



The Postnormal Condition and the Politics of Migration in Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah

University of Ilorin, Nigeria

Civil wars, political chaos, ecological revolutions, separatist agitations, ethnic conflicts and religious clashes form part of the larger body of what, following Ziauddin Sardar, we will define as "postnormal times." The representation of borders in migration is a salient feature of African films and films on Africa, such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Blood Diamond*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Tears of the Sun* and *Somewhere in Africa: The Cries of Humanity*. These cinematic productions are rooted in the culture of migration, displacement, liberation and survival. The present article considers postcolonial African cinema and argues that filming migration, especially forced migration, is intricately related to the postnormal condition characteristic of African societies. Postnormality in that part of the world is largely produced by armed conflicts whose aftermath stages spectacular waves of human migration. The Boko Haram conflict, the Herdsmen crisis and the Niger Delta crisis of resource control in Nigeria and the Al Shabab terrorist group in Somalia and Eastern Africa are some of the instances of violent self-location that have necessitated discussions of refugeeism, migration and postnormality in Nigerian and African film studies. This article focuses on Biyi Bandele's film *Half of a Yellow Sun* which is read in contextual juxtaposition with other films about crisis and migration. Sardar's theory of postnormality is used in the analytical discussion of the film, which demonstrates that African cinema succeeds in representing the complexities, contradictions and chaos of voluntary and involuntary migration and provides an adequate response to the anti-oppressive reforms on that continent.

Keywords: postnormal times, African postcoloniality, cinema, terrorism, anti-oppressive reforms.

Introduction

In 2015, the image of the dead body of Ailan Kurdi, the Syrian refugee boy found floating on the shore of Europe, gained an immediate agency that changed the migrant/refugee discourse and that led Germany and other European countries to open their borders. (Sandten 2)

The quotation above does not only refer to the tragic consequences of migration (especially forced migration) and refugeeism, but also captures the essence of a particular kind of cinematic culture that focuses on displacement, people in crisis and war-driven subaltern and exilic experiences. Filming migration is an artistic activity that presents the movement of people, identities and cultures from one particular location (an indigenous geographical site) to other, less familiar places. This dislocation often turns out to be the result of crises, wars, capitalist and neo-capitalist reorganizations, natural disasters, socio-cultural conditions and other factors.

Significantly, instances of what we would recognize as *migration* today can be found in Classical Greek drama. Some plays present it as the outcome of war. Such is the case with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* which tells the story of King Oedipus and his sons and daughters' exilic journey from Thebes to Colonus. Aeschylus's play *The Suppliants* recounts another trialsome experience of displacement – that of the "fifty daughters of Danaus, who flee in order to escape forced marriages to their Egyptian cousins and thus seek protection in Argos" (Sandten 1). In *The Oresteia*, Aeschylus gives the leading part to Orestes, a migrant who attempts to avenge the death of his father Agamemnon, murdered by his mother Clytemnestra. All this shows that the subject of migration has long been present in visual culture.

CORRESPONDENCE: Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah, Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, P.M.B. 1515, Ilorin 240003, Nigeria. @okpadahstephen@gmail.com

People living in crisis-prone geographical areas turn out to be the most frequent category of migrants. In the majority of cases, migration is the natural outcome of crises driven by some postnormal condition (see Sardar). Recently, ideological conflicts and a newly-emerged form of socio-cultural and religious disputation have yielded other, more problematic and large-scale forms of migrant displacement that seem to take their most distinctive shape in postcolonial African societies. Africa alone, however, does not represent an isolated case in that tendency. Countries and regions such as Iraq and the Middle East have likewise experienced dramatically rising levels of forced human displacement. Specifically, terrorist networks like the Islamic State and its extensions in Iraq and the Levant have exerted significant impact on the number of refugees in Iraq (especially in Mosul) and Syria. Although political ideology is sometimes inherent in the beliefs of terrorist organizations, it is pertinent to note that religion still remains the major cause for the activities of insurgent groups such as Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, ISIL, ISIS, Boko Haram and other global Jihadist movements. This is evidenced by the devastating effects of their assaults which have been mostly targeted at Christian churches. Attacks on churches in Mosul by ISIL and north eastern Nigeria by Boko Haram, respectively, represent graphic examples of terrorist oppression. The ideological motivation of the above-mentioned terrorist groups has certainly acquired postnormal dimensions.

Migration, exile, scattering, displacement and refugeeism have been subject to extensive debates in film studies ever since the inception of the discipline. In fact, silent-film Hollywood contributed a lot to the development of this branch of studies. Interwar Europe with its enhanced rates of displacement and exilic resettlement was the preferred setting in films from that period. Post-war Italian neorealist films displayed similar tendencies. However, we should bear in mind that the terms “migrant cinema” and “cinema of migration” belong to two different types of nomenclature. Ayla Kanbur’s “Reframing Difference in European Migrant and Diasporic Cinema” and Kim Knott’s discussion of migration in film use the term “migrant cinema” about films produced by migrant filmmakers. This explanation points to an evident mismatch between the categories of migrant cinema and cinema of migration. The former is most frequently used about films produced by a migrant or migrants in a host country. Knott suggests that the term “migrant cinema” refers to the cinematic work of first-generation migrants who are able to draw directly on their experiences of exile, migration, the asylum process and displacement. It is not a new genre: “migrants have been involved at all levels of the film industry since it first began” (Knott). This observation is particularly helpful, for instance, when we discuss post-war Jewish films that can fairly reasonably be classified as samples of migrant cinema. Having witnessed and participated in the traumatic expulsion and extermination of their ethnic group, Jewish filmmakers of that time were able to relate the difficulties and pains of Holocaust migration with utmost realism.

The cinema of migration, on the other hand, is concerned with the various components of the migration process itself, such as identity (de)construction and reconstruction, and the problems of border crossing, among others. Launched by filmmakers, who did not belong to migrant cultures, migration cinema developed as a genre exploring instances of displacement, refugeeism, exile and scattering, which would be the usual aftermath of any postnormal condition. The cinematic renditions of forced migration, in particular, have provoked numerous debates on the reasons and premises of migration aiming at a clearer view of how to mitigate the major factors for migrant displacement. Some of the films in this genre do suggest a number of strategic solutions. The present article considers *migration cinema* and its more specific form of *forced migration cinema* as genres that take on concrete dimensions in the context of African postcoloniality. In order to observe how they are predicated upon the postnormal condition of African societies, I will employ the methods of content analysis in my critical reading of Biyi Bandele’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* against the background of other films on crisis and migration.

Theoretical Framework

Most of my analytical observations are grounded in Ziauddin Sardar’s theory of postnormality, developed in a number of articles. The question of how to think about identities and spaces, norms and traditions has been the persistent preoccupation of contemporary scholarship. The necessity to rethink such markers of cultural change comes in response to the unprecedented shift of perspectives that took place in the past two centuries. Globalization, cultural convergence, technological advancement and new economic developments are some of the reasons for these recently advanced trends. In this course of transformations, the “normal” seems no longer easily perceived as a principle that regulates individual and collective self-location. Instead, contemporary ethical, philosophical and cultural thought appears structured by the principle of the “abnormal” that can describe the cross-border experience of distortion, displacement and dislocation of social attitudes more adequately. In “Welcome to Postnormal Times,” Sardar argues that:

The postnormal world is a world of disproportion. Disproportionate distributions of power, wealth, resources and the effective demand to command the use of these resources are matched only by the disproportionate power our knowledge and techniques have given us to destroy the environment on which our affluence depends.

Sardar goes on to elucidate the characteristics of postnormal times: *complexities*, *chaos* and *contradictions*. He identifies the above-mentioned characteristics, or what he terms the three “Cs,” with the spirit of *postnormal times*. “Postnormality” can, therefore, be defined by the complexity of traditions and actions, as well as the rigidity of conflicts (economic, ecological, socio-cultural, political, moral) most of which turn out to be ineradicable. According to Sardar, the temporal limits of postnormal times coincide with the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. The inability of the world’s “Great Powers” to take adequate measures in the aftermath of the First World War culminated in the Second World War which, in turn, wreaked its havoc on humanity. The Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union has lingered until even today, being one of the persistent vestiges of the preceding world war. Twenty-first-century political and religious terrorism and eco-terrorism have become complex issues in world politics. These countercultures have exerted a tangible impact on migrant displacement and its theoretical construction. In this sense, the question of how to articulate refugee and migrant categories, dehumanized identities, exilic and unhomely selves, follows logically from the intensity of the traumatic experience. Citing Ban Ki-moon, the former General Secretary of United Nations Organization, Sardar draws attention to the multiple crises by which our world is being hit all at once. According to Ki-moon, “we have never seen any era when we have been hit by all these multiple crises at the one time” (quoted in Sardar).

Because of all these crises, the postnormal times in which we live are dominated by chaos. The sense of chaotic disorder appears to have become the *espíritu del tiempo*, the spirit of our age of uncertainty, rapid change, realignment of power, upheaval and general loss of direction. This state of confusion has instigated millions of migrant relocations. The Boko-Haram crisis in north-eastern Nigeria, for example, led to the mass migration of the inhabitants of states, such as Borno, Kano, Yobe and Kaduna, to neighbouring states and countries. The crisis culminated in the construction of a camp for the internally displaced. To put it in Sardar’s words,

postnormal times exist in an epoch of chaos, where acceleration is the norm, predictability is rare, and small changes can lead to big consequences. Chaotic behaviour is not an uncommon phenomenon; it has always existed in our weather patterns. But it is rather unusual to see civilizations, whole societies or indeed the entire inhabitants of the globe, behaving according to the dictates of chaos theory.

The controversial manifestations of postnormality have as their most logical outcome the deconstruction of conventions and traditions. Since the traditional *modus operandi* can no longer serve as a means of self-location in the contemporary world, new approaches need to be put into theory and practice. Against the background of chaotic uncertainty, the most outstanding paradigms of chaotic self-positioning are often seen as compatible with revolutionary, terrorist or separatist models. Such countercultural structures are indispensable components of our time:

An even smaller bunch of 9/11 terrorists triggered a chain reaction that led to the ascendance of neo-conservative ideology in the US and Europe, changed the course of Iraqi, Afghani and Pakistani history, redefined the notion of security, revealed the limits of American power, and galvanized mass protests and dissent throughout the world, not to mention the millions who have been killed, maimed or made homeless (Pinstrup-Anderson and Cheng 96).

In what follows, I will explore how Bandele’s film, *Half of a Yellow Sun* responds to the above-mentioned three tenets of Sardar’s theory of postnormal times.

The Politics of Migration in African Cinema

Civil wars, political chaos, ecological revolutions, separatist agitations, ethnic conflicts and religious wars are part of the larger body of postnormality. A focus on migrant border crossing is a salient feature of some

African films (and films about Africa), such as *Hotel Rwanda*, *Blood Diamond*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Tears of the Sun* and *Somewhere in Africa: The Cries of Humanity*. These cinematic productions not only focus on a particular form of crisis, but they also explore the place of the displaced, the new, unhomely geographical location of the migrant. When Frank Rajah Arase produced his film titled *Somewhere in Africa: The Cries of Humanity* (2011), it contributed a vibrant, distinctive perspective to the larger body of films dealing with the culture of migration and postnormality. Although this cinematic narrative is not explicitly concerned with group migration (the film deliberates more on individual migration), the coups and countercoups, socio-political instability, political killings, bad governance, corruption and suffering of the peasants, provide the collective premises of being a refugee, a migrant in one's own country. The aesthetic appeal of this film lies in its plot-focused technique of narration and fast-paced action, skilful use of lighting, dance and song composition (theatrical effects) excellent editing and, above all, a storyline that envelops happenings in colonial and postcolonial African, Latin American and Asian societies.

Generally, migration cinema in Africa consists of two major categories of films. The first one includes the productions of non-African film cultures such as these of Hollywood and European cinema. Such movies are mostly concerned with migration caused by wars, crises, natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, etc. Here included are films like *Tears of the Sun*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Blood Diamond*, and other productions of "First-World" cinemas. A binding characteristic of this group of films is that while almost all of them are set in Africa and presume to be transnational, the principal actors are mostly Europeans or Americans. *Tears of the Sun*, for instance, stars Bruce Willis who facilitates the rescue of the American medical doctor and the Biafran refugees, while Leonardo Di Caprio dominates the dramatic world of *Blood Diamond*.

The second cinematic category comprises films produced by indigenous African cineastes. Nollywood and Ghanaian film industries have a large repertoire of films of migration. Their films belong to a cinematic tradition that presents migrant translocation along the well-established itinerary of escape, liberation, survival and migration. Frank Rajah Arase's *Somewhere in Africa: The Cries of Humanity* and Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* are relevant examples of this cinematic subgenre.

Migration and displacement can reasonably be considered as manifestations of the colonial heritage of postcolonial Africa. European encroachment into what would later become known as their colonies led to numerous wars that, in turn, culminated in mass expulsions of people who went into involuntary exile. Thus, for instance, Shaka, the great warrior-king of the Zulu people in present-day South Africa, who did not allow the British to access his territory and destabilize his government, was murdered and following his death, European invasions conditioned the subsequent migration of some of his chiefs to faraway lands. Furthermore, the south Nigerian town of Calabar served as a refugee asylum for those who disobeyed the law and orders of imperial Britain. In 1897 the British invasion of Oba Ovonranwen Nogbaisi's Benin, their capture of King Jaja of Opobo, the deposition and murder of Attahiru the Eleventh of the Sokoto Caliphate, the murder of Ameh Oboni of Igalla, the punishment meted out to the Uwa Kingdom in the northern part of the Delta State, Nigeria, and the extradition of Nana of Itsekiri in the same State of present-day Nigeria, attest to our claim that migration in Nigeria and Africa can certainly be regarded as a colonial heritage. Such instances of violent oppression become the preferred subject of many theatrical performances and migration films. Sam Ukala, author of the play *Iredi War*, for instance, stresses that the play is "based on the history of the 1906 uprising of the people of [the] Owa kingdom, currently in ... [the] Delta State of Nigeria, against British oppressive colonial rule as championed by Assistant District Commissioner O.S. Crewe-Read (whom the Owa called Iredi)" (6).

The socio-political conditions and cultural and economic structures in postcolonial Africa have also produced new forms of migrant displacement. The exilic practices inherited from colonial times have flourished with the numerous instances of forced migration in postcolonial African societies. One prominent African experience on forced migration is related to the ethnic conflict in Rwanda. On 6 April 1994, the plane conveying President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira was (allegedly) shot by Hutus (see Versi). This event served as a catalyst to the Rwandan genocide, which is one of the most violent and gruesome occasions of mass murder in the twentieth century. The atrocious massacre of the Tutsis by the Hutus, who overpowered them by number, led to the displacement of the Tutsis. According to Liisa Malkki, "the ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi by the Hutus led to the dislocation of the Tutsi as they fled to neighbouring countries to take refuge" (110). As a result, about 1.2 million refugees fled to neighbouring countries. Two of the above-mentioned films, *Hotel Rwanda* and *Sometimes in April*, depict the Rwandan experience in great detail.

Migration and border crossing constitute the subject matter of another production, Antoine Fuqua's *Tears of the Sun*. The plot of this film is structured around the topos of the border. In it, Lieutenant A.K. Waters (Bruce Willis) is instructed by Captain Bill Rhodes (Tom Skerritt) to help Dr Lena Fiore Kendricks (Monica Bellucci), a U.S. citizen by marriage and daughter-in-law of a U.S. Senator, leave a war-torn Nigeria following a military coup d'état, which involves the brutal murders of the president and his family. The movie tells the story of the trialsome experience of a group of displaced refugees who surmount various hurdles on their way to the Nigerian and Cameroonian border. Helped by Zee (Eamonn Walker), Slo (Nick Chinlund), Red (Cole Hauser), Lake (Johnny Messner), Silk (Charles Ingram), Doc (Paul Francis), Flea (Chad Smith) and other U.S. Navy SEAL soldiers, Lieutenant Waters finally leads the refugees, who are of Igbo descent, to Cameroon.

Crisis-triggered border crossing expands the framework of diaspora cultures and studies. Civil-war-torn Liberia, Rwanda, Mali, Sudan and Libya, terrorist-plagued Nigeria and Somalia, amongst other African countries, represent new destinations in border and migration studies. Such diasporic dimensions have, in turn, contributed valuable insights into the space of cultural interaction. The above-mentioned forms of forced migration provide the basis and criteria for our discussion of African migration cinema.

Plot Summary of Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* begins with the first Nigerian Independence Day on 1 October 1960 and concludes with the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. The film is interspersed with archival stock footage of television news broadcasts of political events in Nigeria. After completing their university education in the United Kingdom and the United States, the twin sisters Olanna (Thandie Newton) and Kainene (Anika Noni Rose) return to Nigeria. Their father is the Igbo Chief Ozobia (Zack Orji), a wealthy businessman who owns assets in Port Harcourt. Spurning an offer to marry Finance Minister Festus Okotie-Eboh, Olanna decides to move in with her lover, the "revolutionary professor" Odenigbo (Chiwetel Ejiofor), who teaches at Nsukka University. Meanwhile, Kainene takes over the family interests and pursues a career as a businesswoman, falling in love with Richard Churchill (Joseph Mawle), an English writer. At Nsukka University Olanna finds work as a lecturer in sociology and befriends Odenigbo's houseboy Ugwu (John Boyega). However, she faces hostility from Odenigbo's mother, "Mama" (Onyeka Onwenu), who distrusts the highly-educated Olanna and considers her a witch. Disapproving of her son's relationship with Olanna, "Mama" plies Odenigbo with alcohol and arranges for her servant Amala (Susan Wokoma) to have a one-night stand with him. A devastated Olanna wants to break off the relationship but her Aunt Ifeka (Gloria Young) convinces her to return to Nsukka.

Despite having a one-night stand with Richard, Olanna and Odenigbo reconcile and agree to raise Amala's infant daughter as their own child. The child is named Chiamaka but they call her "Baby." After falling out with Kainene, Richard returns to London. While waiting at the airport, he witnesses northern Nigerian soldiers slaughtering Igbo civilians in the build-up to the Nigerian Civil War. Meanwhile, Olanna is caught up in a race riot and barely escapes with her life. As ethnic tensions build up, Olanna and her family flee Kano and resettle in Abba in Biafra. After reconciling with "Mama," Olanna decides to remain in Nigeria and marry Odenigbo.

While Biafra declares independence, Richard returns from London to work with his lover Kainene, who has become a war profiteer importing arms to Biafra. The fighting forces Olanna and her family to evacuate to Umuahia. During the wedding reception Olanna and her family narrowly escape a Nigerian bombing raid. As the civil war drags on, Olanna and her family relocate to a refugee camp where she reunites with her sister Kainene, who has experienced a change of heart and helps to run the refugee camp. Ugwu is later conscripted as a Biafran child soldier. As time passes by, Olanna and Odenigbo befriend Kainene and Richard. With the refugee camp running low on supplies due to the civil war, Kainene decides to travel into Nigerian territory in order to trade with local peasants despite Odenigbo's warnings. Several days pass by and Kainene fails to return. While Olanna and Richard fail to find Kainene, they are relieved to learn that Ugwu has survived the war and welcome him back to the family. Following the defeat of Biafra, Richard continues his search for Kainene while Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu and "Baby" rebuild their lives. The postscript mentions that Kainene

was never found while Richard moves back to Nsukka. Olanna and Odenigbo remain married for nearly fifty years while Ugwu becomes a writer. Their daughter Chiamaka (aka “Baby”) becomes a medical doctor.

Politics of Migration in *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Nigerian independence from British colonial rule, which took place on 1 October 1960, was experienced as a controversial event. Geopolitical considerations, corruption, partiality and the quest for revolutionary change were germane to the events that led to the armed conflict between the Nigerian federal government and the Biafran troops, represented in the movie. Odenigbo, who is a lecturer at Nsukka University of Nigeria, is a man who is vexed by the history of Nigeria. He is not only critical of the “forced marriage” called Nigeria,¹ he also deconstructs the paradigm of black African inferiority sustained by white European models of denigration. This is certainly evident in his statement below:

Odenigbo: The only identity for an African is his tribe. I am Nigerian because the white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity and I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different from white as humanly as possible. (Bande)

Odenigbo is a revolutionary who feels the plight of his people, the Igbos. He believes that the Igbo massacre in the north is an unwelcome development. He even maintains that the Igbos have been placed at the margins of Nigerian politics and everyday life since the execution of the second coup by the northern elements. *Half of a Yellow Sun* attests to Jürgen Habermas’s suggestion that “the so-called refugee crisis points to the current political climate, the *crisis of legitimation* of capitalism and Western politics rather than as a humanitarian issue” (quoted in Lakraa 2). Odenigbo sees the Nigerian soldier as a northerner and the northerner as the true enemy of the Biafran people. One of the most critical scenes in the film is the entry of northern-led Nigerian troops into an airport, under Captain Dutse’s command. The latter kills all prospective passengers and workers of Igbo descent at the airport.

Drunk, Odenigbo lambasts the Yoruba people for not protecting his people from the irate northern elements in Yoruba towns such as Lagos. He speaks harshly to Miss Adebayo who is ready to leave Enugu for Lagos since an impending war looms. Miss Adebayo foresees chaos in the eastern region, as northern Nigeria had drawn the battle line with the massacre of innocent Igbos. To her, migrating to her home is the only way in which she can ensure her own safety. The northerners’ dislike of the Igbo people is implied in the film text. A Hausa man, who does not know that Olanna is Igbo, expresses his discontentment and hate of her people. He portrays it in the statement below:

Hausa Man: The Igbo vice-chancellor at the University of Lagos had been removed. The problem with the Igbo people is, they want to control everything in this country. Everything. They own all the shops and control the civil service, even the police... (Bande)

The above statement summarizes the usual northern Nigerian attitudes to the indigenous people of eastern Nigeria. *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts the Igbo people as enterprising, accommodating and, above all, successful in all endeavours. During the First Nigerian Republic, for instance, the Igbo dominated the civil service, even in the northern parts of the country. Aware of the high level of illiteracy and economic failure of northern Nigeria, they relocated to greener pastures and attempted to dominate the region. The sense of being dominated by a particular, even smaller ethnic group in one’s own land, coupled with the massacre of the northern elites (Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Sir Ahmadu Bello) during the coup led by eastern military officers (Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Major Adewale Ademoyega, a westerner) on 15 January 1966, formed the basis for the chaos in the north, which led to the deaths of hundreds and perhaps thousands of Igbo people in the region. In fact, these tragic events would later galvanize the run-up to the civil war dramatized in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The call for secession came as a result of the dehumanization of the Igbo by the northerners in a culture of “tribal subjugation” and resistance to “otherness.” This situation helps explain why the inhabitants of the eastern and northern regions displayed such outrageous attitudes of mutual disregard.

¹ The metaphor refers to the compulsory unification of southern and northern Nigeria which was meant to serve British imperial interests. For further reference, see <http://kingdomnewsng.com/articles/342-the-forced-marriage-of-nigeria-lagos-the-original-lady-of-means>.

It is understandable, then, that the economic reasons for the Biafran (Igbo) migration to northern Nigeria in the movie evolve into factors for their forced displacement. Even after it, Biafra is still not safe since the federal troops continue to push further east. Aba has fallen, therefore, it is no longer safe for Odenigbo and the Biafrans to stand their position. However, they continue to fight in an attempt to demonstrate that separation from Nigeria is the only solution to their dependence. Odenigbo warns “Mama” that they need to flee Aba and relocate to Umuahia, which is one of the remaining strongholds of Biafra. “Mama” refuses. She does not want to leave her ancestral home for any other place for fear of losing her sense of stability. Stubborn and strong-willed, as we first see her, she is portrayed as a powerful and relentless mother. Despite being warned by Odenigbo’s cousin that the federal troops are close, she is unwilling to depart from the place. Odenigbo, then, is faced with the dilemma of whether he should continue his flight and leave his beloved mother behind; or stay behind to protect her and face the wrath of the federal troops. Even the sound of the approaching battle fails to persuade “Mama” to leave. Being too old and frail to embark upon such a long journey, she is bent on staying back, taking care of the house as she awaits the return of her children. Unfortunately, “Mama’s” unwillingness to leave leads to her death and Odenigbo has to cross the military border between Umuahia and Aba to bury her body. Actually, Odenigbo’s and his family’s displacement is not a precedent in the family history. On another occasion they have to flee Nsukka where Odenigbo works as a university lecturer, for Aba.

Being a refugee “at home” is one of the most tangible consequences of African military instability. Odenigbo and his Biafran cohorts are refugees within the borders of their own ethnic territory, Biafra, fleeing from one indigenous geographical location in Biafra to another. This internal disintegration is symptomatic of the newly formed country’s lack of capacity to bring the war it wages to a victorious end. In fact, even children are conscripted into the Biafran army. Ugwu, Odenigbo and Olanna’s house-servant is one of these child soldiers.

Conscription of child soldiers is a defining military trait of postcolonial African societies. Ascribing military roles to children is yet another unwholesome “product” of the postnormal condition, which can be traced back to the Sierra Leonean war. The problematic issue of child conscription is a subject frequently addressed in African cinema (in films like the already mentioned *Blood Diamond*, for example). Usually, child recruitment becomes necessary when the fighting camps lack soldiers. What is more, most of the children are taken from refugee camps where numerous abnormal practices are said to have been maintained. Some of those abnormal cultural “habits” stem from the inhumane treatment of the refugees by their hosts. As Hayette Lakraa points out in his article “Im/Mobility, Power, and In/Visible Refugees,” “many refugees seem to have developed mechanisms of resistance to fight back against the scourge of systemic violence by burning their fingerprints, sewing their lips together in protest, going on hunger strikes, and seeking refuge in sanctuary places, such as in churches” (3). Such instances of violence are not infrequent occurrences in African refugee history which abounds in cases of rape of female refugees by peacekeeping troops. Some occasions have been reported in Nigeria, where, for example, sex was offered in exchange for food between workers, soldiers and refugees in the Internally Displaced Persons Camps established to provide shelter to the survivors of Boko-Haram terrorism in north eastern Nigeria. To sum up, the traumatic experience of forced migration obviously leaves its imprint on migrant identity and stamps it with a sense of dehumanization and fear.

In the movie, Olanna fears the unknown. After her mother-in-law’s death, she anticipates the next victims. The war transforms Olanna, a woman born to a well-off family, into a self-sufficient person, who even learns how to sew her torn clothes. The following quote points further to her daily worries:

Olanna: Why are you using the kerosene stove? Are you stupid? Haven’t I told you to save our kerosene? Do you know how much kerosene costs? Go outside and light the firewood. (Bande)

Here Olanna scolds Ugwu for cooking on the kerosene stove instead of burning firewood.

Running for their lives, Odenigbo and his family leave Umuahia for the refugee camp. However, they fail to find a hiding place for themselves even there. The family suffers depression, stress and hunger. In the meantime, Olanna gets ready for her wedding to Odenigbo but is unable to get fresh flowers. When the wedding finally takes place, the ceremony is accompanied by shell explosions, gun shots and bombings. Odenigbo and Olanna, well dressed in suit and gown, hold “Baby,” who acts as a little bride, and walk from the church

to the little sitting room which is prepared to welcome the guests for their reception. The Disc Jockey changes the wedding song to the Biafran anthem. Odenigbo and Olanna are about to cut the wedding cake when bombs thrown by federal troops explode by the window.

As in Faqua's *Tears of the Sun*, the military borderline between Nigeria and Cameroon serves as a way of escape for the people of Biafra. In *Tears of the Sun*, Azuka, the only surviving member of the assassinated president, joins other Biafra refugees who are led to safety from the shackles of the Nigerian rebels to Cameroon. *Half of a Yellow Sun* reworks this same situation when Olanna's mother requests her daughter to leave Odenigbo with her family in an organized flight to Cameroon.

Olanna's Mother: Your father and I have finalized plans. We have gotten someone who will take us to Cameroon and get us a flight from there to London. We have paid for four places. (Bande)

The four places are meant for Olanna, her sister Kainene, her father Chief Ozobia and her mother. They are all privileged people in their society. It follows from this that it is the underprivileged members of society (peasants, workers and other marginal groups) that bear the brunt of wars caused by the bourgeois classes. Chief Ozobia and his family join a group of other asylum seekers of similar social status on their way to nearby countries or to Europe and the Americas. Asylum seeking, a characteristic feature of migration, is one of the painful problems discussed in the film. Major General Ojukwu, who leads the secessionist group in Nigeria, seeks political asylum in Ivory Coast while Major General Phillips Effiong, his deputy, surrenders to Major General Yakubu Gowon of the Nigerian government. Major General Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, a senior military officer, is firmly convinced of the effectiveness of asylum-seeking. Granting asylum rights turns out to be a compelling solution to migrant instability for various reasons. Refugees like Ojukwu, for instance, can benefit from protection in cases of political persecution. Threatened with arrest by the Nigerian federal government for war crimes, he seems to have no other choice left.

Technically, the movie makes use of a variety of means to communicate its message to the audience effectively. The choice of adequate costumes, for instance, including uniforms from the 1960s worn by the Nigerian military under Captain Dutse's command, lend vibrant realism to the events presented. Clothes worn by people in the late 1960s and the early 1970s are also aptly selected. The historical setting is made complete by old model Mercedes Benz cars, the usual property of the middle class to which the protagonist Odenigbo belongs. In addition, Odenigbo and Olanna's wedding cake, an amorphous piece of food lacking aesthetic appeal, is carefully designed to capture the culture of the times. Nigeria's technological advancement at the time of the civil war is also accurately represented by means of a turntable. Played by the disc jockey in Odenigbo's wedding, this device likewise operates as a cultural marker of class status, as only members of the upper middle class could afford it. According to *Nollywood Reinvented*, films like *Half of a Yellow Sun* "buil[d] on amazing sets" (*Nollywood*). The publication's reviewers commend the filmmaker's creative choice of a setting that reflects the historical context of the filmed events.

Conclusion

With its growing number of productions on migration, exile, displacement and borders, migration cinema has already established its significance as a genre in African cinematography. Having been popularized by African filmmakers for more than two decades, this cinematic mode has most certainly emerged as a meaningful response to the postnormal conditions characteristic of postcolonial and postmodern African societies. Films concerned with the issue of migration include *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Somewhere in Africa: The Cries of Humanity*, *Hotel Rwanda*, *Sometimes in April* and *Blood Diamond*. They project the psychological, physical, emotional and mental challenges faced by migrants (and forced migrants, in particular) in war-torn geographical areas. Cinematic renditions of complexities, contradictions and diverse forms of chaos shape, and are being shaped, by the processes of voluntary and involuntary migration in Africa, thus stressing the importance of questions of military subalternity, refugeeism and displacement in that part of the world.

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