In the Shadow of Biafra: The Construction of War Memory in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's

HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

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Abstract

This thesis presents a complete and sustained analysis of Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). While there are many studies on the novel, critics often disagree on issues most central to it, or limit their analysis so that treatment of a topic as broad as ‘memory’ remains unsatisfactory. This thesis analyses the construction of war memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by dissecting ‘memory’ into four main components: trauma, nationalism vis-à-vis tribalism, gender, and storytelling. It argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* articulates a chronicle of the suffering of the Igbo people in the Biafra War, situating it in history in order to make sense of the present and provide hope for the future. At the same time, the novel’s lack of closure points to a spectre of contemporary Biafran nationalism. The novel is an attempt at a ‘people’s history’, broadening the memory of the war through changing parameters of gender and class. The metatextual aspect of the novel links the individualised narration of the war to a broader chronicle of Biafra, bearing witness to the conflict as a whole. All of the novel’s themes are projected into a ‘beyond’, linking the text to a potential future Nigeria. A problematic aspect of the novel is its underrepresentation of non-Igbo minorities in Biafra. Despite this flaw, through its broadening of the memory of Biafra, *Half of a Yellow Sun* implicitly proposes a form of nationalism which pays attention to differences of gender and class.

**Keywords:** Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nigeria, Biafra War, trauma, nationalism, authorship, memory.
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“For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it must always be heard.” – James Baldwin

Introduction

One of the most profound and lasting effects of colonialism is the tensions it caused by fabricating national borders which arbitrarily grouped together diverse ethnic communities. Nigeria is perhaps the most well-known example of this grouping: Matthew Lange and Andrew Dawson estimate that this country combined around 300 linguistic groups into one state (789). This grouping makes it easier for the colonisers (in this case, the British) to rule, as internal division weakens the colonised country – a phenomenon which is popularly described as a policy of “divide and rule” (Coleman 319, cf. Lloyd 3-5). This division is often seen to plunge countries into devastating civil wars. Such conflicts leave traumatic indentations on a country’s collective memory. Literature is often considered to be a carrier of national memory, as will be elaborated upon in chapter 1. This thesis will explore how the Biafra War in Nigeria (1967-1970), a particularly fierce and well-documented conflict, is remembered in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s popular second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006).

An important facet to consider in a discussion of memory is the role of nationalism. Franz Fanon, one of the earliest postcolonial theorists, outlined how heterogeneous groups of people could be unified in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961, a time when many African countries had just become independent, and others were about to. Fanon discusses the desire of colonised peoples to search for an ‘originary’ or pre-colonial identity. He argues that a vital part of the colonialist narrative is to distort the past of the colonised peoples, making claims of “pre-colonial barbarism”. In response to this, native intellectuals – referring to those that are part of a western educated class in the colonised country – turn to researching ancient African
civilisations, to test and challenge these assertions. This claim to a past culture, Fanon states, has the potential to “rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture” (210). A national culture legitimises a people’s existence and serves as a catalyst for anti-colonial resistance, providing hope for a brighter future in which the nation attains self-determination. Fanon states that native intellectuals focused not on “national” pasts specifically, but on African history more generally (216). This makes sense, as the vast majority of the African peoples were being colonised, thus the uplifting of the black race moved beyond single countries – furthermore, the ‘nation’ was an imposed European construct. However, Fanon argues, the natives who wished to inherit this past found that culture is heavily contingent on location. He states that geographical position and the economic ties of different regions outweigh collective cultural sentiment; in other words, many people feel more indebted to the state than to the continent. This then gives rise to a nationally oriented sense of ‘culture’ (216). As a result, a large amount of people in colonised countries are able to depart from the western culture that has been imposed on them, and are able to unite against the colonisers under the umbrella of a national identity.

However, though critics have spent much time discussing the rise of nationalism in colonial states and its role in anti-colonial resistance (cf. Anderson, which will be discussed in chapter 1), what is less often explored is how a strong attachment to tribalism complicates this sense of national attachment. This is not to say that nationalism and tribalism are necessarily opposing forces; rather, they should be seen as two forms of sentiment which, at various points, mingle, co-exist and compete. James Coleman, author of *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, argues that, even while nationalism was strongly on the rise during the colonial era, tribalism was still integral to many peoples’ sense of identity and political views, which lead to significant differences and disagreements within nationalist movements (320). This becomes especially
apparent after the state has become independent and the future direction it will take is fully in the hands of its people, who must now account for these differences and learn to cooperate. The arbitrary boundaries put in place during the colonial era result in a renewed, increasing risk of civil violence, as tribalist sentiment often outweights a fabricated national attachment.

In Nigeria, the conflict between one ethnic group, the Igbo, and the rest of the nation culminated in the Biafra War, starting in 1967 – just seven years after Nigeria had attained independence. The Igbo people had been one of the three biggest ethnic groups to be subsumed into Nigeria, along with the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba peoples (see Appendix 1 for an illustration). Coleman observes that out of these three groups, the Igbo had fundamentally different political views. This was for a large part caused by their relatively isolated geographical location in the heavily forested Eastern region, which ensured a separate development from the other tribes. As a result, the Igbo had a much larger emphasis on the individual and personal achievement, as opposed to the centralised political structures often found in other areas (28). Such differing views gave rise to strong tensions between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria in the postcolonial era. In January 1966, a coup overthrew the existing government, after which an Igbo man became the head of Nigeria’s first military government. In this coup, several Northern ministers and officers were killed, whereas only one of the casualties was Igbo. This led to allegations that it was essentially an Igbo coup, which intensified anti-Igbo sentiment. A counter coup soon followed in which several Eastern Nigerians, primarily Igbos, were killed, and a Northerner was put in power. Soon after this followed riots in which many Easterners who lived in the North were killed. This drove over a million refugees to the East, while many “non-Easterners” were expelled from the Eastern region. At the height of these tensions, Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu proclaimed the independent state of Biafra in the Eastern region (see Appendix 2 for an illustration). This plunged Nigeria into a civil war, which lasted
until the Biafran forces were defeated by the Nigerian militia in 1970, after two million lives had been lost (Nwankwo 10-12).

A civil conflict of this scale leaves its imprint on a country’s history and identity. Literature, as a suitable medium to engage with culture, is a prominent site where such traumatic events can be negotiated. It is noteworthy that a number of historical novels from African countries take a civil war as their starting point – another example from a different country being *The Orchard of Lost Souls* (2011) by Somalian-British writer Nadifa Mohamed. Eleni Coundouriotis states that every major Nigerian writer has written on the Biafra war (98). Aminatta Forna, a writer from Sierra Leone – which also faced a civil conflict – states: “What ultimately happened is that my country had a war. I think it would be extraordinary, as a writer, not to want to write about that.” (“Aminatta Forna.”). Such fictional narratives about civil wars are part of a “historical project”, as Coundouriotis terms it, which are meant to process the trauma from the events (12). She notes how the Nigerian government has repressed public commemoration of the war, which has meant that most of the discourse around it is found in the large corpus of literature on the topic (98). The role of literature in processing the trauma of civil wars has attracted relatively little attention within postcolonial studies, which is remarkable when considering how rampant civil strife was – and still is – in many postcolonial states.

One novel which has attracted a good amount of scholarly attention is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Adichie stated that the Biafra War “is still talked about, still a potent political issue. But I find that it is mostly talked about in uninformed and unimaginative ways.” (Adichie, “The Story.”). Adichie herself did not experience the Biafra War, as she was born several years after it ended. However, in her comments on why she wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie stated that she wanted to write about the war because she “grew up in the shadow of Biafra”, and “many of the issues that led to the war are still unresolved in
Nigeria today” (Adichie, “The Story.”). *Half of a Yellow Sun*, then, is Adichie’s project to recover the memory of the war. The novel is rich and negotiates the conflict through fictionalised accounts and allegory. While there are many studies on the novel, critics often disagree on issues most central to the novel, or limit their analysis in such a way that their treatment of a topic as broad as the recovery of war memory remains unsatisfactory. A full consideration of the novel in all its complexity is required. Therefore, the question at the heart of this thesis is: How does *Half of a Yellow Sun* construct a memory of the Biafra War?

Eleni Coundouriotis, faculty fellow at the University of Connecticut’s Human Rights department, wrote *The People’s Right to the Novel: War Fiction in the Postcolony*. In this book, she traces a literary history of the war novel in Africa, stating that it has become the most dominant literary theme in works about the continent read outside of it. She stresses that the war novel “brings to the fore the violence of imperialism and its aftermath [and] displays the weakness of the nation state and its pull toward social disintegration” (1). This second part applies most strongly to civil war literature. Though Coundouriotis’s book opened up a study of the war novel as a critical genre in African literature, it does not devote explicit attention to cultural memory or trauma studies. The role of memory is vital to consider in understanding the role of the civil war novel in contemporary African fiction, as will be illustrated throughout this thesis. The concept of cultural memory is deeply embedded within postcolonial studies: Fanon’s discussion of a pre-colonial identity hinted in the direction of what would today fall under cultural memory studies. The concepts of cultural memory and trauma will be defined in chapter 1.

This thesis aims to provide a complete and sustained analysis of how *Half of a Yellow Sun* attempts to come to terms with the Biafra War and provide hope for a future of Nigeria. The first chapter will outline the theoretical and contextual background to this study, providing an
overview of the history of nationalism and its role in Nigeria, as well as the complicating factor of tribalism, and lastly an explanation of cultural memory and trauma studies. The remaining chapters will present an analysis of the construction of memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by dissecting ‘memory’ into four main components: trauma, nationalism vis-à-vis tribalism, gender roles, and storytelling and the implications of authorship. Although these themes will be discussed separately at first, the later chapters in this thesis will reveal how they intertwine.

Chapter 2 provides an interpretation of the role of trauma and nationalism in the novel, arguing that literary representation of these themes is inherently political. Chapter 3 presents an interpretation of the novel’s feminist revisionist character, showing that its domestic genre and its attempt to articulate a ‘people’s history’ broadens the memory of the war. Chapter 4 discusses the role of authorship in the novel, arguing that all of the main themes – trauma, nationalism/tribalism, and a people’s history – intertwine in the character of Ugwu and his ‘text within the text’. Though these chapters will discuss purely how these themes appear within the novel, a distinction needs to be made between what is visible in the novel, and the broader implications of its literary project to the country. Therefore, this thesis will conclude by arguing that all of the themes are projected into a ‘beyond’, bridging the history of the war with contemporary Nigeria. As will be illustrated, *Half of a Yellow Sun* engages with the past in order to make sense of the present, constructing a memory of the war in which the definition of the ‘nation’ is broadened, which provides hope for a more democratic future for Nigeria.
Chapter 1: Theoretical and Contextual Framework

Before turning to an analysis of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, it is important to elaborate on the key concepts at the heart of this thesis. The first section of this chapter outlines the specific historical processes which led to the contemporary understanding of ‘nationalism’, how it was introduced in colonial states, and what role it played in Nigeria during the colonial and postcolonial era. It also illustrates how nationalism often competes with strong tribalist sentiment. The second section explains the paradigmatic significance of trauma studies and cultural memory studies, both of which this thesis draws heavily from.

Benedict Anderson outlines how nationalist consciousness arose in European nation states in the late fifteenth century. Latin had for a long time been the main language of print; not any distinct national languages, as is normal today. During the Reformation, however, Luther created a mass religious readership in German when he printed his theses in the language. Protestant groups in other countries quickly followed with large-scale printing of religious propaganda, which would contribute significantly to an emergence of vernacular print-markets (39-40). Additionally, Latin had never had universal political status, and after the fall of the Western Empire, the fragmentary nature of western Europe ensured that it remained that way, as no sovereign could monopolise it and make it his and only his language of state. Thus, gradually, particular vernaculars began to function as administrative languages (41). The choice of an administrative language was not driven by any desire to systemically impose the language on the populations. However, these vernaculars did become “languages-of-power”, and gained prestige as a result (42). This paved the way for them to become national languages at later points in time.

Anderson argues that the advent of mass printing of literature created a need for nationwide print languages. These were usually derived of the vernacular which had risen to language-
of-power. Print languages created unified fields of communication and exchange among readers, which meant that readers existing within particular language “fields” became aware of the other readers who existed within that field. This resulted in the creation of “imagined communities”, as Anderson terms it (43-44). Furthermore, in the long run, these fixed languages also helped to establish a connection with the past, because texts written by seventeenth-century writers are accessible to their descendants today. Thus, print languages laid the basis for various nationalisms, which replaced the old imagined community of “Christendom”, effectively erasing this legacy of the Roman Empire (45).

Timothy Brennan foregrounds the role of imperial conquest in the rise of nationalism. Imperialist countries were not really able to formulate their nationalist aspirations, he states, until markets in colonial territories “motivated the construction of the nation-state at home” (59). Elleke Boehmer argues in a similar vein, stating that nationalism in Britain had traditionally been shaped in opposition to an ‘Other’ (31). By the late seventeenth century, this ‘Other’ was Catholic Europe (31), but when, as stated above, the idea of the community of Christendom faded, and western European states started engaging in imperial conquest, British identity became increasingly defined in contrast to the colonised state. Thus, apart from the rise of vernacular print markets and national languages in a fragmented western Europe, the construction of large Empires overseas would later become a prime contributor to the formulation of national identity in Britain as well as in other countries.

In many colonised states, the rise of nationalism was primarily a reactionary phenomenon, serving as a catalyst for anti-colonial unification. Nigeria is a well-researched country when it comes to the rise of nationalism. James Coleman argues that the primary cause of the rise of nationalism in colonial states was the western educated native intelligentsia. Despite the fact that by the early 1950s, the educated, English-speaking minority of Nigeria constituted
only about 6 per cent of the population, the British education systems nonetheless had a large impact on the rise of nationalism in Nigeria (141). The education systems often reinforced African inferiority in its teachings, and attaining a diploma often did not help Nigerians in attaining positions of responsibility – such as in the technical and administrative branches of the civil service, or in commercial or industrial enterprises. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that Nigerians had scarce opportunities to get an education at all (Coleman 120-121).

Dissatisfaction with the education system was a major cause for protest and the beginnings of nationalist movements.¹

Coleman distinguishes between “personal grievances”, which may result in minor uprisings or local boycotts, and “national grievances”, which are cast in collective terms to relate to the whole of the country and subsume all individual grievances (88). National grievances create uprisings of larger scales and are much less easily alleviated. For these reasons, nationalist leaders often articulated grievances in nationalist terms. These nationalist leaders were often from the educated class (Coleman 141). As a result, they had access to knowledge of western models of nationalism, which brought European national histories into the consciousness of the native intelligentsia (Anderson 116). These intellectuals then started looking for their own national histories, as outlined in the introduction (cf. Fanon). Thus, in a fashion typical of colonial mimicry, these nationalist leaders applied their understanding of European nationalism, to their own history. This enabled them to mobilise people in a relatively unified resistance effort.² ³

¹ Coleman outlines other contributing factors, such as frustrations with Christian missionaries, or the British economic systems which favoured Europeans over Africans. As these factors do not explicitly contribute to the overall argument and serve mainly to account for the rise of nationalism in Nigeria, they are of no further relevance to this thesis. The reader is referred to Coleman 1960 for further reading on this.
² “Mimicry” essentially refers to a copying of the behaviour of the coloniser, which is sometimes used in such a manner that it subverts the colonialist project; as it does in this case. See Bhabha 1990 for a full definition.
³ Also noteworthy is that, after the first World War, the “nation” had become the single legitimate political norm on the international stage, so that even imperial powers “came dressed in a national costume rather than an imperial
Despite the success of the nationalist model in attaining independence for many African states, tribalism is a problematising factor. In postcolonial theory, the role of tribalism is often overlooked. Even Franz Fanon, in his essay “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, focuses on the complicating factor of class distinctions – the upper class keeping neo-colonial economic systems in place to exploit the masses – rather than tribal attachment. “Tribalism” denotes a sense of attachment to members of the same tribal origin (“Tribalism” Def. b.), regardless of the geographical distance between groups with these same origins. Even during the colonial era, as the nationalist movements were at their height, tribalism complicated attempts to unified resistance. Coleman states that there were varied tribal responses to western economic structures, as each tribe had different attitudes towards upward social mobility and economic prosperity. Some tribes benefited from colonial economic structures, while others fiercely opposed them. This difference in attitudes was intensified by the fact that several Nigerian groups had had contact with western economic systems for centuries. Such tribal variations were significant, as they were responsible for tensions within the nationalist movement (64-65). Moreover, the timing and impact of western education differed across various regions: the North lagged behind significantly compared to the South, who were more educated (132). Especially the Yoruba – one of the three biggest ethnic groups, as mentioned in the introduction – had a major lead in education. However, while the Igbo also had a significant advantage over the North in terms of education, they were often underrepresented in professional ranks (143). These inequalities would contribute to competitive tensions among tribes, and a heightened degree of tribal consciousness.4

4 Apart from tribalism, regionalism was also an important factor in the divisions among the Nigerian peoples. Coleman outlines how the British encouraged “regional thinking” in Nigeria: in the 1930s they divided the country in
The concept of cultural memory holds a significant place in many diverse scholarly fields – notably history and cultural studies, but also philosophy, art, and literary and media studies. Astrid Erll points out that a rapid growth in publications concerning cultural memory can be observed since the late 1980s (1). Erll broadly defines cultural memory as referring to “the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts”, or how individuals, groups, and the nation as a whole ‘remember’ their “invented traditions” or myths (Erll 2). Jeanette Rodríguez and Ted Fortier make a distinction between cultural memory at the personal level and at the collective level: personally, an individual may recover or recollect their cultural memory through crisis; collectively, individuals may recover their cultural memory through expressions such as songs, rituals, stories, etc. (xii). Cultural memory is significant to this thesis because it is an illustration of the habit humans have to make meaning, and specifically attribute meaning to past events (1; cf. Erll 4). This thesis explores how *Half of a Yellow Sun* links individual memory and trauma to collective memory of the war, and how the novel aims to alter this memory.

Literature is a suitable medium to engage with culture, as individual as well as collective experiences and crises can be explored through textual representations. As outlined by Brennan, the novel is a prominent site where a ‘collective’ or ‘national’ memory can be constructed (49-56), not least because narrative techniques provide insight into individuals’ communal experiences and recollection of collective events. Two useful concepts to mention are those of “portable monuments” and “people’s history”, coined by Ann Rigney and Raphael Samuel respectively. Portable monuments are memorials which are not tied to a particular spatial location and can be carried over to new situations. Literary works are often considered “carriers and
shapers” of cultural memory (Rigney 383, cf. Janssen 5). This thesis will consider how *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be seen to carry and shape the memory of the Biafra War, revealing its impact on the present.

A “people’s history” refers to the project of broadening the subject matter of history and bringing it closer to ‘the people’. A people’s history is considered “oppositional” to the state’s national ideology, as it offers an alternative to the static and often elite history taught in schools (Samuel xvi). ‘Elite’ here refers to middle-class, masculine, and heterosexual representations, ignoring the specificities of alternative experiences. Samuel states that people’s histories have been concerned with “the recovery of subjective experience” by looking at every day life (xviii). Lastly, people’s histories are an attempt to write a “history from below” (xv). To summarise: a people’s history looks to the domestic, focusing on the particular experiences of varied groups which are often ignored in ‘state’ history. This changes history from a static discipline to a site of humanitarian discourse. To write a history from below opens up the possibility for a democratic future for the nation; a people’s history therefore has important political implications. Although literary works in themselves are not strictly people’s histories, they offer the possibility to negotiate the domestic and every day life and articulate the potential for a future of the nation. Therefore, throughout this thesis, whenever *Half of a Yellow Sun* is referred to as a ‘people’s history’, this should be taken to signify a negotiation of the domestic novel as a site to articulate the subject matter of a people’s history, rather than a faulty classification of the novel.

Trauma studies are crucial in analysing cultural memory is trauma studies, as a nation’s collective identity is often radically transformed through crises (cf. Alexander, cited below). ‘Trauma’ is a slippery term and escapes easy definition. It is commonly defined as a condition which resulted from some event or series of events that left a profound emotional shock, which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “is repressed and remains unhealed” (“Trauma.”
In her introduction to literary trauma studies, Elissa Marder states that the groundwork in trauma studies has insisted on “the importance of finding new ways to acknowledge the impact of events that can only be known belatedly and of listening to the power of experiences that can only be expressed indirectly” (2). There are two important points in this statement. First off, “trauma” cannot easily be located in a moment of time: Cathy Caruth, one of the founding critics of trauma studies, argues that the impact of traumatic events lies in their refusal to be located in time, “in [their] insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (9). The experience of the traumatic event remains with the subject, haunting them while blurring the distinction between past and present.

Secondly, the experience of trauma poses a challenge of expression, which can only be dealt with through testimony. Caruth argues that, although trauma opens up a breach in experience and understanding, this also opens up new possibilities of experience and modes of understanding. The repetitive and haunting nature of the traumatic event compels the subject to survive the trauma by bearing witness to it. She argues that coming to terms with trauma “can only take place through the listening of another” (10-11). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub write about “testimony”, the act of bearing witness and giving narrative form to traumatic events. The impact and aftermath of historical traumas should be confronted by considering how artists respond to them in language. Artistic representations show how traumatic consequences have not just not disappeared, but are also “still evolving” (xiv). Trauma is defined anew in each next generation. Felman argues that bearing witness through authorship entails taking up the first person, and the responsibility of relating the events (3). She argues that testimony must go beyond individual experience because others must hear and tell the tale (3). The event must be given narrative form so that it may be passed on, which is what Adichie achieves with *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Marder states that Felman “shows that in opening ourselves to (...) voices from the
past that live in the present, we may also be able to open ourselves to the possibility of a future that might escape being overly determined by (...) the (unwitting) traumatic repetitions of its (unknown) traumatic past” (4). Indeed, as will be illustrated in this thesis, *Half of a Yellow Sun* opens up the possibility of a future, more democratic Nigeria.

Especially significant to this thesis is the notion of a “collective” or cultural trauma. Jeffrey Alexander states that “a cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness”, leaving a permanent imprint on their memories and future identity (1). A question that must be asked in response to this, especially when considering the context of civil wars, is: *whose* trauma? All sides suffer losses in a conflict and are marked to some degree by the event. However, in the example of the Biafran war, the mass slaughtering of Igbo people just before Biafra’s secession is also part of their collective trauma left by the war. Moreover, the Biafrans lost the war with many more losses. Therefore, the group which collectively felt the greatest impact as a result of the fighting was the Igbo people, not the whole of Nigeria. For this reason, it is important to consider who is given representation in civil war literature. This representation is inherently political, as will be argued in chapter 2.
Chapter 2: Whose Memory? The Politics of Trauma and Ethnic Representation

This chapter presents an analysis of trauma and nationalism vis-à-vis tribalism in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Although the two themes could have been discussed separately, they overlap significantly in their implications for the politics of representation. As will be illustrated, *Half of a Yellow Sun* provides readers with a representation of traumatic events and their after-effects, showing the belated experiencing of trauma. Additionally, the novel posits writing as a means to come to terms with these events, and illustrates that having a person bear witness to one’s stories is important in processing trauma. Secondly, the interplay between tribalism and nationalism is visible throughout the novel, showing their complex relationship. Despite what critics have previously argued, this thesis rejects a reading of the novel as celebrating a sense of nationalism along ethnic lines. However, the novel does articulate a distinctly Biafran perspective on the war, represented by characters’ individual trauma. This chapter will focus on individual trauma, as opposed to collective trauma, which has larger implications for the national identity. A discussion of trauma on the individual level is required, however, as the novel makes use of allegory to present the larger implications of individual trauma to the national trauma. The role of collective trauma and the link between individual and collective trauma will be discussed in chapter 4.

Before turning to the analysis, an overview of the formal features of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is in order. The novel is composed of four parts, the first and third of which take place in the “early sixties”, and the other two in the “late sixties” of the twentieth century. The exact years are not explicitly mentioned. The parts set in the early sixties are concerned with introducing the characters of the novel to the reader – and also often to each other – and with the ethnic tensions that led up to the Biafra War in 1967. For instance, the first part informs the reader that Igbo people were not allowed to attend schools in the Nigerian North (Adichie 38). The parts which
take place in the late sixties are concerned with the mass killings of Igbo people in the North, the coups which would lead to Biafra’s secession, and the war itself, up until Biafra’s surrender.

The setting in which the story takes place is largely the Igbo heartland, although a few scenes take place in the north of Nigeria – especially when characters witness the mass killings of Igbo people in the Northern region in 1966. Lagos, then the national capital of Nigeria (Akpome 2013b 32), is also often mentioned – although none of the novel’s action takes place there. The focus of the novel is largely domestic; the war only affects the characters indirectly, as they have to flee their hometowns. The exception to this is Ugwu, a houseboy who is forcefully conscripted into the Biafran Army, after which a small part of the novel is narrated from the war front. Apart from Ugwu, there are four other characters most central to the story: Odenigbo, Ugwu’s master, a professor at Nsukka University who is a firm believer in tribalism and Biafran secession; Olanna, a young woman who, despite disapproval from her family, goes to live with and later marry Odenigbo; Kainene, Olanna’s twin sister who manages her family business in Port Harcourt; and Richard, an English writer with a fascination for Igbo culture who gets together with Kainene. Other characters which appear in the argumentation more than once are Odenigbo’s academic friends, such as the poet Okeoma, Professor Ezeka, or the Yoruba woman Ms Adebayo. They will simply be referred to as ‘the academic community’, unless when only one person is concerned. All other characters which appear in this thesis are only relevant once, and are therefore briefly introduced the moment they are mentioned. Finally, the ethnic origins of characters are always Igbo, unless otherwise indicated.

Trauma is one of the central themes in *Half of a Yellow Sun*: the novel highlights the belated experiencing of trauma and the importance of narrative in processing it. Firstly, Olanna and Ugwu can both be seen to experience a belated trauma. An important moment happens when Olanna is at her old friend Mohammed’s house after having visited her family in Kano, in
the north of Nigeria. Mohammed hears that a mass killing of Igbo people is going on, so he disguises Olanna and drives her to her family’s house, only so they can discover they have all been murdered (Adichie 147-148). He then quickly takes her to a train station to ensure she can evacuate. On the train, which is packed with Igbo refugees, Olanna is sitting next to a woman with a bloodied calabash on her lap. The woman asks her to look in the calabash, where she is holding a little girl’s head with “rolled-back eyes and open mouth” (149). These events have a profound effect on her: when she arrives back in Nsukka, she starts having “Dark Swoops”, moments of hyperventilation and mental stress. The first one is described as follows: “A thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe. Then, when it let go, freeing her to take in gulp after gulp of air, she saw burning owls at the window grinning and beckoning to her with charred feathers.” (156). These Dark Swoops are characteristic of the symptoms Elissa Marder attributes to trauma. They show an indirect and belated experiencing of an event which still affects Olanna in the present. Her Dark Swoops indicate a refusal of the event to be located in history, intertwining the past and the present.

Ugwu is an embodiment of ‘war trauma’ in both a mental and physical sense. After he is forcefully conscripted into the Biafran army, he is gravely injured during an operation. While he is in hospital, he is haunted by the face of a bar girl he raped during an incident in which his fellow soldiers pressured him into joining in on a gang rape. Thus, after Ugwu is injured and leaves the army, he is haunted by memories of his crime as well as the realities of the war, which left physical scars on him. He is often forced to recollect these memories in his sleep, which cause him to experience his trauma anew. Christopher Ouma analyses Ugwu as an embodiment of memory and trauma, stating that “[t]he scars of his body become markers of memory, and residual archives of pain and trauma” (24). Having served in the army, Ugwu complements the domestic focus of *Half of a Yellow Sun* with experience from the war front. Contrary to what
most characters experience, war trauma leaves both mental and physical scars on Ugwu. His challenge is to recover from both types of wounds, or at least learn to live with them. This proves difficult, as Ouma states that “Ugwu’s state of delirium is located in a continuum of traumatic memories and experiences, aided by the physical pain he is feeling at the moment” (24). His physical wounds intensify the recollection of his memories, which makes Ugwu the ultimate embodiment of ‘war trauma’ and its belated experience.

The novel posits narrative as a means to process these traumatic events. Immediately after he leaves the hospital, Ugwu starts to write, and in this he finds a way to come to terms with his experience. Although Ugwu recognises that it is impossible to record the details of his trauma accurately, it helps him process his experience:

[Ugwu] realized that he would never be able to capture that child on paper, never be able to describe well enough the fear that dulled the eyes of mothers in the refugee camp when the bomber planes charged out of the sky. He would never be able to depict the very bleakness of bombing hungry people. But he tried, and the more he wrote the less he dreamed. (Adichie 398)

Indeed, the dreams which haunted him begin to fade as he finds an outlet for his experience in writing. Furthermore, Ugwu later writes down accounts of Olanna’s experiences as well, which helps her in the same way. When she describes to him the child’s head in the calabash she saw on the train, Ugwu writes it down. The novel states that Olanna feels like “his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of” (410). For Olanna, having a person to listen to her stories helps her to come to terms with her trauma. This follows Cathy Caruth’s line of thought that a listener is
required in the process of healing, as discussed in chapter 1. Ugwu gives testimony to Olanna’s experience, bearing witness to her stories by writing them down. In doing so, he helps her come to terms with it. Thus, the novel shows how giving narrative form to events, as well as having a person bear witness to one’s stories, helps in processing trauma.

The relationship between nationalism and tribalism is negotiated throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun*, revealing the complexity of the interplay between these sentiments. Critics tend to disagree about whether or not *Half of a Yellow Sun* privileges Biafran nationalism, or ethno-nationalism in general, over Nigerian nationalism. Aghogho Akpome argues in favour of this position, stating that, intentionally or not, Adichie’s work seems to favour the idea of a separate Igbo state in its dealing with the “multi-faceted problematic” of Nigerian nationhood (2013b: 25). He remarks how the novel offers a distinctly Biafran perspective on the war, and argues that it is an “apologia for the defunct Biafra” (2013b: 25). Rather than being an apologia, however, the novel should be interpreted as a project to recover the trauma of the people of Biafra.

Before elaborating on this argument, it is important to devote attention to Akpome’s arguments. Akpome points to “subtextual” features of the novel, which, in his view, covertly privilege an ethnically oriented form of nationalism. Odenigbo’s academic community is significant in this discussion, as they hold regular discussions on nationalism, tribalism and Pan-Africanism. As Christopher Ouma argues, this community can be considered a microcosm of post-independence Nigeria before the war which reveals the tensions between nationalism and tribalism (19). Akpome argues that the manner in which the narrative presents these discussions tends to foreground and privilege Odenigbo’s tribalist ideals. In one discussion, the academics are discussing the potential of Pan-African responses in engaging with world affairs. When Professor Ezeka calls for a greater Pan-African response to “what is happening in the American South” Odenigbo rejects this on the grounds that “Pan-Africanism is a fundamentally European notion”
and Africans are “not all alike except to white eyes”. He then asserts that “the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe”, as he was Igbo before Europeans tried to make him Nigerian. He tells the community that they should ask their village elders about their tribal history (Adichie 20-21). Later in the story, Ms Adebayo praises a musician for his “true Nigerian” music, which moves beyond his tribal culture (109). Odenigbo responds by asserting that “[t]hat’s reason enough not to like him. (...) This nationalism that means we should aspire to indifference about our own individual cultures is stupid” (109). Akpome argues that, in both these discussions, Odenigbo’s ideas are subtly underscored: although his comments are not completely unchallenged, they practically end the debate. This, Akpome argues, “suggests that the narrator – or the implied author – intensifies and privileges his ideas in the subtext” (2013b 29). In this manner, he opens up a reading of Adichie’s work in which a nationalism along ethnic lines is looked upon favourably.

Though Akpome’s interpretation is understandable, the novel is much less defeatist about a democratic, nationalist future for Nigeria than he contends. Although he remarks that Odenigbo’s comments often practically end debates, he fails to grasp the significance of the manner in which they end. Both discussions cited in the preceding paragraph end with a person ironising Odenigbo’s tribal attachment. In the first instance, after he states that the tribe is the only authentic identity for Africans and that that the discussion participants should ask their village elders about their history, Ms Adebayo states that “[t]he problem is that Odenigbo is a hopeless tribalist”. Then she adds, jokingly, “we need to keep him quiet” (Adichie 21). Moreover, in the second instance, after asserting that nationalism necessarily involves “indifference” about pre-colonial tribal cultures, Olanna says: “‘Don’t waste your time asking Odenigbo about High Life. He’s never understood it’ (...) ‘He’s a classical music person but loath to admit it in public because it’s such a Western taste.’ ” (109). Although Odenigbo does not shy away from making
his anti-western sentiment clear, this comment is especially significant in the larger context of the novel. It is a deliberate act by the author to have another character put Odenigbo’s anti-western sentiment in words, and ironise it in the process. In doing so, the novel reveals how Odenigbo defines his sense of ‘culture’ in a purely oppositional manner to colonial legacies. This suggests that he only rejects such concepts as nationalism and Pan-Africanism because he wishes to take distance from the colonial era. Thus, the characters’ responses to Odenigbo’s comments makes it so that the reader can take ironic distance from Odenigbo’s views. Akpome exaggerates the “foregrounding” and “privileging” of Odenigbo’s arguments and fails to see the way in which the novel ironises Odenigbo’s scepticism of nationalism and its potential.

As argued in chapter 1, it is important to consider who is given representation in trauma novels. This right to be given artistic representation, or the “right to the novel”, as Coundouriotis terms it (6), is inherently political in its implications. Although it is an overstatement to claim that *Half of a Yellow Sun* privileges ethno-nationalism, as argued above, it is true that the novel articulates a distinctly Biafran perspective on the war. This serves to foreground the trauma of the Igbo people, who suffered much worse during the war. From the pre-war persecutions of Igbo people to the heavy losses suffered during the war – both from the battling as well as from starvation – the Biafra War left much bigger scars for the Igbo than for the rest of Nigeria. The novel itself comments on this at several junctures. Amid the pre-war tensions, Ms Adebayo, the Yoruba woman in Odenigbo’s academic community, argues that secession is not the only way to security. This angers Odenigbo, who shouts:

> Did your cousins die? Did your uncle die? You’re going back to your people in Lagos next week and nobody will harass you for being Yoruba. Is it not your own people who are killing the Igbo in Lagos? Didn’t a group of your chiefs go to the North to thank the
emirs for sparing Yoruba people? So what are you saying? How is your opinion relevant?

(Adichie 174)

Following this, Ms Adebayo leaves the house, and Olanna demands that Odenigbo apologises. The reader, knowing that Odenigbo is an overzealous supporter of Biafran secession, may see Olanna telling him to apologise as an indication that the implied author has no affiliation with the notion that a non-Igbo subject has no legitimacy in speaking of the conflict and an alternative solution. However, this sentiment is repeated later on in the novel; by Olanna herself, no less. At the height of the conflict, Olanna receives a package from Mohammed – who is a Muslim Hausa man – containing a chocolate bar and a letter saying that he is well. This angers Olanna, as the novel states that

she flung the bar across the room. Mohammed’s letter incensed her; it insulted her reality. But he could not possibly know that they had no salt and Odenigbo drank kai-kai every day and Ugwu was conscripted and she had sold her wig. He could not possibly know. Yet she felt angry that the patterns of his old life remained in place, so unquestioningly in place that he could write to her about his polo game. (377)

Though she realises that she should not be angry, as she is aware that Mohammed was scarcely informed of the situation in Biafra, she is frustrated that life goes on for him while they are in constant danger. Through this repetition of the motif that non-Igbo people are unaware of the horrors of the war, the novel legitimates its Biafran focus by stressing that it was a far greater trauma for the Igbo people than others.
At the same time, however, not all of “Biafra” is equally represented throughout the novel. A problematic aspect in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is its underrepresentation of non-Igbo minorities in Biafra, which problematically implies that their suffering is less important. Akpome comments on the fact that non-Igbo minorities populated a significant part of the Eastern Region that became Biafra; yet, they figure only marginally in the novel (2013b 32). Hugh Hodges argued that *Destination Biafra* (another rehistoricising novel about the Biafra War, published in 1994) erases the history of non-Igbo minorities by ignoring how these peoples suffered attacks from both sides of the conflict (5). Following up on this analysis, Akpome argues that *Half of a Yellow Sun* also erases, or at least misrepresents, the anxieties of minorities (2013a 33) – although he does not provide an overview of how minorities do appear in the novel. A cause of anxiety for the characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are “saboteurs”, who were the cause of several crushing defeats for the Biafrans (Adichie 290). This causes the Biafrans to turn against each other out of fear. Soon after the problem of sabotages is first mentioned, they are linked to minorities, as a man states: “‘Our town would not have fallen but for the saboteurs in our midst!’(…) ‘I was a Civil Defender. I know how many infiltrators we discovered, and all of them were Rivers people. What I am telling you is that we can no longer trust these minorities who don't speak Igbo.’” (290). This anti-minority sentiment is repeated later on in the novel: when Dr Inyang, from “one of the minority tribes” (it is not specified which tribe), tries to inspect a wounded pregnant woman, the latter recoils, spits in her face, and calls her a saboteur (320).

Saboteurs are not always linked to minorities; several Igbo characters are also accused of being saboteurs at several junctures. However, it is repeated enough to be significant, especially when considering how minorities find little other mention in the novel. Only two other passages in the novel include a non-Igbo minority, and in one of these passages concerned how people from the minority tribes felt that they did not belong in Biafra (Adichie 314-315). Although
characters such as Kainene reject anti-minority sentiment – she slaps the aforementioned pregnant woman in her face and shouts “We are all Biafrans!” (320) – they are only represented from a Biafran point of view, which Akpome correctly remarked. This intensifies the significance of their linking to saboteurs, as this constitutes more than half of the times they are mentioned.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Ugwu writes a book about the Biafra War, called “The World Was Silent When We Died”, which relates the suffering of the Biafrans. Though the book is supposed to represent all those who identify as Biafran, the treatment of non-Igbo minorities in the novel, as discussed above, suggests that its use of the communal word “we” is highly problematic. In fact, this book is never seen to mention minorities at all. The lack of representation of non-Igbo minorities, who are not given a voice in the novel, means that the violence against these minorities in the war is largely ignored. Such underrepresentation has political implications, as it misrepresents the reality of the situation. Moreover, it inherently involves a covert assumption that non-Igbo minorities are not ‘Biafrans’, and even that their suffering is less important. Thus, while the novel’s treatment of trauma and nationalism vis-à-vis tribalism foregrounds it as a literary project to recover the trauma of the Biafran people, non-Igbo minorities are not given adequate representation. This has problematic implications to the novel’s attempt to negotiate a ‘people’s history’, which will be discussed in chapter 3.

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5 This book and how it appears in the novel will be discussed at length in chapter 4.
Chapter 3 – “Unreasonable Love”: Olanna, Gender Parameters, and Reconciliation

This chapter presents an analysis of how Half of a Yellow Sun constructs an alternative memory of the war through its genre as a domestic novel and its feminist revisionist character. These facets contribute to its project of narrating a ‘people’s history’. As discussed in chapter 1, a people’s history involves a broadening of the subject matter of history, which is achieved through the inclusion of previously disenfranchised groups. Textual representations are often used to reclaim the (or rather a) past for these groups. Half of a Yellow Sun also engages in such a project, recovering the role of women in the war through its domestic genre. Additionally, the women in the novel are presented as transformative forces, whose capacity for forgiveness symbolically impacts the political situation. This representation results in a broadening of the memory of the Biafra War along the lines of gender. Furthermore, the novel also stresses the importance of dialogue in providing hope for the future, showing that the war was caused by the failure of dialogue. It does so by means of an allegorical representation of the relationship between Nigeria and Biafra through the characters of Olanna and Kainene.

The novel’s narration alternates between Ugwu, Olanna and Richard in units of three chapters, so the story of the war is told from different perspectives. Eleni Coundouriotis argues that, because of the novel’s focus on the domestic scene, it engages in “the feminization of the war novel”, strengthening women’s political identity by demonstrating how they reform men (225; cf. Akpoma 2013a 34). The two most prominent women in the novel – Olanna and Kainene – are strong and independent, which grants them a unique social position. Coundouriotis states that their education enables them to “lead a revolution of gender identities”, which has broad implications for a reform of gender roles in society (228). Against her family’s wishes, Olanna

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6 For an in-depth analysis of focalisation and polyvocality in Half of a Yellow Sun, see Akpome 2013a.
forsakes her higher-class status and seeks her life in the middle-class academic world with Odenigbo. Additionally, Kainene acts almost like a son in managing the family business and coming to her own professionally (228). When Chief Okonji, a friend of Olanna and Kainene’s parents, hears about Kainene’s profession, he says to her father: “Whoever said you lost out by having twin daughters is a liar”, to which the father responds that “Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two.” (Adichie 31). Kainene rejects a conventional, domestic lifestyle and instead chooses to develop a career. As implied by the citation above, businessmen traditionally wish to have sons who can follow in their footsteps. Kainene’s revolutionary social position in fulfilling this position herself opens up the possibility of changing gender parameters in Nigeria.

Apart from this representation of working women, *Half of a Yellow Sun* also recovers the importance of the role of women in the war itself. It does so through its portrayal of what is known as *afia attack*, which refers to a woman who sneaks across the border into enemy territory to trade for desperately needed supplies before returning. Christopher Ouma argues that the novel’s representation of *afia attack* contributes to the way in which it shifts perceptions of division of labour, as well as the distinction between the ‘war front’ and the ‘home front’ (23). Due to the large amount of attention the novel devotes to the conditions of starvation in Biafra, this manoeuvre is highlighted as a means of surviving the war. It also illustrates how those traditionally associated with the ‘home front’ can play a prevalent role in the war, slipping through borders which are usually reserved for those who fight on the ‘war front’. *Half of a Yellow Sun* rejects a narration of the war in which it is conceived in masculinist terms and articulates the changing parameters of society along the lines of gender, broadening the history – or rather the memory – of the Biafra War.

The political impact of women in the novel is articulated through Olanna and her capacity for forgiveness. Adichie stated that, apart from recovering the memory of the war, she wanted
Half of a Yellow Sun to be a tribute to love: “the unreasonable, resilient thing that holds people together and makes us human” (Adichie, “The Story.”). This sentiment is represented in Olanna. Odenigbo’s mother dislikes Olanna and thinks she is “controlling” Odenigbo, so she concocts a plan to break them up. She brings Amala, a peasant girl from her village who works for her, to his house and forces her to seduce and sleep with Odenigbo. The latter, unaware that his mother was getting him drunk so he would be receptive to seduction, fell for her trap. This affair results in Amala getting pregnant. Odenigbo’s mother wanted Amala to be married off and raise the child herself. However, when Amala runs away, Olanna takes the child, called Baby, under her own custody. Coundouriotis argues that, at this point in the novel, their family is “an avatar of the nation that will be stitched together after the civil war” (228). In other words, the novel uses the allegory of the family to privilege forgiveness as the ideal basis for post-war Nigeria. At the core of this forgiveness, Coundouriotis states, lies “an empowered woman as the moral arbiter who keeps the common-law marriage together”. The post-war family bears the marks of Odenigbo’s failure as a husband, which is repaired by Olanna’s corrective action to define the family (228-229). Coundouriotis thus analyses Olanna as a “transformative force” who inspires and nurtures love (234). While this is true, it must be noted that Olanna’s forgiveness does not come instantly nor easily. While she is living in her own apartment so as to avoid Odenigbo after the incident, she herself has an affair with Richard, her twin sister’s boyfriend. It is only through this act of sexual vengeance that she can come to terms with Odenigbo’s act. Despite this, Olanna’s sacrifice in forgiving Odenigbo and taking in a child which is not hers illustrates the role of forgiveness in reconciliation.

Yet, Olanna’s affair bodes ill for her relationship with Kainene, which can be read as an allegorical representation of the failure of dialogue between Nigeria and Biafra. When Olanna and Kainene were children, their bond was so strong that they could read each other’s minds
without talking. As they grow up, however, their contact fades; the novel remarks how “[t]hey never talked about anything anymore” in the early sixties (Adichie 31). Meredith Coffey observes how this rift between the two is only apparent after the both of them return from their education in London, the former colonial metropolitan capital. She remarks that “the sisters, like the regions of Nigeria, realize the extent of their differences upon their separation from London” (71).

Indeed, as was outlined above, the differences between the tribes were already existent during the colonial era, but were intensified after Nigeria’s separation from the British Empire. Coffey argues that Olanna represents Nigeria in their relationship, and Kainene represents Biafra – although both are proud Biafrans in ideological terms (71). Kainene never seems to regret her distance from Olanna, whereas Olanna is saddened and attempts to pinpoint when and how their relationship had changed (72).

After Olanna sleeps with Richard, Kainene drifts even further away from Olanna. Coffey states that the two subsequent affairs enact similarities with the two coups which led to Biafra’s secession. Odenigbo’s affair with Amala may be read as the first coup; the ‘Igbo coup’. Thus, Olanna’s affair with Richard represents the mid-1966 counter coup. This parallel is reinforced by the significance of Richard’s name: the 1946 Richards constitution had established the regional boundaries and federal structure which the first coup of 1966 attempted to overturn. In response, the “victim” of the first event became the perpetrator of the second; just as Olanna perpetuates the first sexual crime in committing a second (Coffey 73). Kainene’s refusal to speak with Olanna reflects the failure of dialogue between Nigeria and Biafra (cf. Dickson and Preye 84); dialogue which, the novel reminds readers in an allegorical fashion, was desperately needed.

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7 Coffey also comments on the significance of Richard’s last name (Churchill), among other things not mentioned here as they are outside the scope of this thesis. For a full overview of the allegorical meaning behind Olanna’s and Kainene’s relationship with each other, see Coffey 2014.
A final and particularly puzzling dimension to this allegorical relationship is Kainene’s implied death at the close of the story. At a certain point in the novel, Kainene decides to cross the border in an *afia attack*, to buy necessary supplies. She never returns, but the characters hear no concrete reports of her death either. Critics have varied ideas on how her supposed passing should be interpreted in light of a future beyond the war in the novel – although their conclusions are similar. Coundouriotis argues that Kainene’s disappearance after crossing the border “bodes ill for the future of the reunified Nigeria”, as it essentially reinforces these borders (235). This reinforcement means that, although the physical borders are gone, the notion of them existing remain, preventing tensions from dropping.

Coffey points to the fact that Kainene re-established her bond with Olanna during the war, and the two grow close again. After having been forced out of their homes, they end up in the same refugee camp. They even establish a routine which fosters their dialogue: “In the evenings, Olanna and Kainene walked home together. They talked about the people at the camp, about their school days at Heathgrove, about their parents, about Odenigbo” (Adichie 390). Coffey argues that this bond reveals another parallel with the history of the war: “As Nigeria nears its goal of defeating Biafra, and physically nears the center of what remains of it, Olanna fulfills her own ambition to rekindle her emotional closeness with Kainene.” (74). This development in their relationship is quickly reversed, however, when Kainene disappears and is presumed dead. Coffey analyses Kainene as a “spectre”, who leaves everyone in suspense and unable to move forward. Just like Biafra, who she represents, she has disappeared within the borders of Nigeria (75). Significantly, Kainene’s implied death remains unresolved as no body is found. Furthermore, despite the fact that the war is over by the end of the novel, thus indicating that the year is 1970, the ending is still subsumed within the fourth part, “the Late Sixties”. This maintains an open ending in which the history of the war is not fully resolved (Coffey 76). Thus,
Kainene’s disappearance achieves more than representing war trauma. Because she represented Biafra in the allegorical relationship with Olanna, her disappearance leaves behind a spectre of the idea of Biafra.

Odenigbo reinforces this spectre of Biafra, as he clings most strongly to the notion that Kainene did not die. When Olanna wishes to search a mortuary to look for her body, Odenigbo tells her that there is “no point”, as he asserts that “[Kainene] is alive. There is no body” (410). As Kainene can be read as an allegory of Biafra, Odenigbo’s desperate assertion that Kainene is alive may be interpreted as his clinging to the idea of Biafra. Thus, while *Half of a Yellow Sun*’s literary project attempts to situate the Biafra War in history by representing the suffering of the Biafran people, as illustrated in chapter 2, Adichie leaves behind the possibility that the idea of Biafra remains.
Chapter 4 – A “People’s Historian”: Ugwu, Authorship, and ‘the Book’

Ugwu is considered by several critics to be the most significant character to the novel’s central themes, largely due to his writing of a ‘text within the text’ (cf. Ouma, Akpome 2013a, Ngwira, Dickson and Preye). In Half of a Yellow Sun, there appears a metatext about the Biafra War, called “The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died” (henceforth: ‘the Book’). This book appears in the novel at the end of various chapters and is written differently from the rest of the novel: firstly, it appears in the present tense, as opposed to the past tense used in the rest of the novel. Secondly, the reader does not get to see actual passages from the Book, but the process of writing it: many sentences start with “he recounts …” “he discusses …” “he writes …” (Adichie 82; 115; 155). The reader is led to believe that Richard is writing this book throughout the novel, but at the end it is revealed that Richard passes on the project to Ugwu. This chapter discusses the significance of the Book, arguing that all of the main themes discussed in this thesis intertwine in this book and Ugwu’s role in writing it. The Book is Ugwu’s tool to bear witness to the collective trauma of the Biafra War, as it at once provides a framework for the events of the past, as well as hope for the future. Ugwu’s role as a people’s historian and witness to the Biafra War is justified by his development throughout the novel, his strategic position among the other characters, and his dealing with trauma, which involves a negotiation of gender roles.8

Ugwu’s role in Half of a Yellow Sun is that of a people’s historian. As argued in chapter 3, Half of a Yellow Sun may be read as negotiating a people’s history, broadening the memory of

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8 An additional note on the structure of this thesis may be required at this juncture. My analysis of collective trauma could just as easily have been placed at chapter 2, devoting a full chapter to trauma and moving nationalism and tribalism to a chapter on its own. However, to reiterate, a consideration of trauma and nationalism in one chapter clearly highlights the politics of representation. Furthermore, placing the discussion of the role of the Book in negotiating collective trauma in this chapter, alongside the other themes concerning Ugwu and the Book, foregrounds how all the themes intertwine in this metatextual feature of Half of a Yellow Sun. It also ensures a gradual development in the argumentation from the personal level increasingly more to the national level.
the war. Ugwu’s Book attempts a people’s history, and the novel positions him as an ideal witness to the Biafra War. To understand this, it is important to consider his position and development in the novel. Ugwu is strategically positioned in relation to the other characters (cf. Akpome 2013a 28, Coundouriotis 232) – with the possible exception of Kainene, whose contact with Ugwu is scarce. Ugwu’s work in the kitchen of Odenigbo’s and Olanna’s household allows him to overhear the discussions of the academic community. Additionally, Odenigbo provides Ugwu with an education by enrolling him in the staff primary school. He also teaches him himself by informing him of current events and allowing him access to his books. These things enable Ugwu a window into current issues, especially debates surrounding Nigeria and Biafra. Richard occasionally talks to Ugwu about the book he plans to write, but which, as the reader learns at the end, Ugwu takes over from him. Richard may be seen as Ugwu’s model of authorship (cf. Coundouriotis 232). Ugwu’s indebtedness to Richard is reflected in his keeping the title of the book the way Richard had in mind. Lastly, Olanna is a role model for Ugwu, who provides him with an alternative idea of gender roles than his traditional family taught him.

Ugwu remarks how Ms Adebayo nor Olanna were anything like what his aunt had told him about how “university women” are (Adichie 19). Additionally, he states that he did not want “any woman coming in [the house] and disrupt their lives”, where he would have to share the caring for Odenigbo with someone else (21, 25). However, when he meets Olanna, he admires her straight away: he loves her accent and the way her voice sounds, and she is quick to teach him a few things about household tasks. Suddenly, Ugwu says, it was “unbearable” to think of the home without her (25).

All these influences from various characters cause Ugwu to face, as Christopher Ouma terms it, a “new and rapidly advancing post-independent modernity” (18). Ugwu’s development throughout the story is very significant, as many critics have picked up on. He goes from being a
naïve village boy to being a relatively educated servant under Odenigbo’s mentoring, to being a teacher in a refugee camp, to being a soldier in the Biafran army after he is forcefully conscripted, and finally to being a historian and writer. By this point, he takes up the role of witness to the Biafra War. Ugwu’s testimony to Olanna’s trauma was already discussed in chapter 2, illustrated by the following quote: “his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of” (Adichie 410; emphasis added). The “larger purpose” that is mentioned relates to the narration of a chronicle of Nigeria’s “national catastrophe”, as Bernard Dickson and Kinggeorge Preye term it. In narrating Olanna’s experience, they argue, Ugwu also symbolically takes up the role of witness to the nation in crisis as a larger whole (84). In other words, the novel allegorically maps a witnessing of individual trauma onto a witnessing of the national trauma.

However, the most significant way in which Ugwu can be read as a witness to the Biafra War is by analysing the role of ‘the Book’, which holds significance to the novel’s thematic issues in a number of ways. Ouma argues that Ugwu embodies a convergence of individual and collective trauma and memory, as his writing forms an autobiographical consciousness as well as an engagement with national history and memory (24). The first thing that is useful to note here is that, as Aghogho Akpome observes, while Half of a Yellow Sun itself contains a high degree of emotional truth and focus on the domestic scene, the Book provides a depersonalised, global point of view on the war (2013a 32). This contrasts with and complements the rest of the narrative. The Book is used as a structuring device to make sense of the broader context around the central events in the story. It thus allows for a more complete narration of trauma and the act of witnessing it. When read as a tool to witness the conflict, the Book takes on broader significance in the novel’s dealing with trauma, as it contextualises the personal experiences of the characters.
While Ouma and Dickson and Preye are correct in their observations that Ugwu is a witness who embodies both individual and collective trauma, Dickson and Preye limit their analysis to an allegorical reading in which individual trauma is mapped onto the national trauma. Ouma analyses Ugwu’s writing more generally, which hints towards a distinction which needs to be made. To fully understand how Ugwu’s role of witnessing works, it is useful to distinguish between the two types of writing he performs: an ‘introverted’ mode of writing, and an ‘extroverted’ mode of writing. As stated above, the Book, although it is said to contain Olanna’s story of the woman with the calabash in the prologue, will mostly contain depersonalised facts on the war. This contrasts with the individual writing he does: before starting to write the Book, he writes down personalised accounts of the war, ranging from “the children in the refugee camps, how diligently they chased after lizards” to “Aunty Arize’s anonymous death in Kano and about Olanna losing the use of her legs” (Adichie 397-398). These personal accounts serve to process the trauma resulting from his own experience, as well as those who relate their stories to him, as discussed in chapter 2.

However, Ugwu also needs to put these experiences in a wider historical context to truly make sense of them. On the personal level, therefore, the Book becomes his way of framing his own narrative, and, quite literally, situate it in history. In relating this larger story, he also takes upon what Emmanuel Ngwira terms the “burden of writing” for the war on behalf of the people (47). Thus, through his individual, short pieces of writing, he comes to terms with traumatic experiences. Furthermore, through the Book, Ugwu bears witness to the Biafran trauma, taking up the role of people’s historian. While the personalised accounts may be read allegorically, as illustrated by Olanna’s comment about the “larger purpose” it served, the relationship between
Ugwu’s introverted and extroverted modes of writing must be acknowledged to fully understand how he embodies individual as well as collective trauma.⁹

Ugwu’s role as people’s historian is legitimised through his development throughout the novel, which posits him as an ‘ideal witness’ to Biafra in terms of his class, authentic position in the war, and his relationship with gender roles. First off, Ugwu’s epistemological journey allows him insight into new models of knowledge while he retains a sense of class consciousness. Although he is lifted up to a more intellectual, middle-class state of mind, he still spent most of his life as a peasant, which gives him a legitimacy in speaking for ‘the people’. As several critics note, the postscript of Ugwu’s book (“For Master, my good man” (Adichie 433)) is significant, as “my good man” is what Odenigbo used to call Ugwu. Ngwira states that, “[i]n this mimicry of Odenigbo, Ugwu acknowledges the language and knowledge taught to him by Odenigbo, yet the power relationship between Ugwu and Odenigbo has now changed” (47). Indeed, Ugwu’s postscript indicates a changed relationship between him and Odenigbo, as he now calls the latter “my good man” instead of the other way around. However, he still refers to Odenigbo as “Master”, which implies a submission to his former servitude to him. This postscript may be read as a signifier of his partial identification with the peasantry as well as the middle class, giving him a dual class consciousness. His role as people’s historian is significant in this context, as it serves to add a class dimension to the novel’s historical project. Apart from the novel’s recovery of women, it also uplifts the working class in its depiction of Ugwu.

⁹ In using the terms “introverted” and “extroverted” while referring to different modes of writing, I am indebted to Coundouriotis’ use of these terms. She makes a distinction between “introverted” literature on the one hand, which has a national focus in its subject matter and addresses a national audience, and “extroverted” literature on the other, which is geared to please an international, western audience (16-17). The way in which I use the terms does not work in the same way: Ugwu’s introverted writing is personal as well as national, and his extroverted writing is national as well as international. Nevertheless, there is a parallel between Coundouriotis’ use of the terms and mine.
Secondly, the implications of Richard giving the task of writing Biafra’s history to Ugwu have puzzled critics. Throughout the novel, Richard becomes more engaged with the Igbo people, and Biafra as a whole. He self-identifies as Biafran and makes a commitment to the newly created state because it holds new possibilities for him. Richard thought that “[h]e would be Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian—he was there at the beginning; he had shared in the birth. He would belong.” (Adichie 168). However, Richard’s ‘Otherness’ is repeated to him throughout: Madu, Kainene’s former lover, urges him to write propaganda pieces for Biafra; he asserts that Richard is suitable for this because of his racial position. He states that readers “will take you more seriously because you are white. Look, the truth is that this is not your war. This is not your cause.” (305). After the war ends, Richard gives up on his project and passes it on to Ugwu, stating that the war “isn’t my story to tell, really” (425). Ugwu agrees with him: the novel states that “[h]e had never thought that it was” (425).

Coundouriotis argues that this shift causes the dream of an inclusive Biafran nationalism to collapse, as the ideal that anyone can become African is subverted (230). However, to understand what Adichie is suggesting with this shift, one needs to understand her stance on postcolonial authorship. Ngwira argues that Adichie explores the relationship between storytelling and power in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Adichie once stated that how stories are told and who tells them are dependent on power dynamics, as one person can have the ability to create “the definitive story” of another (Adichie, “The Danger.”). Thus, Ngwira explains how these power relations produce a “knowing subject” who can tell stories about a “passive object” whom they hold epistemological power over. “This binary”, he argues, “can be noted in many narratives of war in Africa today in which the West usually assumes the position of the ‘knowing subject’”. The choice to have Richard pass the role of storyteller on to Ugwu, then, is her attempt to rethink the epistemological power of the West over Africa (Ngwira 44). Ugwu takes control of his own
narrative as the only legitimate storyteller, having lived the war more vividly than Richard through his experience as a child soldier and an Igbo.

Furthermore, Ugwu’s role of witness is also justified by his shift in views about gender relations by the end of the novel, which rejects a patriarchal vision. Critics have argued that Ugwu’s role as people’s historian is problematised by his rape of the bar girl, which was described in chapter 2. Ouma states that,

As an authorial strategy to present an anti-heroic dimension of Ugwu, the rape scene potentially throws into doubt the identification of the reader with Ugwu, presenting him as part of an already structured patriarchal war economy and vitiating his erstwhile stature as an evolving authoritative and moral voice in the novel. (23)

Ugwu had been objectifying to women throughout the novel, as he only thought of women – such as his childhood crush Eberechi – with sexual connotations: he often thought of the shapes of their bottoms, or compared how loudly they would moan during intercourse (Adichie 119, 199, 287; 25, 85, 242). This objectification culminates in the rape scene, when Ugwu seemingly becomes a symbol of Nigeria’s patriarchal society. Ouma argues that he is redeemed at the end of the novel “through a very significant act of writing as a process of his expiation and healing” (18). Ugwu’s writing and his role of witness to the Biafra War, Ouma asserts, may be interpreted as his redemption.

This is a reductive reading, however, as it attempts to artificially link Ugwu’s role as witness to his atonement for the rape. While the two are related, in the sense that Ugwu needs to atone for his crime before becoming an ideal witness, it cannot be said that his redemption results from his writing. Rather, his redemption lies in his vision of Eberechi while he is in hospital. As
mentioned in chapter 2, part of Ugwu’s trauma included the face of the bar girl, who stared at him with a “calm hate” (Adichie 396). In the process of coming to terms with his experience of the war, it is vital to atone for his sexual actions. During his time in hospital, Ugwu sees images from the war:

In that gray space between dreaming and daydreaming, where he controlled most of what he imagined, he saw the bar, smelled the alcohol, and heard the soldiers saying “Target Destroyer,” but it was not the bar girl that lay with her back on the floor, it was Eberechi. He woke up hating the image and hating himself. He would give himself time to atone for what he had done. Then he would go and look for Eberechi. (397)

As can be observed here, Ugwu realises that he has committed an act of evil, and he wishes to atone for his crime. The changing image from the bar girl to Eberechi is noteworthy, as it signifies a realisation that he had been objectifying to the latter as well. Apart from his activity of writing, he also wishes to visit Eberechi again, which forms another part of his healing process and solidifies his atonement. Ugwu himself articulates this when he remarks that “[Eberechi] waiting for him was proof of his redemption, [which] gave him comfort as he healed” (397). This time, he thinks of a woman in a purely innocent way, signifying a shift in his mentality. Through his act of rape and his subsequent redemption, Ugwu is able to come to terms with gender roles and provides a vision of a non-patriarchal future.

One final way in which Ugwu is privileged as the ideal witness to Biafra lies in the novel’s treatment of the other characters. Critics have noted how Odenigbo and his educated community “withdraw into silence” by the end of the novel (Ngwira 47, cf. Dickson and Preye 84, Akpome 2013a 33-34). At least two members of the group, the poet Okeoma and Professor
Ezeka, did not survive the war (Adichie 391, 422). After the war is over and Odenigbo, Olanna and Ugwu are back in their old house in Nsukka, nobody ever visits them anymore (423). Most significantly, as the war is reaching its end, Odenigbo is reported to go to the bar very frequently: Olanna “was no longer sure when he went to the Manpower Directorate and when he simply went to the bar” (389). Additionally, whereas Olanna and Kainene spend a lot of time sitting outside and talking, the novel informs the reader that Odenigbo never joins them (391). His lack of contact with the other characters and his near-perpetual drunkenness signify a disillusionment with the nation of Biafra, which causes him to become silenced. As the person from the academic community who was always most vocal about his opinions, especially when it concerned Biafra, this silencing is telling and might be interpreted as the death of the Biafran ideal. However, as argued in chapter 3, Odenigbo also clings most strongly to the notion that Kainene is alive by the end. Thus, he holds on to the idea of Biafra, even as he is no longer vocal about his ideals due to the failure of Biafra in the war. He is unable to situate Biafra and the war in history, which Ugwu is able to; this further privileges Ugwu’s ideological position in the novel. Thus, Ugwu is positioned as an ideal witness to Biafra, carrying its memory into the next generation, which has to shape the ideological future of Nigeria.
Conclusion: Beyond the Novel

As has been illustrated throughout this thesis, the role of war memory in *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be explored by dissecting it into four main themes: trauma, nationalism vis-à-vis tribalism, gender, and storytelling. Apart from identifying how these themes work in the novel, however, it is important to devote some attention to the implications of the themes outside of the text. All of the themes in the novel are projected into a ‘beyond’, a potential future Nigeria after the war. The novel was published forty years after the war began, so in the temporal sense Nigeria was already in the post-war period. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, Adichie herself remarked how the memory of the war is still alive in Nigeria today. Thus, Nigeria ‘beyond the war’ refers to a Nigeria which has processed the memory of the war and is no longer captured by its trauma. The first part of this conclusion summarises the primary arguments of this thesis and reiterates how the main themes intertwine in the novel. The second part links the novel’s primary thematic issues to contemporary Nigeria, arguing that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is Adichie’s attempt to trace a genealogy and come to terms with the war to make sense of the present, as well as negotiating a future for the country. The thesis will close with an answer to the research question and a closing remark.

*Half of a Yellow Sun*’s genre of the domestic war novel and its negotiation of a people’s history through an exploration of every day life in the war for various characters allows the novel to articulate a broadening memory of the Biafra War. Trauma figures prominently in the novel, as characters have to come to terms with the horrors they experience. Olanna experiences Dark Swoops, which are a manifestation of her indirect and belated experience of trauma, which refuses to be located in history. Ugwu is the ultimate embodiment of war trauma, as he receives both physical and mental wounds on the war front. He provides Olanna and himself with an
outlet for their trauma through his writing, allowing them to make sense of the traumatic events and locate them in history. Additionally, the help he provides Olanna in coming to terms with her experiences illustrates how a secondary witness who listens to and gives testimony to one’s stories is vital in processing trauma.

Odenigbo’s academic community forms a microcosm of pre-war Nigeria, as they reveal the tensions between nationalism and tribalism. Odenigbo is a fervent supporter of tribal consciousness, which is juxtaposed against notions of ‘Nigerianness’ and Pan-Africanism posed by the other academics. Despite what critics have argued, *Half of a Yellow Sun* cannot be said to privilege the tribe, as the implied author takes ironic distance from Odenigbo’s assertions. Rather, the novel should be interpreted as a project to recover the trauma of the Biafrans, who suffered the greatest losses in the conflict. A problematic aspect in the novel is its treatment of minorities, who are not given adequate representation relative to their disproportionate suffering in the war. This foregrounds an inherently political assumption that these minorities are not authentically ‘Biafran’ and their suffering is less important.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* recovers the role of women in the war through its domestic genre and its celebration of working women and *afia attack*. Due to its focus on the domestic and the ‘home front’, it rejects a narration of the war in which it is conceived in masculinist terms. The novel articulates the changing parameters of society along the lines of gender, broadening the memory of the Biafra War. The political impact of women in the war is represented by Olanna and her capacity for forgiveness. Her acceptance of Baby as her own child signifies the possibility of reconciliation and hope for a future Nigeria after the war. The relationship between Olanna and Kainene allegorically represents the relationship between Nigeria and Biafra, as the two lose contact but renew their bond as the war draws to a close. Through this relationship, the novel points out the importance of dialogue in coming to terms with each other and critiques the
failure of dialogue between Nigeria and Biafra, as is represented in Kainene’s disappearance. This disappearance, which remains unresolved, leaves behind a spectre of the Biafran ideal. Odenigbo can be observed to cling to the hope that Kainene is alive, which reinforces this spectre.

All the themes in the novel significantly intertwine in the character of Ugwu and his role as people’s historian. On the personal level, his trauma consists of physical and mental scars, as well as a negotiation of gender roles in society. Storytelling at once provides an outlet for his own trauma, while it also turns him into a witness of the Biafra War and the collective trauma resulting from it. He becomes a carrier of the memory of the war, and articulates this memory through his writing. His individual, introverted mode of writing can be read allegorically to represent a witnessing of the war, especially when he narrates Olanna’s story, which is commented to serve a “larger purpose”. However, this role as witness to the Biafra War is most clearly represented in his extroverted mode of writing, which negotiates an international perspective on the conflict. Due to Ugwu’s experience as a child soldier, his strategic position alongside the other characters, his dual class consciousness, and his atonement for the rape, he gains a unique position and insight. Through all these factors, he experienced the war from both fronts, gained insight into intellectual issues while still identifying as a servant, and came to terms with gender roles. Such experience is needed to legitimise his role as historian and writer.

Furthermore, the fact that the other learned characters are pushed back by the end of the novel illustrates that he is posited as an ideal witness to the Biafra War, carrying its memory while situating the trauma in history.

Looking beyond the text, the novel can also be seen to process the trauma of the war for readers. The novel’s strength in processing trauma outside of the text lies in its metatextual aspect. As argued in chapter 4, the Book poses a contrast with the rest of the narrative because it
contains depersonalised facts on the war, and puts it in a larger narrative which moves beyond the rest of the novel. This provides contemporary readers with an opportunity to reflect on the larger whole of the war, while the novel’s focus remains on the domestic everyday life. Moreover, Emmanuel Ngwira argues that, due to the Book’s usage of the third person and the present tense, the reader is drawn into Ugwu’s acts of writing (48). Because the reader only sees the process of how the Book was written, they become a part of the narration of the conflict. Drawn into Ugwu’s act of witnessing in this way, the reader becomes a ‘secondary witness’ to Biafra, allowing them to make sense of the conflict and situate it in history.

This is not to say that the war is completely resolved. As argued in chapter 3, the novel’s open ending, as well as Kainene’s disappearance while Odenigbo clings to the notion of her being alive, leave behind a spectre of the idea of Biafra. This mirrors Adichie’s comment that many of the issues that led to the war are still unresolved in Nigeria today. In fact, the spectre which may be read in Kainene’s disappearance and the open ending to the novel can be observed in Nigeria nowadays in the form of the MASSOB (“the movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra”), a contemporary manifestation of the Biafran ideal, whose support has grown in recent years (Adichie, “The Story.”). Adichie wrote her novel in this context, being very much aware of the ethnic tensions which are currently going on. Her decision to leave the ending open, especially with regard to Kainene’s death which remains implied, is a deliberate one. Had a body been found, Kainene’s death could have represented the complete collapse of Biafra as a nation as well as an ideal, leaving room to come to terms with this loss and move beyond it. This is another way the novel bridges itself to the present, as the lack of closure to Kainene’s fate and the novel as a whole reveals that the shadow of Biafra remains.

Ugwu’s character may be read to open up the possibility of a future, more inclusive Nigeria. Eleni Coundouriotis argues that Ugwu’s development in the novel and his final role as
the holder of the memory of Biafra “holds the promise for a more democratic realisation of an enlightened, intellectual middle class” (233). When discussing the shift of authorship of the Book, Coundouriotis argues that Adichie is suggesting that Richard giving up on his project is acceptable “if the tradeoff is the celebration of the peasant turned people’s historian, an inclusion with much larger implications for the democratic future of Nigeria” (231). Due to his position alongside the other characters and his development throughout the novel, summarised above, he is in the ideal position to represent ‘the people’. His narration of the story, therefore, does not only help in processing the trauma of the war, it is also significant because it points toward a democratic future for Nigeria, in which the working class is included and finds literary representation. Ugwu’s storytelling is projected beyond the novel, forming a bridge between the history of the Biafra War and a future Nigeria.

Taking all different themes into consideration, it may be ultimately argued that, although *Half of a Yellow Sun* articulates a distinctly Biafran perspective on the war by recovering their trauma, it creates a link with Nigeria in its allegorical representation of the relationship between Olanna and Kainene, and provides hope for a Nigeria beyond the war through its broadening of history’s subject matter, which is captured in Ugwu and his Book. Due to the novel’s negotiation of a people’s history and its construction of a broadening war memory, it may be argued that *Half of a Yellow Sun* is implicitly in favour of a nationalism which pays attention to differences of gender and class.

However, although Adichie gives adequate representation to the role of women and the peasantry in the novel, the problem of non-Igbo minorities remains. As argued above, their suffering was in significant ways worse than that of the Igbo people. Many of them never truly belonged in Biafra and often suffered violence from both sides in the war. The novel does present the conundrum of ‘saboteurs’ in the war, which is often blamed on minorities by the characters.
However, they are not given a voice and remain under the surface. One might say that Adichie, who negotiates the relationship between storytelling and power, was avoiding a pretence of being able to speak for such groups she does not belong to. However, she could still have given the minorities a role in the form of one or more relatively significant side characters, even while avoiding a claim to authenticity in speaking for them. The novel’s treatment of minorities has important implications for their role in a future Nigeria. While the Igbo people are given a history and a voice, the question remains: who, then, is to represent these minorities and articulate their suffering? As this is something the novel leaves unresolved, the answer to this question may lie in the hands of other authors in future projects. Their narrative, too, must find testimony in literary projects. For, as James Baldwin once wrote, “while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it must always be heard” (147).


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Appendix 1: Ethnic Map of Nigeria

Simplified map illustrating the geographical areas which the most populous tribes occupy in the present day. The Hausa-Fulani are still the largest group in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East. The approximate locations of these groups have not changed much compared to the timeframe under discussion in this thesis.

Appendix 2: Biafra on the Map (May 1967)

Illustration of Biafra’s location in Nigeria soon after its proclamation as an independent state. Lagos, then the national capital of Nigeria, is visible on the west side of the coastline.

(Source is Wikipedia, but it is most suitable as the illustration is accurate and the map shows the locations of several key cities. The creator points to their sources, so the reader may check its validity. Furthermore, full accuracy is not required for the purposes of this illustration, which is meant for readers who are unfamiliar with the geography of Biafra.)