass peppered the singing. “All we are saying, sole administrator must go! (*PH*, pp. 222-223)

This scenario has been quoted extensively in order to holistically and effectively capture the explosive mood of the rioting students. From their utterances and actions as represented above, two main issues emerge as reasons for the riot. One is their perceived impropriety of appointing a sole administrator instead of a vice chancellor voted by a council to run the affairs of their institution. Obviously, this is

the same reason why Auntie Ifeoma and some other unnamed lecturers are equally agitating. The other reason borders on the failure of leadership on the side of the sole administrator as evinced in his inability to provide some essential amenities like water and light to the institution, as well as the same failure of leadership on the part of the Head of state as evinced in the prevailing scarcity or non-availability of petrol on campus which Obiora had earlier referred to as “a microcosm of the country” (p. 218). In this context, the scarcity or non-availability of it within the campus typifies the general scenario in the entire country. When the chips are down with respect to the protestations and rioting, monumental havoc are wreaked on the campus, and the sole administrator and his wife manage to escape for their life. Kambili narrates thus:

Auntie Ifeoma came home that afternoon with the news of the riot. It was the worst one since they became commonplace some years ago. The students had set the sole administrator’s house on fire; even the guest house behind it burned to the ground. Six university cars had been burned down as well. The university was closed down until further notice as a result of the damage to university property and the atmosphere of unrest. (*PH*, p. 224)

This atmosphere of chaos necessitates the manhunt for those suspected or known to be “disloyal” and therefore behind the riots in one form or the other. Auntie Ifeoma and his family members are at home one evening when the unwanted guests arrive as Kambili informs:

I was still thinking about the dream that evening as we all sat in the living room, watching TV. I heard a car drive in and park in front of the flat...the banging on the door was...loud, rude, and intrusive. Auntie Ifeoma...opened the door only a crack, but two wide hands reached in and force the door ajar. The heads of the four men who spilled into the flat grazed the door frame. Suddenly, the flat seemed cramped, too small for the blue uniforms and matching caps they wore, for the smell of stale cigarette smoke and sweat that came in with them, for the raw bulge of muscle under their sleeves (*PH*, pp. 224-225).

Upon forcefully gaining entrance into the apartment, the men promptly announce their mission and proceed to execute it:

We are here to search your house. We’re looking for documents designed to sabotage the peace of the university. We have information that you have been in collaboration with the radical student groups that staged the riots... the voice sounded mechanical... the other three men walked briskly into the flat as he spoke. One opened the drawers of sideboard, leaving each open. Two went into the bedroom. (*PH*, p. 225)

When Auntie Ifeoma confronts them to ascertain their identity, they promptly reveal that they “...are from the special security unit in Port Harcourt” (p. 225). All protests from both Auntie Ifeoma and Obiora to stop them from entering into their inner rooms fall on deaf ears. Kambili states how the rest of the events unfold:

Auntie Ifeoma muttered to us all to remain seated...before she followed the men into the rooms. They did not look inside the drawers they flung open, they just threw the clothes and whatever else was

inside on the floor. They overturned all the boxes and suitcases in Auntie Ifeoma's room, but they did not rummage through the contents. They scattered, but they did not search. As they left, the man with the tribal marks said to Auntie Ifeoma, waving a stubby finger with a curved nail in her face, "Be careful, be very careful. (*PH*, pp. 225-226)

Adichie's choice of words and portrayals of the actions of these men suggest that their visit is intended for harassment and warning. The overall objective is to intimidate the activist; to put fear in her so that she can be cowed into silence. Although they initially state that, "we are here to search your house. We're looking for documents designed to sabotage the peace of the university" (p. 225), what they do afterwards does not really prove any atom of sincerity in those declarations. Thus instead of searching the house, Kambili simply observes that, "they did not look inside the drawer they flung open...they just threw the clothes on the floor. They overturned all the boxes... but they did not rummage through the contents. They scattered but they did not search" (p. 25). Obviously, Auntie Ifeoma has been perceived by the authorities as a threat in the acceptance of their anomalies and therefore need to be threatened to silence. Ifeoma herself knows this when she says, "they want to scare me. Since when have students needed somebody to tell them when to riot" (p. 226).

Obiora's response to this situation after the men depart is to suggest to Auntie Ifeoma that they should emigrate to America since their safety is no more guaranteed in their own country. "We should leave. Mom, we should leave. Have you talked to Auntie Phillipa since the last time?" (p. 226). Phillipa had taught in the same institution with Ifeoma until she emigrated to America due to poor conditions of service. Ifeoma eventually indicates that she has considered the option of leaving the country when she says, "I have sent my CV to Phillipa" (p. 239). Adichie uses these developments to demonstrate that intimidation and threats to the Nigerian intelligentsia by military juntas, as well as unbearable conditions of service are the very factors that resulted to brain-drain in the country in the 1980s and 1990s, the consequence of which the country is still suffering from till today. Ifeoma is still waiting for the response to the CV she submitted for employment in America through Phillipa when she receives a notice of termination of her teaching appointment at the University of Nigeria. It is over a telephone conversation with Kambili and Jaja who had already returned to their residence at Enugu after their visit to Nsukka that Ifeoma announces that, "They have given me notice of termination for what they call illegal activity. Amadi has been notified. He is leaving for missionary work in Germany at the end of the month" (p. 255). For Kambili, this development is a devastating one in view of the freedom, friendship and joy she shares with the family and with Father Amadi each time she and Jaja visit Nsukka. She narrates her feelings thus:

It was a double blow. I staggered. It was as if my calves had sacks of dried beans tied to them. Auntie Ifeoma asked for Jaja, and I nearly tripped, nearly fell to the floor, as I went to his room to call him. After Jaja talked to Auntie Ifeoma, he put the phone down and said, "We are going to Nsukka today. We will spend Easter in Nsukka." (*PH*, p. 255)

Ifeoma eventually emigrates to the United States of America with her three children—Amaka, Obiora

and Chima, leaving behind them a nation in disarray; a nation still under the jackboot of a ruthless junta. As earlier stated, the sociopolitical conflicts Adichie fictionalizes or historicises in this context are derived from certain notable sociohistorical conditions in Nigeria. Adichie was most likely a witness to those ugly moments and events since it is on record that she emigrated to the United States at the age of 19. The said events occurred precisely in 1996 with the “record-breaking” controversial appointment of Professor Umaru Gomwalk as the Sole Administrator of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Since Adichie’s parents were members of staff of the university even at the time of the events and Adichie was born in 1997, it therefore implies that she might have witnessed some of those occurrences before she left for the States same year. Then the following year-1997, her father, Professor James Nwoye Adichie retired from the university. Ikwuemesi (2018, pp. 131-136) encapsulates the sociohistorical circumstances these conflicts in the novel are derived from thus:

The years 1993 to 1998 were a particularly dark period for Nigeria. They were the gory years of Abacha dictatorship, with all its characteristic harshness and wanton brutality. They were the years of the triumph of evil, even falsehood and intolerance were shamelessly woven into the creed of leadership, when it was anathema to stand up for one’s rights. The ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) strike of 1996 was one of the many moments in history when the above scenario was most vividly dramatized. In its characteristic nihilist manner, the Abacha administration frustrated... and banned ASUU as a way of halting the strike. The university of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) was the guinea pig for the government’s tactics. The ASUU strike coincided with the bloom of Professor Umaru Gomwalk’s sole administratorship at UNN in 1996. It was the first time in Nigeria’s educational history that a university had a sole administrator. Professor Gomwalk’s appointment at the University of Nigeria—a university founded by Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria’s greatest nationalist—was not only one of the many evil triumphs of the military over the larger society; it was also an aberration and a rape of the academic community. A sole administrator appointed by a military despot to run a first-rate university would certainly go against... principles. First, he refused to recognize ASUU-UNN as an umbrella body for faculty on campus. He sacked over 100 members of the faculty in order to intimidate them to go back to work. He publicly tore an order of the Federal High Court given at Enugu in 1996. On one occasion, his agents at Nsukka detained and beat up a court bailiff attached to the Federal High Court in Enugu. At his behest, 17 academics were detained and later arraigned for charges of sedition and arson. Even when the case was struck out of court for “lack of merit” he refused to reinstate the affected academics who he had suspended. Above all, his tenure generated the worst brain-drain ever experienced at the University of Nigeria. History shall be the ultimate witness of those who were persecuted for holding on to the truth during the crisis at Nsukka...the tragedy of Nsukka and the entire education industry is the tragedy of their generation; the folly of a wasted generation.

These are the political and sociohistorical milieu from where Adichie drew inspirations regarding the conflict involving some members of staff of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka over the appointment of a sole administrator to pilot the affairs of the institution. The character of Auntie Ifeoma belongs to the

category “of those who were persecuted for holding on to the truth during the crisis at Nsukka” (Ikwuemesi, p. 136). Also, Oluigbo (2017) corroborates Ikwuemesi’s historical accounts when he states:

The university had been embroiled in a deep-seated crisis that dated back to the days of Prof. Umaru D. Gomwalk as sole administrator. Under Gomwalk, that prestigious institution of higher learning founded by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and established by an Act of Parliament on May 18, 1955 was embroiled in a crises of immense proportions...The immediate cause of the crisis seemed to be the removal of Prof. Oleka Kelechi as Vice Chancellor and the appointment of Prof. U.D. Gomwalk as Sole Administrator of the university by the Sani Abacha military junta. Many of the university’s academics and students saw Gomwalk as a spoiler, the parabolic tare among the wheat planted by the enemy, the Abacha dictatorship, to destroy the institution that was the pride of Nigeria. He was seen as an instrument for “the destruction of the structures and psyche of the university system.” Gomwalk increased students’ school fees without Federal Government approval, ejected students from their hostels at night, while the security outfit he set up to “curtail his enemies” constantly harassed students, especially in the female hostels. The harassment of students in the male hostels and the students’ attempt to resist it led to the shooting of a student, following which the students unleashed mayhem.

For Nweze (1997), “All the segments of the university have known no peace since the arrival of the sole administrator. The first victim of Gomwalk’s entrance into the university campus were the students who in one fell swoop lost the Electronics Engineering laboratory and the art theater.” These are the complex and precarious sociopolitical conditions that informed Aunty Ifeoma’s protest against the appointment of a sole administrator by a military despot to run the affairs of the University of Nigeria instead of a vice chancellor which, according to her, ought to be voted for by “a governing council” (*PH*, p. 217). It was also these underlying sociohistorical and political conditions that prompted Adichie’s representation of the engulfing students’ protests and riots; which in the novel as in historical reality had a myriad of catastrophic consequences for the students who lost an entire academic session and yet returned to pay what Oluigbo (2017) refers to as “reparation fee” for the damages done to the institution’s infrastructure.

At the heat of the crises, it is observed that even the sole administrator himself suffers a great deal of humiliation orchestrated by his own actions. This is what it implies when it is stated that he and his wife are “smuggled out in the boot of an old Peugeot 404” (*PH*, p. 224) as though they are contraband materials being smuggled out from the prying eyes of Nigerian Customs officials to avoid confiscation. Ideally, the head of a prestigious institution like the University of Nigeria ought to be a respectable figure who ought not to be “smuggled out” in that manner under normal circumstances. But honour gives way to a show of shame because abnormalities and aberrations have become the order of the day in the nation under the jackboot of a tyrant. Thus it can be seen that the conflict is full of losses for students, staff and the sole administrator himself. Later on, the reader is informed that the Head of State “died atop a prostitute, foaming at the mouth and jerking” (*PH*, p.289). Adichie uses the multiplicity of

losses resulting from these conflicts and bad governance to convey a number of messages to the reader. One of such messages is that when we wittingly or unwittingly refuse to collectively fix the problems of our nation, everyone turns out a loser in one way or the other in the end irrespective of status.

It is significant to note that none of the sociopolitical conflicts represented in *Purple Hibiscus* as derived from remarkable sociohistorical circumstances in the country have been resolved in the Nigerian nation till date. The conflicts have even become endemic, even taking bolder dimensions. Just as the character of Nwankiti Ogechi - a pro-democracy crusader is harassed by state security agents and eventually assassinated by them, even for his non-violent protests, a number of real progressive and pro-democracy activists agitating for genuine national reforms are still being harassed and incarcerated today by Nigeria's Department of State Security (DSS). The latest of such incessant attacks on human rights and pro-democracy crusaders was the show of shame portrayed in the attempted unlawful rearrest of Omoyele Sowore even in the premises of a Federal High Court already sitting in Abuja on Friday December 6, 2019. Adesomoju (2019) states that

"Justice Ijeoma Ojukwu of the Federal High Court in Abuja abruptly suspended sitting and fled her court on Friday as operatives of the Department of State Service invaded the courtroom to rearrest *Sahara Reporters* publisher, Omoyele Sowore, less than 24 hours of releasing him from earlier illegal custody."

Such occurrences after over two decades of uninterrupted democratic experiment and supposedly civilian administration in Nigeria portrays nothing short of stagnation. In other words, to think that such things are taking place under a democratically elected government is, to say the least, disgusting, even scandalous. In his reaction to the development when he was interviewed in the court premises after the sordid events, Femi Falana, Sowore's Counsel who also happens to be a long-standing pro-democracy crusader described the incidents as "horrendous, bizarre, and barbaric contempt of court never witnessed under even the most brutal of past dictators that had ever ruled Nigeria" (In Adesomoju, 2019). Ironically, what successive military regimes could not do to the Nigerian justice system in all their years of iron-fisted tyranny was what a supposedly democratic dispensation did to the system and to fellow civilians on December 6, 2019 without an iota, even a pretense of an apology to the same citizens that voted them into power.

Again, just as in the case of the character of Ade Coker, journalists in Nigeria are still being harassed, detained, even incarcerated for trumped-up charges in the process of performing their professional and ethical duties as the fourth estate. The latest of such unlawful arrests, detention, arraignment and incarceration is that involving Mr Agba Jalingo the publisher of *Cross River Watch* and other journalists working under him for "criticizing" the Cross River State Government under the leadership of no less a figure than the 'enlightened' Professor Ben Ayade. Jalingo spent 179 days in incarceration before being released on 16th February, 2020. Eniola (2020) states that, "Jalingo, who is the publisher of *Cross River Watch*, was first arrested by the police in August 2019 on the orders of the Ben Ayade-led Cross River State Government." Currently, the anti-hate speech bill is in the offing; a bill which many analysts

believe is being sponsored and targeted to be used to stifle freedom of expression by the citizens of the country. The so called anti-hate speech bill, if it succeeds and passed into law, can only achieve what decree number 4 achieved for the Buhari junta in the early 1980s. Reminiscing on what the obnoxious decree achieved for the Junta at the time, Vourlias (2015) states:

Journalists jailed by Muhammadu Buhari's regime in the 1980s are ready to forgive, but others are skeptical. When Muhammadu Buhari hit the campaign trail in Nigeria earlier this year, he got help from an unlikely source: Tunde Thompson. As a reporter for the Lagos-based *Guardian* newspaper in the 1980s, Thompson was one of two journalists jailed under the repressive military regime led by Buhari. Thompson was a casualty of Decree 4, a draconian piece of legislation that allowed the government to imprison any journalist who embarrassed the country's military leaders - a nebulous charge that was frequently invoked to muzzle the press and the civil society during the 18 months of Buhari's rule. After Thompson and his colleague Nduka Irabor published a report on diplomatic postings that involved top military brass, the two were arrested in February 1984, and held for eight months.

The ongoing experiences of journalists and civil rights activists in Nigeria prove beyond all reasonable doubts that press freedom is still not well guaranteed. This is one of the problems Adichie demonstrates in *Purple Hibiscus* through the character of Ade Coker and others concerning the Nigeria of the 1980s and 1990s under the jackboots of military despots like Generals Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. The prevalence of the same phenomenon till now really shows that Nigeria as a nation is yet to resolve such a conflict as represented by Adichie in her novel under study. Currently, university lectures are still on strike for the same reasons they embarked on strike in 1996, etc. These show that the country has not made any significant progress from where it was in the 80s and 90s. If anything, the nation is rather retrogressing in view of the fact that in addition to human rights violations, we have remained, to borrow the words of Brigadier Sani Abacha in his coup broadcast of 31st December 1983, "...a debtor and a beggar nation." Ironically, it was the same coup that installed Muhammadu Buhari as Head of State.

4. Conclusion

The seemingly endless and unmitigated re-occurrences of certain remarkable political and socioeconomic altercations deducted from notable sociohistorical circumstances in Nigeria as represented in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* aptly casts the nation in the unfortunate mould of the Igbo proverbial deaf grasshopper annihilated by a hornbill. This underscores the reason why after over six decades of freedom from British imperialism; after passing through the *fiery fires of a* thirty-month avoidable fratricidal civil war; after several years of being under the brutal jackboots of some of the most despotic and repressive military rulers the world has ever known; after over two decades of uninterrupted democratic experimentation, there is still the prevalence of arbitrary apprehension of journalists, pro-democracy crusaders and human rights activists, even as incessant

industrial disharmony continue to ravage the nation's educational and indeed other sectors of the economy. As these *infernors* devour the *House*, the pathetic pretenses, prevarications and pontifications of the supposedly *firefighters and householders* make the entire scenario to appear more gloomy and precarious. These are not signs of growth and maturation for the nation and demonstrate the need to take responsibility for positive change.

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