

“A CONFUSION OF VALUES”:
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BIAFRAN DREAM IN CHINUA ACHEBE’S AND
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE’S NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR FICTION

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Introduction

For many new nation-states, independence from colonial rule signifies not only the end to oppression but also the beginning of it. The transition period from decolonisation to independent self-government inevitably causes tension as new nation-states attempt to interrogate and re-evaluate the socio-political structures of power inherited from colonisation. As Audre Lorde argues, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (112). The transvaluation of acquired socio-political structures is a crucial step forward in bringing about change for newly independent nation-states, but habitually results in the unveiling of internal corruption and a struggle for power.

For Chinua Achebe, “one of the most distressing ills which afflict new nations is a confusion of values” where the newly independent nation-state continues the corrupt colonial practices to the detriment of their own society (“Role” 10). As a postcolonial writer, Achebe’s position “depends to some extent on the state of health of his society[;] if a society is ill, he has a responsibility to point it out” (“Biafra” 231). These prophetic words concerning a new nation-state’s “confusion of values” comes from Achebe’s 1964 essay “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation”, which was written just three years before the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran war and provides readers with a crucial insight into what he believes are the key factors that triggered the civil conflict so soon after Nigeria gained its independence.

The Federation of Nigeria celebrated its full independence from British colonial rule on 1st October 1960 but as early as July 1967 the south-eastern provinces of Nigeria (commonly

known as Igboland¹) attempted to secede from the fractious postcolonial nation-state to form the independent Republic of Biafra. By the end of the decade, political, economic, cultural and religious tensions between the north and south provinces resulted in a bloody civil war, and with support of Great Britain, the Nigerian Federal government was able to quash the dream of Biafra within three years. By January 1970, the fight for secession had failed, the Biafran dream collapsed, and the civil conflict devastated the newly decolonised Nigeria.

From the time of its outbreak to the present day, Nigerian authors (Achebe 1972; Amadi 1973; Soyinka 1975; Saro-Wiwa 1985; Adichie 2006; Okparanta 2015) have novelised the Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970). Of these works, this thesis will focus on Achebe's collection of short stories *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) which are both set during the civil conflict but are written more than thirty years apart. Achebe, the “father of African literature,” and Adichie, his “literary daughter” (Tunca 109), are internationally recognised as seminal Nigerian writers and their works have often been compared by many critics because of their numerous personal and professional similarities (Ugochukwu 2011; Ibhawaegbele 2012; Eisenberg 2016; Wenske 2016; Tunca 2018). Their works set in the context of the Nigerian-Biafran War have, however, received far less attention for comparative study. By writing about the civil war from a humanist, Biafran perspective, Achebe, as Adichie has testified, “validate[d] [her] history, ma[de] it seem worthy in some way,” which she, in turn, aims to do for future generations with her postcolonial literature (qtd. in Choudhury 96). What links both writers is their shared mission of narrating the story of Biafra from a realistic, human

¹ Igboland is so-called because it is “home to the Igbo which are one of the three major [ethnic groups] inhabiting Nigeria, Hausa and Yoruba being the other two” (Mander 51).

perspective to reclaim the public images of the Nigerian-Biafran War, which in the past has often been misrepresented by Western authors and media outlets².

Achebe's "Civil Peace", "Sugar Baby" and "Girls at War", and Adichie's novel not only offer a tragically realistic, human perspective of the Nigerian-Biafran War, but they also champion the reconciliation and unification of a still fragmented society. Anne McClintock argues that all postcolonial narratives "are stories of political power and all publication involves a delegation of authority", noting that "Edward Said points out that the word *author* itself springs from the same etymological roots as *authority* and is attended by potent notions of engendering, mastery and property" (300), emphasising the political responsibility that comes with authorship. Yet, where Achebe identifies as a political writer so that he can "draw attention to the intellectual seriousness" of the subjects he addresses in his fiction, "Adichie, half a century later, is still investing herself with the mission of reclaiming the humanity and dignity of African peoples in her dialogues with the West, but she does so by shunning the 'political' tag" (Tunca 111). Despite their differing professional identities, Achebe's "powerful social consciousness, especially his desire to comment on the corruption and maladministration of the New Nigerian state" is akin to Adichie's depiction of the socio-political corruption and the subsequent human tragedy of the civil conflict (Morrison and Tredell 132).

² Hamish Dalley observes that the Harper Perennial edition of *Half of a Yellow Sun* incorporates "images of starving children and refugees [which links] the novel to the tropes of humanitarian crisis that framed the war's reception as a global media event in the late 1960s [and] continues to shape stereotypes of Africa as a place defined above all by human suffering" (128). However, Dalley fails to recognise that Adichie's incorporation of the photographs, typically used by the Western media, exposes the limited narrative of the Nigerian civil war which is juxtaposed with the richness of the Biafran experience conveyed in her novel.

One of the central points developed in this thesis is that the Nigerian-Biafran War, represented in both texts, exacerbates the deterioration of the postcolonial nation-state by revealing the inherited corruption adopted from colonisation. The lives and identities of both Achebe's and Adichie's central characters are dramatically altered when exposed to the trials and traumas of civil war; relationships break down, national pride falters and societal constructs are dismantled. By humanising stories of civil conflict, both narratives work towards shaping and legitimising the wartime experiences of the Igbo community, whose struggle for independence has often been blamed as the cause of a disastrous civil war.

Achebe's civil war trilogy tracks the rise and fall of the Biafran dream, focalising the initial idealism, gradual disillusionment and ultimate displacement of the Biafran community through multiple perspectives. Living in Nigeria at the time of the civil war, Achebe recognised "a new spirit among the [Biafran] people" and "a determination [to] put in their best and fight for their freedom" which transcended "the understandable trepidation associated with a long looming war" ("Country" 171). In the titular story "Girls at War", Achebe captures the initial nationalistic hope for an independent Biafra in the characterisation of Gladys; her eagerness to contribute to the war effort at the beginning of the narrative, despite opposition from others, encapsulates the revolutionary idealism that the Biafran community possessed in the late 1960s. Achebe's "Civil Peace" and "Sugar Baby", however, depict the fractured remains of Nigeria after the civil war with the experiences of the protagonists representing the breakdown of community values and the long-lasting traumas that continue to affect former Biafrans. The ambiguous endings to Achebe's civil war stories and lack of resolutions reflect the uncertainties of Nigeria's future as "a highly conflicted space" (Mander 53).

Inspired by Achebe's polyphonic approach, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is narrated, in turn, by Ugwu, Olanna and Richard, who offer differing perspectives in terms of

social class, gender, and race. Anne McClintock argues that “race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego” (McClintock 5), yet Adichie’s multifocal narrative does just that. Ugwu, a houseboy and later child soldier and author, represents the working-class perspective; Olanna, daughter to *nouveau riche* “Big Man”, forms the elite upper-middle-class viewpoint and female perspective; and Richard, a white British journalist who aims to tell the story of Biafra, represents race from a Western perspective. Adichie’s novel, like Achebe’s short stories, traces the downfall of the Biafran dream back to the “confusion of values” that corrupted the promise of a peaceful post-Independence Nigeria. In my close analyses of these texts, I will draw on postcolonial criticism and theory (Fanon 1967; Memmi 1969; McClintock 1995; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002; Young 2003; Choudhury 2016; Gandhi 2019), to examine both Achebe's and Adichie's critical reflection on a postcolonial Nigeria amidst a civil war. By applying postcolonial frameworks to the examination of both texts, I aim to discover how the writers’ portrayal of the rise and fall of the Biafran dream contributes to a faithful portrayal of a postcolonial Nigerian nation-state and the unveiling of the roots of individuals’ and societies’ “confusion of values”.

Postcolonial Criticism and Theory

Postcolonialism is a complex concept that is difficult to define due to the ever-changing subject matter it seeks to examine; even the term itself causes debate amongst critics. Anne McClintock points out that the term “postcolonialism” is “haunted by the very figure of linear development it sets out to dismantle” (10), arguing that the prefix “post-” is derogatory as “the world’s multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear European time” (11). Leela Gandhi suggests that “the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequences” (3) because by removing the hyphen the experiences of the formerly colonised peoples are independently legitimised and validated.

A pertinent definition of postcolonialism, to the works of Achebe and Adichie, is Robert J. C. Young’s who defines the term as a political philosophy that champions “the right to autonomous self-government of those who still find themselves in a situation of being controlled politically and administratively by a foreign power” and “with sovereignty achieved, [seeks] to change the basis of the state itself” (113). Young also points out that postcolonialism has “fundamental sympathies for the subaltern, for the peasantry, for the poor, for the outcasts of all kinds” and “espouses subaltern cultures and knowledges” which “it regards as rich repositories of culture and counter-knowledge” (114). To put it succinctly, postcolonialism explores the socio-political issues of a formerly colonised nation-state from the many perspectives of its minority groups. Fundamentally, for Young, postcolonialism “stands for empowering the poor, the dispossessed, and the disadvantaged, for tolerance of difference and diversity, for the establishment of minorities rights [...] within a broad framework of democratic egalitarianism that refuses to impose alienating western ways of thinking on tricontinental societies” (113). Postcolonialism focuses on those that, in literature and society, have been sidelined to the peripheries; it gives a voice to the voiceless and helps

to expose the injustices and inequalities of formerly colonised peoples. Young's definition is a particularly helpful starting point in the exploration of Achebe's and Adichie's Nigerian-Biafran war narratives as Young brings to the forefront the societal and humanist aspects of postcolonialism that both writers promote in their postcolonial fictions.

Akin to the ever-changing nature of postcolonialism, postcolonial theory has also continually developed its practices to match the pace of our rapidly developing world. It is a theory that encompasses many critical practices within its broad boundaries such as Marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis; however, as Leela Gandhi puts it, it is fundamentally a practice "devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past," which in turn "discloses a relationship of reciprocal antagonism and desire between coloniser and colonised" (4). Gandhi's definition is especially germane to the analysis of Achebe's and Adichie's civil war narratives as both writers look to Nigeria's disputed past to make sense of its still conflicted present; as Jonathan Highfield points out, "while a historian attempts to find the language to narrate the events of the past without prejudice, a novelist relies on the prejudices and limitations of characters to capture the nuances of a specific historical moment" (263). Looking at the role of postcolonial literature, Young argues that the responsibility of the postcolonial writer is to champion "those underclasses, those groups marginalized according to gender or ethnicity [...] those at the margins of society, [and] those whose cultural identity has been dislocated or left uncertain by the forces of global capitalism" (113-114). For Young, postcolonial literature "looks at and experiences the world from below rather than from above" (114), which Achebe and Adichie do by focusing on the domestic lives of Biafran individuals during the Nigerian civil war. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin suggest, "the development of national literature and criticism is fundamental to the whole enterprise of post-colonial studies" because "without such developments at the national level, and without the

comparative studies between national traditions to which these lead, no discourse of the post-colonial could have emerged” (16). Achebe’s and Adichie’s fictional depictions of the Nigerian-Biafran War initiates a dialogue about Nigeria’s colonial past; it offers and reflects on multiple perspectives of those victimised by the postcolonial nation-state’s “confusion of values” and by acknowledging the cause of their suffering, the process of recovery can begin.

In his seminal text *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon observes that African writers are faced with a complicated paradox of acknowledging a painful colonial past as well as trying to distance themselves from it to move forward towards reconciliation. Fanon argues that both the former colonising power and decolonised nation-state “must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible” (231). Achebe, in his 1997 essay “African Literature: English and the African Writer”, appears to disparage Fanon’s argument by encouraging postcolonial writers to confront their conflicted past *and* utilise the by-products of colonialism such as the English language to achieve “authentic communication” and reconciliation. Commenting on his choice to write his postcolonial fiction in English, Achebe declares, “I have been given this language and I intend to use it” (“African” 348). Rather than ignoring the impact of colonisation in Africa, Achebe argues that “on the whole, [colonisation] did bring together many peoples that had previously gone their several ways” and “it gave them a language with which to talk to one another”; if colonisation “failed to give [the colonised] a song, it at least gave them a tongue for sighing” (“African” 344). Achebe writes in English so that he can spread the message of reconciliation within his own diverse and fragmented society as well as communicate with a wider Western readership. Leela Gandhi argues, “histories, much as families, cannot be freely chosen by a simple act of will, and newly emergent postcolonial nation-states are often deluded and unsuccessful in their attempts to disown the burdens of their colonial inheritance” (4). However, rather than

disowning the “burdens of colonial inheritance,” Achebe confronts his readers with the reality of postcolonial Nigeria through the medium of the English language, thereby bridging the gap between a colonial past and a postcolonial present.

Both Achebe and Adichie are vocal about the role of the African anglophone writer and the responsibility of promoting public images of Africa that counter the stereotypical images of the continent often depicted in Western media. In her 2009 TED talk “The Danger of a Single Story”, Adichie addresses the problem that most anglophone African writers face when their fiction reaches a global audience. In her talk, Adichie comments that Western readers are often surprised by the vivacity of her stories of Nigeria as depictions of Africa are often reduced to “a single story”. Adichie argues that “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete” (15). As Eve Eisenberg suggests, “if we were to derive pedagogical principles from Adichie’s TED Talk, one remedy we might devise would be to expose [a global audience] to multiple examples of African stories, thereby to reduce the likelihood of their accepting uncritically stereotypical images of Africa” and “to make available to them a much richer picture of the continent” (98). Achebe and Adichie challenge the single story of Nigeria’s conflicted past as a time of abject suffering and misrule by focalising the Biafran experience from multiple perspectives. Both writers defend their use of English in the narration of their postcolonial fiction by arguing that it is an effective tool in communicating their stories of civil war to a polyglottal Nigerian readership *and* Western audience; by confronting a global audience with a realistic depiction of the Nigerian-Biafran war, a frank dialogue concerning the impact of colonisation is started which, in turn, can lead to recovery and reconciliation with a conflicted colonial past.

Chapter 1: Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories*

It is often thought that Achebe's personal account of the rise and fall of Biafra is primarily manifest in his memoir *There Was a Country* (2012), where he gives "a chilling account of the devastating [Nigerian] Civil War" from his own perspective as "a key Biafran diplomat – and as a victim" (David 115). Achebe's memoir of Biafra includes a collection of essays and poems that explore the lead up to the Nigerian-Biafran War, the socio-political factors that made life in Biafra intolerable, and the nation-state's attempt at recovery after Biafra fell. In the introduction to his memoir, Achebe declares that "it is for the sake of the future of Nigeria, for our children and grandchildren, that I feel it is important to tell Nigeria's story, Biafra's story, our story, my story" ("Country" 3), and as a postcolonial writer, he believes that it is his duty to memorialise Biafra and "weave it tightly into the fabric of Nigeria's history" through his writing (David 115). Achebe explains, in his memoir, that he "chose to express [him]self in that period [of civil war] through poetry, as opposed to other genres", interjecting the collection of essays in *There Was A Country* with the poetry he wrote during the civil war ("Country" 3).

What is striking about this statement is that Achebe's pivotal collection of short stories *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972) – originally published only two years after the Nigerian-Biafran War officially ended – is therefore neglected by the writer as part of the oeuvre he wrote during and about the Nigerian civil conflict. Although *Girls at War and Other Stories* includes a diverse selection of twelve short stories that "span a period of 13 years in Achebe's writing" (Morrison and Tredell 130), it is the trilogy of stories – "Civil Peace", "Sugar Baby", and "Girls at War" – that were written and set during the time of the Nigerian civil war that Achebe overlooked in his memorialisation of Biafra. The civil war trilogy is important to acknowledge as, unlike his memoir which was published forty-two years after the conflict ended, his short stories were written during the time of the civil

conflict and therefore more accurately reflect the hope and uncertainties of the war-time period that they depict. Moreover, as Catherine Lynnette Innes argues, unlike Achebe's novels that preceded *Girls at War and Other Stories*, his civil war stories bring "marginalized characters into the foreground – the women, the children, the clerks, the poor traders and craftsman - and also focuses a much harsher light on those who exploit or ignore them, the complacent middle-class professionals" (133). Readers are privy to the interior thoughts of multiple Biafran characters, on both ends of the social spectrum, as Achebe chooses to represent a cross-section of Nigerian society amidst a civil war.

Achebe's civil war trilogy, in a similar vein to his 2012 memoir, follows the hopeful beginnings of the Biafran dream through to the horrific downfall of the independent nation-state. The initial optimism for Biafra and the gradual disillusionment due to its corruption and "confusion of values" is most notably evident in the demise of Gladys who signifies the "decline of a soaring idealism" (Feuser 70) in the titular story "Girls at War". The focus of "Civil Peace" and "Sugar Baby" is the aftermath of the civil conflict where characters' experiences represent the post-war recovery of the blighted Biafran community and the traumas that surface with the forced re-emergence into Nigerian society. *Girls at War and Other Stories* renders the optimism about, the downfall of and recovery from the Nigerian-Biafran War more tangible for readers. As Elleke Boehmer points out, "the nation has historically not only offered important ways of recovering self and reclaiming cultural integrity after colonial occupation," but has also "remained an important ground for transforming political and economic conditions, forging identity and achieving social justice" (4). Through fictionalising the rise and fall of Biafra, Achebe solidifies Biafra's place in Nigerian history and initiates a dialogue about Nigeria's conflicted past. As Achebe himself declares, "the [postcolonial] writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front" ("Novelist" 4)

2.1 A Hopeful Nation-in-Formation

As Nigeria is the most populous African country, with “140 million people; more than 250 ethnic groups [and significant] religious diversity (50% Muslim, 40% Christian, 10% of indigenous faiths)”, the attempted unification of values after decolonisation proved to be considerably challenging (Hawley 16). For Achebe, the Republic of Biafra arose out of the need to create a sense of place for the Igbo community. Achebe states that “the most vital feeling the Africans had at that time [of civil war] was that they were finally in a safe place... at home” (“Country” 171). On a microcosmic level, Gladys in Achebe’s titular story “Girls at War” represents the initial hope that the nation-in-formation provided for the Igbo community.

Gladys is introduced to us through the protagonist and focaliser Reginald Nwankwo at three separate stages of the Nigerian-Biafran War. Gladys and Nwankwo’s first meeting is situated in the early stages of the civil conflict where Gladys is described as an ardent and diligent officer at a “check-point at Awka” (101). This situation is based on a real-life encounter described in Achebe’s Biafran memoir, where he explains that “young girls [...] had taken over the job of controlling traffic. They were really doing it by themselves – no one asked them to” (171). By emphasising that “no one asked them to”, Achebe accentuates how a woman’s role and position in society was altered by taking on military responsibilities during the establishment of Biafra. These sentiments expressed in Achebe’s memoir are strikingly similar to the opening lines of “Girls at War”; he describes “the first heady days of warlike preparation” as a time “when thousands of young men (and sometimes women too) were daily turned away from enlistment centres” due to excessive numbers of citizens “coming forward burning with readiness to bear arms in defence of the exciting new nation” (101). Catherine Lynnette Innes argues that “the parenthetical ‘and sometimes women too’ suddenly suggests the marginal role of women in the narrator’s consciousness” (130-131).

Indeed, Achebe has often been criticised by feminist critics for “consistently side-lin[ing] the place of the postcolonial woman in order to focus on postcolonial manhood” (Powell 167).

On the surface, it may seem as if this argument could be applied to Gladys; however, if we take into consideration Achebe’s comment about the female volunteers in his memoir, we can see that the tone connotes wonder rather than a condescending afterthought. Achebe’s marvel at women volunteering to help with the war effort should not be confused with the opinions of his misogynistic protagonist, Nwankwo, as it undermines his subversion of the woman-as-nation trope that manifests later in the story.

Nwankwo, a hidebound womaniser, initially sees Gladys’s dutiful militaristic actions as an unnecessary nuisance that should not apply to “one of the big people” like himself (101). However, straight-talking Gladys replies to Nwankwo’s petty irritation with: ““Sorry to delay you, sir. But you people gave us this job to do”” (102), reminding Nwankwo of his “confusion of values” concerning the prioritisation of his own selfish needs over the protection of others. Achebe foregrounds the hypocrisy of Nwankwo’s actions suggesting that his promotion to an official for the Ministry of Justice and the benefits that it includes such as avoiding “thorough searches at road-blocks” has distorted his personal and political values (101). Nwankwo disapproves of Gladys “patching up with Civil Defence” and even likens women engaged in war-time labours to “little kids who marched up and down the streets [...] wearing their mothers' soup bowls for steel helmets” (103). Nwankwo’s initial derogatory attitude towards women has taken precedence in scholarly analyses of the story over the examination of the civil war as the catalyst to a change in gender roles in the wake of a new nation-state (Innes 1990, Feuser 2001, Boehmer 2013). Furthermore, Nwankwo’s first encounter clearly changes his perspective from believing that “girls were not required in the militia” to a determination “not [to] sneer at the girls again, nor at the talk of revolution” (103). Nwankwo recognises his behaviour to be a “gross levity” (103), diminishing women’s

roles in “running the new systems foisted upon [the Biafran people] at the dawn of independence” (Achebe, “Country” 2). Considering Nwankwo’s personal growth in changing his opinion of “girls at war”, it is disappointing that this change in perspective is corrupted by the increasing devastation of the civil war. Later in the narrative, Nwankwo objectifies Gladys “as a pawn in an underground enterprise” of corruption and moral decay (Boehmer 3). The enthusiasm that Gladys initially displays for the independence of Biafra and her small part in the actualisation of it is gradually quashed by a desperate need to survive in a time of corruption and devastation of the Biafran people. As Elleke Boehmer puts it, Gladys embodies “the national conflict as glorious, for a brief time, and then, more predictably, [represents the] double-dealing and civil strife as diseased and corrupting” (3). The hope that the nation-in-formation had in the wake of independence is corrupted by a “confusion of values” brought about by the mass devastation of the Biafran people.

2.2 Women as Mirrors to Disillusionment and Moral Decay

Achebe’s “Girls at War” focuses “on women and their aspirations, blighted in each case by the society and the circumstances that surround them” (Innes 126). As Achebe testifies, the unprecedented circumstances of the Nigerian-Biafran War meant that Nigeria became “a cesspool of corruption and misrule” with “those who were in power want[ing] to stay in power” (“Country” 51). Consequently, as “no postcolonial state anywhere has granted women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state” (McClintock 13-14), the initial hope that women possessed for a better future in Biafra was quickly dismantled by corrupt patriarchal infrastructures. In “Girls at War”, Gladys functions as a mirror to the moral decay of the men in power, whose personal and political values have been warped by war-time corruption. Achebe’s “Girls at War” tackles the deterioration of

nationalistic idealism by mirroring Nwankwo's disillusionment and corruption in the gradual demise of his female companion Gladys, who, in turn, reflects "the depths of disintegration brought about by the conflict" of a struggling nation-in-formation (Ugochukwu 255). Despite her comparably sporadic appearances throughout the narrative, Gladys's symbolic significance is essential in highlighting the "confusion of values" in her male counterpart, signalling the "shift from formal to informal empire" (Young 3), where women are doubly colonised by the ruling male elite.

Achebe structures "Girls at War" around the three meetings of Gladys and Ministry of Justice official Nwankwo. Each meeting signifies the "at-first-emergent and then declining nationalist times" in Biafra with Nwankwo failing to see his own moral decay reflected in the unethical actions of Gladys (Boehmer 1). The hope for Biafran independence portrayed at the beginning of the narrative gradually gives way to the rising desperation of the Biafran people. Nwankwo observes that "death and starvation [...] long chased out the headiness of the early days" and "girls became girls once more and boys boys" (104). The promise of war as a unifier of the Biafran people and social equaliser for men and women disintegrated with the hopeless reality of the civil war. Achebe notes the drastic change in atmosphere in his memoir, *There Was a Country*, where he describes the "millions of civilians – grandparents, mothers, fathers, children, and soldiers alike – flood[ing] the main highway arteries between towns and villages fleeing the chaos and conflict" (169), a scene that he fictionalises in "Girls at War" when Nwankwo meets Gladys for a second time.

Nwankwo sees Gladys walking amongst a multitude of desperate civilians on a roadside, yet he ignores the "scores of pedestrians, dusty and exhausted, some military, some civil" (105-106) to pick up "a very attractive girl by the roadside" (105). It is deeply ironic that an official for the Ministry of Justice should unjustly choose to offer refuge to a select individual not based on her level of need but based on her physical attractiveness. Noticing that the

“attractive girl” is Gladys, Nwankwo is quick to comment on the substantial change in her outward appearance. Nwankwo attempts to flatter Gladys by saying: “You were always beautiful of course, but now you are a beauty queen” (106). Here, the term “beauty queen” is used with ambiguity to emphasise the extent of Gladys’s transformation, but also to draw the reader’s attention to Gladys’s “confusion of values” as demonstrated by the pageantry of appearance in a time of desperate poverty. During their first meeting, Nwankwo describes Gladys as “a beautiful girl in a breasty blue jersey, khaki jeans and canvas” (102), clearly depicting a modest military uniform concealing her voluptuous figure. Yet, on their second meeting, Gladys is undoubtedly more conscious of her image as she wears a “high-tinted wig and a very expensive skirt and low-cut blouse” (106). The drastic change in Gladys’s image signifies her reliance on her physical attributes as a commodity. From this point in the narrative onwards, Gladys begins to reflect Nwankwo’s own hypocrisy and increasing moral decay; he scrutinises the changes in her values but is unaware of similar changes in his own.

By using Gladys as a mirror to moral decay in a postcolonial context, Achebe “focuses a much harsher light on those who exploit or ignore [minorities such as women], the complacent middle-class professionals” (Innes 133). Nwankwo judges Gladys’s transformation as “wonderful”, yet “tragic” (106); he deduces that her expensive image is at the cost of “some well-placed gentleman, one of those piling up money out of the war” (106). This is a crucial moment in the story as it signals to the reader that Nwankwo is completely unaware, or perhaps in denial, of his own methods of exploitation. Indeed, immediately before his second meeting with Gladys, we witness Nwankwo driving past a “scarecrow crowd of rags and floating ribs” (105) to “[appropriate] food relief intended for the starving masses” (Morrison and Tredell 134). Although the “independent accusation of [the crowd’s] wasted bodies and sunken eyes” produces a show of “deep embarrassment” in Nwankwo, his superficial excuse that “he couldn’t abandon [his family] to kwashiokor” (105) demonstrates,

as Innes points out, his “self-serving hypocrisy – a hypocrisy sharpened by his privileged position in the Ministry of Justice” (83). Nwankwo is unable to accept his own “confusion of values”, yet is quick to notice it in other characters such as Gladys and her friend Augusta. In his conversation with Gladys about her friend Augusta’s “powerful boyfriend” (111), Nwankwo admonishes him for “swindl[ing] the government [for] foreign exchange” (109), to purchase Augusta’s “shoes, wigs, pants, bras, cosmetics and what have you, which she will then sell and make thousands of pounds” (111). Nwankwo’s criticism of Gladys and her friend’s changing ideals saddens him as he sees Gladys as a girl “who had once had such beautiful faith in the struggle and was betrayed (no doubt about it) by some man like him out for a good time” (108). Gladys’s matter-of-fact reply - “That is what you men want us to do” (111) - parallels her reply to Nwankwo’s disapproval of her military efforts earlier in the story. Again, Gladys deflects the blame onto the instigators of corruption, whereas Nwankwo’s hypocritical reproach remains directed towards women rather than the immoral men in power.

Achebe “characterizes the corruption of the civil servant class during the Biafran War” in Nwankwo’s witnessing of Gladys’s heroic death at the end of “Girls at War” (Fallon 8). Ironically, in the denouement of the narrative, as Nwankwo “relates to us [Gladys’s] moral resurrection”, the reader sees that he himself “has also been unwittingly ravaged by the canker-worm of moral decay” (Feuser 70). Nwankwo believes Gladys to be “a mirror reflecting a society that had gone completely rotten and maggotty at the centre” (116), yet fails to detect his own moral decay. In the final moments of the narrative, Gladys redeems herself and shows that “underneath the rot and the consumerist venality [,] her moral regeneration [and] heroism of the early days comes surging back” (Feuser 70). In a parallel moment to earlier in the story, where Nwankwo chooses to help Gladys instead of needy refugees, Nwankwo stops to offer a lift again but this time to a wounded soldier. The soldier

is described as “a mere boy, in filthy khaki drenched in sweat [who] lacked his right leg from the knee down”, a visual depiction of the escalating violence of the civil conflict. He is described to be “greatly surprised” by Nwankwo’s generosity, emphasising the rarity of such a selfless act by the controlling elite (118).

Achebe solidifies this message at the end of the story when, out of the passengers in Nwankwo’s car – Nwankwo himself, his driver, Gladys and the soldier – it is Gladys that redeems her unethical actions by sacrificing her life in an attempt to help the wounded soldier escape the danger of an air raid. Nwankwo is described to have “pushed past [Gladys] shouting to her at the same time to come on”, encouraging her to think of herself before helping more vulnerable others. Achebe hyperbolises the extent of Gladys’s heroism by using sensory language to depict the air raid; the bombing is described as “a high whistle [that] descended like a spear through the chaos and exploded in a vast noise and motion that smashed up everything” (119). Gladys’s selfless gallantry juxtaposes Nwankwo’s selfish behaviour, and, as Innes argues, “Reginald’s own stance is called into question by the violence of his dismissal of a society from which he considers himself detached” (130). The last lines of the story describe “the remains of [Nwankwo’s] car smoking and the entangled remains of the girl and the soldier” (120). As Elleke Boehmer puts it, “the moment of conflagration signifies the destruction of young Biafra, of brave, loyal soldiers and dutiful girls united in a hopeless and yet ennobling national struggle” (3). Nwankwo’s “piercing cry” at the sight of Gladys and the soldier’s violent death (120) represents his acknowledgement of war as an “extension of egotism and untruth” (Lynn 84). Rather than Gladys reflecting the moral decay of society and “confusion of values” in the new nation-state, as Nwankwo first thought, it is, as Innes points out, “[his own] image that stares back at us” (130). This final scene highlights that, in Franz Fanon’s words, “society [...] cannot escape human influences. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are willing

to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure,” but progress cannot be made unless the flaws are acknowledged by those who are making them (Fanon 13).

2.3 The Post-war Displacement of the Biafran Community

Achebe’s remaining short stories in the civil war trilogy - “Civil Peace” and “Sugar Baby” – examine the “prelapsarian lives within post-war Nigeria [and the] characters who fail in their struggle to ‘return’” (David 105) to a civilized normality. In these stories, Achebe “calls our attention to the often-ignored fact that the end of wars is not an end in itself, it is a beginning” (David 118), especially in the case of civil wars, for those who were “on the wrong side” (Achebe, “Thoughts” 65). The former Biafran community had to rapidly come to terms with “the adverse economic effects of the devastation [and] the psychological damage” that the civil conflict inflicted on millions of its citizens (Lynn 75). With the collapse of Biafra in 1970, “former Biafrans – now Nigerians – also quickly discarded their garbs of Biafran-ness and sought to return to their pre-war Nigerian lives” (David 104). Achebe addresses this enforced transition of the Biafran people in a poem called “After a War” included in his civil war memoir; he writes that “after a war life catches / desperately at passing / hints of normalcy like / vines entwining a hollow / twig” (“Country” 254). Achebe’s use of the adverbial phrase “catches / desperately” connotes the disturbing immediacy in which the Biafran community had to find a sense of place and the adjective “hollow” further emphasises the artificiality of the unity imposed on them by their former adversaries. In his short story “Civil Peace”, Achebe suggests that “civil peace is the mirror image of civil war insofar as the human tendencies that push people to war are not completely resolved in its wake, regardless of political settlements” (Lynn 73). He captures a time immediately after the end of the Nigerian-Biafran war where the “Igbo society portrayed in the story seems to have

lost its way [with] the post war devastation [and hostile violence is] being re-directed against itself” (Lynn 78). Achebe’s protagonist in “Civil Peace”, Jonathan Iwegbu, and his family initially thrive in the post-war society; however, when their financial stability is threatened by corrupt forces, we begin to see a shift in the moral compass of the Igbo society where the displacement of the civil war has caused a breakdown in community values.

In the opening pages of “Civil Peace”, Achebe encourages the reader to champion his protagonist, Jonathan Iwegbu, as he appears to value the survival of his family over material possessions; he displays gratitude for surviving the civil war with the “five human heads” of his family members (82). Achebe’s repeated use of synecdoche in the word “heads” to describe Jonathan’s remaining family members emphasises not only the violent fragmentation caused by violent warfare but also highlights Jonathan’s view of his family as material wealth salvaged from the war. Jonathan views his position of relative wealth as a “miracle” and “blessing”; all other existing material possessions such as “his old bicycle” (82) and his “little zinc house” (83) are thought to be a “bonus” (82) to the survival of his immediate family members. In an attempt to initiate the post-war recovery, Jonathan’s “children picked mangoes near the military cemetery and sold them to soldiers' wives for a few pennies” and “his wife started making breakfast akara balls for neighbours in a hurry to start life again” (84). However, Achebe forebodes the loss of financial stability for the Iwegbu family early on in the narrative by emphasising that Jonathan “had to be extra careful” with his accumulated earnings as “some heartless ruffian” picked the pocket of “a man a couple of days earlier” (84), indicating the continuation of existing corruption in the aftermath of the civil war.

The fleeting return to normalcy that Jonathan and his family worked towards is terminated dramatically with a “carnavalesque³ glimpse of the social upheaval” (Lynn 75). The Iwegbu family are subjected to a night-time robbery of their twenty pounds of “egg-rasher” (ex-gratia⁴) that they traded for their “rebel money” (that is, Biafran pounds) (85, 84). In a darkly comic moment, the thieves introduce themselves in a business-like manner to the terror-stricken family: “Now make we talk business. We no be bad tief. We no like for make trouble. Trouble done finish.” (87). By having the thieves “mak[e] a grotesque imitation of middle-class Western ideas of fair play, urbanity, and decorum” (Crehan 18), Achebe reminds the reader that “the robbery represents a continuation of the civil war for the man and his family” (David 111), except that the oppressor has changed. The gang of thieves justify their corruption by comparing their level of restraint to the brutality of the civil war; they argue that the “war done finish and all the katakata wey de for inside. No Civil War again. This time na Civil Peace” (87). Achebe puns the adjective “civil” to describe the civility of the thief’s actions but also to foreground the Igbo community’s act of self-sabotage. However, what is more shocking than the robbery is the thieves’ mockery of the acquiescence of Jonathan’s neighbours. They imitate the futile cries of Jonathan and his family: “Police-o! Thieves-o! Neighbours-o! Police-o! We are lost! We are dead! Neighbours, are you asleep? Wake up! Police-o! ” (86), showing the powerlessness and dangerousness of the situation for the Iwegbu family. Achebe stresses that “in their moment of need, the traditional Ibo ethic of community is nowhere to be seen” (Morrison and Tredell

³ Thomas J. Lynn’s use of the word “carnavalesque” refers to “Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s exploration of concepts associated with carnival” (79). Lynn observes that “in Bakhtin’s view, ‘carnival [...] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitionists’, and the thieves in “Civil Peace” gained their practical and literary purchase from just this suspension in the post-war environment” (80).

⁴ After the Nigerian-Biafran War, former Biafrans were required to turn in their “rebel currency” to the Treasury in exchange for legitimate Nigerian currency. The term “egg rasher” is Pidgin English for the Latin “ex gratia”, which roughly translates into “as a favour”, and connotes the guileful way former Biafrans were coerced into reintegration.

133), as only “at the first sign of light [did] neighbours and others [...] commiserate with him” (88), thereby inadvertently acknowledging their compliance in the robbery. This event serves to remind us that “a community's war-related wreckage cannot be offset merely by industriousness or financial improvement” (Lynn 79). As Thomas J. Lynn notes in his 2010 article for *Peace Research*, “in a post war civil society, civility is in short supply: people continue to bully, deceive, and overreach in the struggle for a foothold in the peace” (73). In the aftermath of the Nigerian-Biafran War, Achebe recognised that “the village code of conduct has been violated but a more embracing and a bigger one has not been found” (Achebe, “Role” 12), highlighting the former Biafran community’s displacement and “confusion of values” as a result of the civil conflict.

Achebe’s short story “Sugar Baby” is also set in the aftermath of the Nigerian-Biafran War, but the focus of this story is directed more towards a “confusion of values” as a result of personal loss. The protagonist and focaliser, Mike, is compelled by his friend and former comrade, Cletus, to recount war-time memories to a party of friends, but what becomes apparent through Achebe’s structuring of the narrative is the difference in Mike’s recollection of these memories to Cletus’s. By encouraging the reader to gradually piece together Cletus’s traumatic past, the story exposes the devastating impact that the civil war had and its long-lasting psychological impact on the Biafran community. Through the exploration of Cletus’s struggle with his warped memories in “Sugar Baby”, “Achebe informs us that the sense of loss felt by former Biafrans was not addressed [and] they continue to struggle with the trauma of loss” (David 118). The devastating reality of the Nigerian-Biafran War was that “more than a million Biafrans perished as a consequence of famine, malnutrition, and disease” (Lynn 75), in their fight for independence. In “Sugar Baby”, Achebe tackles these issues surrounding food rationing and the repercussions it had through Cletus’s addiction to sugar. Achebe uses the symbol of the sugar to represent the loss of something precious and the

adverse effects that this loss has on a person's psychological state and, over time, what strategies a person uses to recover from the trauma of this loss.

An initially humorous scene at the beginning of "Sugar Baby" becomes much more sinister when we consider the symbolic implication of the relationship between Cletus and a bowl of sugar. Mike and a few of Cletus's companions witness Cletus "thrust his hand into his sugar bowl [and] fling it out of the window, his squarish jaw sat viciously" (89). Cletus's explanation of this unusual act is, "only to show sugar that today I am greater than he" (89). Achebe's personification of the sugar emphasises Cletus's desperate attempts to show that he has overcome his desperate addiction to sugar. Cletus repeatedly encourages Mike to "tell [the others] about me and sugar" (90), but Mike does not want to "enact that farcical celebration of victory over sugar" (90–91), as he perceives Cletus's response to the regaining of what was lost as a superficial recovery. Mike recognises that "for Cletus, sugar is not simply sugar. It is what makes life bearable" (91), revealing Cletus's superficial recovery to the reader.

Through a series of flashbacks, Mike narrates the beginnings of Cletus's experience of loss represented by his addiction to sugar. Mike recollects the time when Cletus's addiction became so agonising that he exclaimed, "Fuck your war! Fuck your survival!" (93) in a fit of anger at not being able to find a decent replacement for sugar. Mike and Cletus even attempted to ask Father Doherty, the distributor of relief supplies, for some sugar, which was met with the heated rejection, "sugar when thousands of God's innocents perish daily for lack of a glass of milk!" (96). Cletus's selfishness and disillusionment over the loss of sugar may seem farcical, yet when we liken it to the more substantial loss that millions of Biafrans experienced over the course of the civil war, Cletus's emotional outbursts seem less hysterical. Brought out of his period of reflection by Cletus's "desperate [...] begging, pleading, touting for the sumptuous agony of flagellation", Mike is encouraged one last time

to “tell [the others of] the battle I waged with sugar” (99). It is this particular memory that is warped by the trauma of loss as Mike’s and Cletus’s reactions to it are obviously different. Mike explains how Cletus’s girlfriend Mercy “thrust her hand into the opened packet of sugar”, that he managed to obtain as a gift for Cletus, and how she “grabbed a handful and was about to put it in her handbag” (99). Mike then describes how Cletus “pounced on her” whilst he “seized her hand containing the sugar and began to prize it open, his teeth clenched”, portraying the act as animalistic and aggressive (99). Achebe argues that the civil war brought out “something nasty in human nature. Perhaps not just human, but also in animal nature” (Achebe, “Biafra” 229), which is clearly evident in the actions of Cletus here.

Mike admits that he “came very near to loathing [Cletus]” in this pivotal scene as he witnessed a “confusion of values” in Cletus where he pitifully demonstrated his preference for material possessions over his relationship with his girlfriend (99). Cletus’s reaction to this memory is also telling as he comments that he is “sick and tired of all these grab-grab girls” (99), suggesting that he still denies his own part in the downfall of their relationship and believes his actions to be justified. By this shocking response, Mike realises that Cletus is still coping with the repercussions of loss, “so [he] steered [him]self to a retrieving joke, retrieving all be it with a razor-edge” (100). Achebe’s use of the phrase “razor-edge” to describe the recollection of memories suggests that the recovery from loss is a painful process, but “by exposing and dramatizing the problem [...] he can go to the root of the problem.” Achebe argues that “you need a writer to bring out the human tragedy, the crisis in the soul” and that it is “the writer’s duty is to help [decolonised nations] regain [their dignity] by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost” (Achebe, “Role” 11, 8).

Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* was written during a tumultuous period in Nigerian history and it is clear to see the significant impact that this context had on the

writing of his civil war trilogy. All three of Achebe's civil war stories lack a resolution to the issues they conveyed, as at the time they were written, former Biafrans like Achebe were still trying to come to terms with what they had lost in the collapse of the Biafran dream. In a 1997 interview with Rajat Neogy on Biafra, Achebe argues that "it is really no use talking of unity; you don't unite the dead, you only unite the living, and there must be a minimal willingness on the part of those who are to be united" (Achebe, "Biafra" 226). This interview shows how decades after the Nigerian-Biafran War ended, tensions between the former Biafran community and the rest of Nigeria and the devastating repercussions of the civil war are still unresolved. In his short stories, Achebe does not focus on blaming particular parties for the downfall of Biafra, but he does draw attention to a "confusion of values" that still permeates Nigerian society and prevents any progress towards unification.

Chapter 2 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been extensively praised for its depiction of the Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970), receiving the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction and thus going "some way towards affirming Biafra's importance within the narrative of Nigeria's 20th century postcolonial history" (Rushton 179), as the Biafran perspective of the civil conflict is "relatively unspoken of in official Nigerian historiography" (Feldner 40). For Adichie, "literature is about memory, history, reconciliation and identity" (Adichie, "Role" 96); she wrote *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the hope that it "would make Nigerians, particularly Nigerians of [her] generation, aware of their history and [...] at least make it possible for [them] to collectively acknowledge what happened" (Adichie, "African" 52). In the appendices of the Fourth Estate edition of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie includes her essay "In the Shadow of Biafra" to explain her motivation behind writing "*the great Nigerian civil war novel*"⁵ (Emenyonu 8).

Despite having been born seven years after the civil conflict ended, Adichie explains that she "grew up in the shadow of the Biafra" and therefore "wanted to engage with [her] history in order to make sense of [the] present" because "many of the issues that led to the war remain unresolved in Nigeria today" (2). Indeed, before the narrative even begins Adichie makes a "bold attempt at genealogical memorialization" by dedicating the novel to her "family [that] was affected by the war" (Akpome 25) as "a way of coming to terms with the past whose pastness juts out into the present and future of individuals and communities" (Mander 51). Adichie dedicates *Half of a Yellow Sun* to her "grandfathers, whom [she] never knew" as they "did not survive the war" but also to her "grandmothers" who did survive the war and to her family's former houseboy Mellitus. The ominous ending of Adichie's

⁵ The author's own use of italics.

dedication to Mellitus “wherever he may be” foregrounds the lack of reconciliation and personal loss that still affects the former Biafran community as a result of the civil conflict, echoing themes in Achebe’s civil fiction. By explicitly naming immediate family members that were affected by the war, “*Half of a Yellow Sun* unsettles the historical distance between the reader and the Nigerian civil war, positioning that past as meaningful to contemporary discourse about Africa” (Rushton 184). The Nigerian-Biafran war significantly impacted post-Independence Nigeria and Adichie’s choice to write about the civil conflict nearly forty years after it ended indicates the substantial impression it left on her and contemporary Nigerian society. Adichie’s work is “continuous with that of many postcolonial historical novelists, for whom the genre’s double temporal address allows it to explore past conflict in order to promote present or future reconciliation” (Dalley 127). By delving into a conflicted past from the Biafran perspective, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* aims to address the breakdown of the Biafran dream and lingering after-effects of the civil war that continue to reverberate throughout present-day Nigeria.

The Nigerian-Biafran War has been fictionalised since the Nigerian coup d’état began in 1966⁶, but it is striking that Chinua Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories*, written in 1972 only two years after the war ended, bears many likenesses to Adichie’s 2006 novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, considering they were written thirty-two years apart. In essays, Adichie has expressed her admiration of Achebe’s literary works, accrediting him as “the writer whose work gave [her] permission to write [her] own stories” (Adichie “African” 42). In her essay “In the Shadow of Biafra” (2006), Adichie calls Achebe’s short story “Sugar Baby” from his 1972 civil war trilogy “the best piece of fiction [she has] read about Biafra” (10). What interests Adichie in Achebe’s writing on the Nigerian-Biafran war is his exploration of “what

⁶ Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People*, London: Heinemann, 1966; Wole Soyinka, *Idanre and Other Poems*, London: Methuen, 1967.

happens when the shiny things we once believed in begin to rust before our eyes” (“Shadow” 10), alluding to Achebe’s depiction of the gradual disillusionment of the Biafran dream that led to what Achebe called a “confusion of values” by the end of the civil war (Achebe, “Role” 10).

In “African ‘Authenticity’ and the Biafran Experience” (2008), Adichie praises Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* for its portrayal of “Biafran heroism”, which is unconventionally set “in out-of-the-way refugee camps, in the damp tatters, in the hungry and bare-handed courage of the first line of fire” (“African” 50). Inspired by Achebe’s short stories, Adichie proclaims herself determined to make her own civil war novel about “the grittiness of being human—a book about relationships, about people who have sex and eat food and laugh, about people who are fierce consumers of life” (“African” 50-51). Perhaps here Adichie is defending *Half of a Yellow Sun* for being “more a love story than a war story” (“African” 53), for, as Meredith Coffey points out, there has been a mixed reception of “her focus on the concrete details of personal life”, which critics like Coffey see as either “enriching her dramatization of wartime events, or distracting from them” (129). Following Meredith Coffey, I will argue that the setting of the Nigerian-Biafran War is “not just as a ‘backdrop’” to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, but plays a central role in the story in shaping the characters’ sense of self and sense of place (Coffey 64). In her essay “African ‘Authenticity’ and the Biafran Experience” (2008), Adichie explains that she “had no interest in writing a polemic”, but instead wanted to write a novel “with unapologetic Biafran sympathies” (“African” 50), as she believes that “to write a realistic fiction about a war, especially one central to the history of one’s country, is to be constantly aware of a responsibility to something larger than art” (Adichie “Shadow” 11), echoing Achebe’s thoughts on “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation” (Achebe, 1964). Both Achebe and Adichie focus on the

human aspect of the Nigerian-Biafran War to give a realistic impression of the rise and fall of the Biafran dream from the Biafran perspective.

Both Achebe and Adichie have been vocal about the role of the African anglophone writer and the problems that come with universalising fiction to attract a broader Western readership. For Achebe, an African writer “should aim at fashioning an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience”, expressing his own difficulties as a postcolonial Nigerian author writing in English (“African Literature” 347). In his impassioned essay “Thoughts on the African Novel” (1988), Achebe criticises the extent to which the content of his fiction should be edited for a larger Western audience by stating, “Am I being told, for Christ sake, that before I write about any problem I must first verify whether they have it too in New York and London and Paris?” (65). To Achebe, the postcolonial African writer should “write for the *whole* nation whose audience cuts across tribe or clan. And these, for good or ill, are the writers in English” (Achebe, “Role” 12). Achebe chooses to write about Nigeria in a universal language in the hope of reaching a polyglottal Nigerian and African readership as well as a diverse Western audience, a motive shared by Adichie in her writing *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In their respective Nigerian-Biafran war narratives, both Achebe and Adichie narrate the events from the perspective of the defeated Biafran community. However, as Ruth S. Wenske points out, “it seems that rather than finding out who is to blame, Adichie, like Achebe, focuses on who cannot be blamed—in order to move toward reconciliation” (76).

Both Achebe and Adichie present their version of the civil conflict with “no clear-cut to victims and [their work] cannot be reduced to a simple understanding of ‘right and wrong’” (Rushton 190). Adichie comments that “the writing itself was a bruising experience” for her as she “struggled to maintain many fragile balances [and] often wondered whether to stop or to scale back” (“Shadow” 12). She intended to legitimise the Biafran experience but

also wanted to “avoid making Biafra a *utopia-in-retrospect*, which would have been disingenuous - it would have sullied the memories of all those who died” (“African” 50). Like Achebe, Adichie achieves this balance by creating flawed Biafran characters as a result of their “confusion of values”. Following the same narrative arc as Achebe, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts different stages of the civil war, tracking the initial hope for an independent Biafra, the gradual disillusionment as a result of corruption and the eventual displacement of the Biafran community with their forced absorption back into a fragmented Nigeria. Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays the southeast provinces’ dream of secession from Nigeria as a way for the Igbo community to begin a secure life post-Independence on their own terms. However, this postcolonial dream is gradually crushed by a corruption of power from both outside and within Biafra, which fractures and displaces the Biafran community. The vast similarities in motivation, focalisation and plot between Achebe and Adichie’s civil war stories signals that “Chinua Achebe’s legacy remains central to the African literary imagination” (Choudhury 97) and that issues depicted by Achebe over thirty-two years before Adichie’s novelisation of the Nigerian-Biafran War still resonates with present-day Nigerians.

2.1 Building the Dream of Biafra

When reflecting upon the atmosphere in Nigeria after the 1966 anti-Igbo pogrom in the northern provinces, Achebe recognised “a new spirit among the people” to “put in their best and fight for their freedom” in Biafra and fictionalised this tenacity of spirit in his civil war fiction (Achebe, “Country” 171). Echoing Achebe’s views on the lead up to the civil war, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie captures the optimism and security that the Biafran dream promised. Adichie describes Nigeria in the late 1960s as a time that was “in many ways

shabby, painfully shabby”, but also a time when “people discovered strength and talent and courage” (Adichie, “African” 52). The juxtaposition between the hope and the tragedy of Biafra is central to Adichie’s civil war novel as characters who fall victim to the atrocities of the Nigerian-Biafran War either emerge stronger and more determined to help secure the dream of Biafra or sink into episodes of melancholy and self-pity. Unlike Achebe’s civil war stories, whose narrators are all male, Adichie chooses to focalise a hope for the Biafran dream through a broader spectrum of characters. Olanna, Adichie’s central focaliser, and her husband Odenigbo’s teenage houseboy, Ugwu, discover their “inner strength” and “talent” during the civil war by prioritising the education of Biafra’s future generations over their own fears. With the help of Olanna and Odenigbo, Ugwu channels his own and others’ traumatic war-time experiences into writing and eventually becomes the spokesperson for Biafra by the end of the novel. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, “education emerges as the main tool in Adichie’s project of nation building,” as Ugwu and Olanna’s makeshift curriculum inspires hope and nationalistic pride in Biafra during a desperately hopeless time (Feldner 56). The importance of education is promoted throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun* because, for Adichie, education makes the dream of Biafra tangible.

Education is first introduced to the novel through Odenigbo’s fervent willingness “to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure[s]” left behind by colonisation (Fanon 13). Odenigbo’s charged intellectual debates with his fellow staff members from the University of Nigeria at Nsukka are overheard by Ugwu, who eagerly listens from his domestic sphere in Odenigbo’s kitchen. Ugwu is surrounded by Nsukka’s academic elite who preach that “education is a priority!” and question how emancipated Nigerians can “resist exploitation if [they] don’t have the tools to understand exploitation?” (11). Therefore, from the very beginning of the novel, Ugwu is instilled with the importance of education in building a nation-state. Odenigbo insists upon enlisting Ugwu into the university “staff primary school”

(11) and refuses to be called “Sir” by Ugwu because he argues that “*Sir* is arbitrary. [Ugwu] could be the *sir* tomorrow” (13), demonstrating his firm belief in the power of education as a unifier for the future generation of Nigerians. Indeed, to some extent Odenigbo’s educational ideals come to fruition by the end of the novel as Ugwu is revealed to be the author of the highly academic metafictional text interjected throughout the novel, titled *The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died* by Ugwu dedicating *The Book* to his former “Master” Odenigbo (433). Ugwu’s elevated status from uneducated houseboy to academic author foregrounds the hopeful possibilities for younger generations. Whilst Maximilian Feldner argues that “Odenigbo is [solely] responsible for Ugwu becoming a prototype of Achebe’s ‘novelist as a teacher’” (56), it is clear that Olanna plays an equally important role in Ugwu’s academic development since she recruited Ugwu as an educator. Moreover, by acting as what psychoanalyst Dori Laub has called, a “co-witness” to the testimonial of her trauma, Ugwu is inspired to tell the story of Biafra (Laub 70). The shift from Odenigbo to Olanna as Ugwu’s educational mentor is significant as it foregrounds the “important resilient roles of the Biafran heroines in their struggles [to] rebuild a war ravaged society” (Njoku 162) and also signals the transference from the abstract idealism that Odenigbo represents to the building of a solid foundation for the future of Biafra.

At a time in the novel when hope is dwindling due to the growing impoverishment of the Biafran people, Olanna, along with her twin sister Kainene, manages a refugee camp that becomes “a centre of revival and family reunion at such a time when there is no vestige of hope for many Biafrans” (Njoku 164). Since the refugee camp is housed in the local primary school building, Olanna, with the help of Ugwu, teaches children in the backyard “about the Biafran flag [by explaining that] red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of the yellow sun stood for the glorious future” (281). Olanna’s explanation of the

colour symbolism in the Biafran flag provides the children with tools to understand their present situation, something Adichie herself explains was erased from her education as it was common to “pretend [it] never existed, that we hide, as if hiding it will make it go away, which of course it doesn’t” (Adichie, “African” 52). Olanna’s fervent passion for education transforms the abstract idealism that Odenigbo initially displayed for the future of Biafra into concrete foundations of hope and progress for the future. The shift from abstraction to physical foundations of progress marks a significant difference between Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* because Adichie’s novel, as Carol Ijeoma Njoku puts it, “uncovers the untold truth about Biafran female heroines, signals hope for future struggles and re-emphasizes the woman’s significance in the human struggles for victory and survival” (Njoku 166). Adichie has the advantage of writing about the Nigerian-Biafran war over thirty years after it ended; her civil war narrative is more optimistic for the future of a united Nigeria than Achebe’s much earlier *Girls at War and Other Stories*. Commenting on Achebe writing his civil war trilogy in such close proximity to the civil war, Adichie comments that she “often wondered [...] how much of the muted defeat in *Girls at War* [was] in fact what Chinua Achebe himself felt about the loss of Biafra” (“Shadow” 11). Because Achebe wrote so soon after the Nigerian-Biafran war ended, the hope that the characters display for security in Biafra never materialises into something concrete and remains an abstraction, whereas Adichie has the advantage of temporal distance to recognise that educating future generations about the civil conflict is needed to reconcile a still conflicted postcolonial Nigeria.

Although *Half of a Yellow Sun* is built around a past event, “it doubtlessly seeks meaning for Nigeria’s future” and Ugwu “can be taken to represent some optimism for the future” (Feldner 54). Like Achebe, Adichie herself said that she “wanted to make a strongly felt political point about who should be writing the stories of Africa” (Adichie, “Stories” 6)

and therefore she carefully chooses a cross-section of Nigerian society to focalise the story of Biafra. Adichie takes the agency away from white Briton Richard, who is the assumed author of the metafiction titled *The World Was Silent When We Died* that is embedded throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun* and gives the responsibility of telling Biafra's story to Ugwu. With the "highly symbolic transfer of authorship from Richard to Ugwu, Adichie claims the right to tell the history of Nigeria for her own people" (Feldner 52). Adichie's purposeful shift from a white Briton living in Biafra to a Nigerian teenage houseboy and later Biafran soldier signifies the importance of authenticity in the memorialisation of Biafra and how "speaking through the voice of the disempowered becomes, in part, a way of lessening the marginalization of privilege" (McClintock 305). Although Richard displays a genuine interest in Nigerian culture and his wish to document the Nigerian-Biafran War is well-intended, he fails to realise until the very end of the novel that he can never truly be Biafran despite being there from its conception.

As Hamish Dalley observes, Richard "struggles to escape the legacy of imperialist stereotypes that limit his ability to understand the society to which he wishes to belong" (Dalley 124). Throughout the course of the novel, Richard gradually realises that his romantic relationship with Olanna's twin sister Kainene is his only tangible link to Biafra and without her, he is lost. His romantic rival, Colonel Madu Madu, acts as a constant reminder to Richard of his otherness. Richard responds bitterly to Madu's use of pronouns that are "edged with exclusion" and indicate that "Richard was not part of *we*", that he is seen as "a visitor [who] could not take the liberties of the homeowners" (304). The secession of Biafra meant "a new start, a new country, *their* new country" to Richard as he believes that "he would be Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian [as] he was here at the beginning; he had shared in the birth. He would belong" (168). However, when he loses his only link to Biafran society, his lover Kainene, he ultimately realises he is, as Amy S. Rushton puts it, "only

‘native’ by association with Kainene. Like the state itself, their relationship cannot survive the rupture of ethnic division” (Rushton 193) and therefore “the war isn’t [his] story to tell, really” (425). Adichie replaces Richard with Ugwu as the spokesperson of Biafra, thereby transferring agency to a more suitable writer as Richard’s experience as a Biafran could never compare to Ugwu’s. Ugwu’s original title for his book on Biafra was “Narrative of the Life of a Country” (424); however, Ugwu chooses to replace his original title with Richard’s, “The World Was Silent When We Died”, which highlights that the rightful claim to the pronoun “we”. This transferal of authorship echoes the Achebe sentiments “that if the white man is so curious about the black man, one day he may actually stop and listen to him” (Achebe, “Hopes” 16). In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the transferral of narrative agency from Richard to Ugwu in the telling of Biafra’s story signals a shift in the responsibility of educating future generations of Nigerians about their conflicted past. Ugwu represents the next generation who have been personally affected by a colonial and conflicted past but use these painful experiences to shape a postcolonial future.

2.2 Balancing Biafran Sympathies

Nigeria in the 1960s was “fraught with political unrest and anxieties, evaporating the pre-Independence excitements and the hope of freedom from the excruciating colonial regime” (Anyanwu 140). Like Achebe’s civil war fiction, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* depicts the disillusionment and breakdown of the Biafran dream as a result of the corrupt socio-political systems left behind by colonialism. The downfall of Biafra in Adichie’s novel showcases “the tragedy of post-Independent Nigeria where independence arrives in borrowed apparel” due to the “agendas, policies and structures of the colonial era [that were] commandeered by inefficient, greedy politicians and corrupt bureaucracy” (Mander 52). In *Half of Yellow Sun*,

the socio-political corruption is shown to originate from within Biafra as well as outside of it. Adichie balances her Biafran sympathies by exploring how her characters “may be kind and unkind in different ways” thereby blurring the boundaries between the oppressor and the oppressed (Adichie, “African” 46). Like Achebe’s complex and flawed characters in *Girls at War and Other Stories*, there are no clear-cut victims or perpetrators in Adichie’s novel either; her protagonists all undergo a “confusion of values” as a result of the inherited corruption perpetuated by the Nigerian-Biafran War. Both Achebe and Adichie choose to highlight the corruption of the Nigerian social elite, who use their elevated status to others’ disadvantage, but Adichie also vindicates her socially advantaged characters, Olanna and Kainene, by subverting their positions of power so that they re-evaluate their priorities. Adichie, like Achebe, also uses minor characters to represent a cross-section of Nigerian society affected by the civil war, but Adichie uses a broader range of characters from outside Biafra to the international dimension of the corruption. Perhaps as a result of fictionalising the Nigerian-Biafran War as a novel rather than a trilogy of short stories as Achebe did, Adichie is able to cast a wider net on the roots of corruption and explore in more depth the long-lasting impact the corrupt socio-political systems had on new nation-states.

The corruption that existed in post-Independence Nigeria is first exhibited in *Half of a Yellow Sun* before the civil war with the objectification of Olanna and her twin sister Kainene by the patriarchal figures that make up the Nigerian social elite. To use Kainene’s sardonic phrasing, Olanna is objectified “as sex bait” by her father, Chief Ozobia, in order to secure his business investment with Chief Okonji (35). When her father’s investor propositions Olanna, she “did nothing [to evade him because] she was used to [...] being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne-drenched entitlement, with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together” (33). In this exchange, Adichie emphasises the double colonisation of women in post-Independence

Nigeria and the transfer of power from the former colonial powers to the corrupt Nigerian elite. Kainene's presence at a high-profile ex-patriate function also sheds light on the role of women before the war. Richard, upon first seeing Kainene, thought that she "seemed more like a mistress [with] her brazenly red lipstick, her tight dress, her smoking" than "some wealthy Nigerian's daughter" (57). Like Gladys in Achebe's "Girls at War", women in post-Independence Nigeria "had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own man but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women" (McClintock 6). Olanna and Kainene, despite being part of the Nigerian social elite, still must contend with patriarchal structures initially enforced through colonisation and continued after Independence.

Indeed, Adichie explicitly broaches this subject through the conversation Odenigbo has with his university colleagues. Commenting on the former Prime Minister of Nigeria, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Odenigbo argues that Balewa "will always please his Masters the British. He's their stooge. They put him there, and they tell him what to do, and he does it," exclaiming that "we [Nigerians] are living in a time of great white evil" (110). Odenigbo's critique alludes to the notion that independence was a move "from direct to indirect rule, a shift from colonial rule and domination to a position not so much of independence as of being in-dependence" (Young 3). In a more grotesque scene later in the novel, Okeoma, the former poet turned Biafran soldier, describes his British commander's treatment of women to Odenigbo and Olanna. Okeoma bluntly explains how his army commander "throws girls on their backs in the open, where the men can see him, and does them, all the time holding his bag of money in one hand," he rationalises this behaviour by explaining that his commander "thinks he knows more about our own land than we do" (323). Here, Adichie is highlighting a detrimental stereotype presented earlier on in the novel at a British ex-patriate function where Susan, Richard's ex-lover, "chuckled [with the other guests] about how tribal Nigerian

politics was, and perhaps these chaps were not quite so ready to rule themselves after all” (53). Adichie challenges the notion that new nation-states are unable to govern themselves by suggesting that the root of corruption lies with Nigeria’s former colonisers.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie echoes Achebe’s thoughts on “the social malaise in [post-Independence] Nigerian society [being the result of] political corruption” where the “structure of the country was such that there was an inbuilt power struggle among the ethnic groups, and of course those who were in power wanted to stay in power” (Achebe, “Country”, 51). Adichie foregrounds the corruption in Biafra by contrasting the relative luxury that the social elite lives in with the extreme poverty and squalid living conditions that the rest of the Biafran society is forced to endure during the civil conflict. However, the exposure to the traumas of war produces a “confusion of values” whereby Adichie’s characters are forced to re-evaluate their priorities and reshape their identities in order to survive. Unlike their parents who own “half of Lagos” (59) and went overseas “until things calmed down” (131), Olanna and Kainene choose to stay in Nigeria to help the “Biafra win the war” effort (275). At the outbreak of war, Kainene was “an army contractor [with] a license to import stockfish” and therefore initially profited from the war, but after witnessing a gruesome decapitation she abandons her business and decides to take “charge of a refugee camp” (343), for the first time prioritising the needs of others over her own.

Kainene’s twin sister Olanna also questions her personal values as a result of the growing desperation of her living conditions. She admits that she “had forgotten that [she and her family] had high ideals [and] did not ask favors of highly placed friends” (337), after “she felt like a thief” (270) for using her social advantage to acquire extra food from the relief centre for her severely malnourished daughter Baby. Olanna’s personal crisis reaches its peak when she is mugged by a group of hungry soldiers who “were bearing down on her” looking “desperately lawless”, but she “imagined fighting them, strangling them, killing them”

because “the corned beef was hers. Hers” (272). Olanna’s rationalisation is striking and highlights the “confusion of values” that she and the group of soldiers are experiencing as a result of the mass starvation caused by the civil conflict. Kainene brings moral clarity to the community in a later incident where a “soldier had been stealing from the farm [which] happened everywhere now, farms raided at night” and her neighbours wanted to violently punish him; she explains to them that “he is not a thief. He is a hungry soldier” (404) bringing everyone to their senses and restoring community spirit. Olanna and Kainene’s personal crises as a result of the traumas of war evoke a “confusion of values”, where their highly triggered emotions overpower their logic and reasoning. Adichie presents Olanna and Kainene’s fall from the social elite to avoid “simplifying interpretations of [...] the perpetrators of violence or their victims’ as homogeneous masses” (Dalley 126). The female protagonists in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are not entirely innocent of unethical acts as a result of being pushed to their limits by civil warfare, but emerge morally righteous when others fail to.

Similarly, the actions of minor characters that represent a broader spectrum of communities outside Biafra are also affected by a “confusion of values”. Adichie includes characters from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and religious figures from abroad to show alternately the support, betrayal and willed ignorance of outsiders of the Biafran cause. When the first military coup happened in 1966, Olanna was visiting her ex-lover Muhammed in the North. He was able to smuggle her onto a train to avoid any danger but remains a distant figure throughout the war until Olanna receives a letter from him at the later stages of the conflict. Olanna admits that “Muhammad's letter incensed her; it insulted her reality”. His mentioning of “his polo game”, whilst “Odenigbo drank kai-kai every day [to suppress his traumatic recall] and Ugwu was conscripted” (377) emphasises his willed ignorance to the suffering that she and the Biafran community endured and the luxurious life he continues to

enjoy. A similar scenario happens to Kainene's friend Colonel Madu Madu when his Hausa comrade "Ibrahim saved [his] life" by informing him of the coup and "drove [Madu] to his cousin's house [where he] slept in their chicken house for two days" (139) to escape from the danger of the Nigerian soldiers looking for Igbo "infidels" (152). Where Muhammed and Ibrahim represent the Hausa that supported the endangered Igbo characters, another minor character Abdulmalik, shows the betrayal that the Hausa inflicted on them too. Olanna's beloved Aunt Ifeka, Uncle Mbaezi and cousin Arize were all betrayed by their neighbour Abdulmalik, who "finished the whole family" by slaughtering them under the pretence that "it was Allah's will!" (148). Showcasing members of the Hausa as sometimes supportive and at other times violent helps to avoid serotyping the enemy of the Biafran cause, but also highlights that the corruption came from outside of Biafra as well as from inside.

Religious figures in the novel are used to demonstrate the "confusion of values" that society underwent as even representatives of sacred institutions are depicted as perpetrators of corruption. When Ugwu attempts to flee a conscription officer threatening him with a gun and ran to the Catholic church to plead sanctuary, the priest refused to open the doors with the reply that "those outside who are being conscripted, they are God's children too" (350). This callous response sparks a chain of events that leads to Ugwu's loss of innocence, as he is forcibly conscripted into the army and both witnesses and participates in traumatic events thereafter. Moreover, in the refugee camp where Ugwu, Kainene and Olanna volunteer, Father Marcell takes advantage of starving young women who have been entrusted to him for protection and care. Kainene rightfully shows disgust at discovering that Father Marcel "fucks most of the [vulnerable young girls] before he gives them the crayfish that [she] slaved to get here!" (398), which demonstrates that corruption infiltrated even sacred intuitions and their representatives. Corruption already existed before the war, but once the Biafran community are pushed to their limits due to the severe impoverishment of the civil

war their personal values are tested. Unlike Achebe, Adichie includes characters from outside Biafra such as Hausa characters and Christian missionaries who may at times offer support, but also further avenues for corruption. Thus, she tries to avoid stereotyping the Biafran people as suffering homogeneous masses and the outsiders as either willingly ignorant or violent adversaries.

2.3 Loss and Lack of Closure

As *Half of a Yellow Sun* is divided into four parts, alternating between “The Early Sixties” and “The Late Sixties”, the novel oscillates between the immediate period before the Nigerian-Biafran War and times during the civil conflict. Janice Spleth argues that Adichie avoids labelling these time periods in relation to the war because she wanted to promote “the private lives of individuals, emphasizing the role played by non-combatants” (Spleth 129). However, I will argue that the civil war plays a pivotal part in the *breakdown* of relationships, and characters’ sense of self and place. The non-linearity of Adichie’s narrative, with its alternating sections set in the early and late 1960s, heightens the tragedy of the civil war as the characters’ hopes and dreams of an independent Biafra that we see in “The Early Sixties” are revealed to be an illusion when juxtaposed with the devastating reality of civil warfare portrayed in “The Late Sixties”. Like Achebe, Adichie foregrounds the overwhelming loss and lack of closure after the civil war ended which ruptures the lives of her Biafran characters. Odenigbo loses his visionary colleagues to the war and the violent loss of his mother catalyses his grief, and his vigour and passion seen at the beginning of the novel collapses into weakness and self-pity. Olanna and Richard grieve the loss of Kainene who, like Mellitus in Adichie’s dedication, cannot be found after the civil war has ended. Ugwu loses his innocence to the war by witnessing and taking part in the violence of the warfare,

but emerges as the only sign of hope for the future. Ugwu's loss of innocence, the lack of closure due to Kainene's disappearance and the ultimate loss of the Biafran dream symbolised in Odenigbo's downfall highlight the lingering tragedy of the Nigerian-Biafran War, but there are also signs of reconciliation and empowerment in the future generations. Both Achebe and Adichie's civil war stories end with tragedy but also symbolise recovery; however, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* goes a step further giving the narrative agency to Ugwu who is chosen to tell the story of Biafra by the end of the novel.

By "The Late Sixties" the characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* begin to realise that there will be "no return [...] to their prelapsarian lives within post-war Nigeria" (David 105). The loss of Kainene severely impacts Olanna and Richard, causing a conflicted sense of self and place. As Fernand Leroy points out, according to traditional Nigerian customs, "twins [are believed to] share the same combined soul" and when "the life of the other [twin] is imperilled [...] the balance of his soul [becomes] seriously disturbed" (Leroy 134). When Olanna loses her twin sister, she displays a conflicted sense of self, turning to previously shunned traditional spiritual practices to seek solace and closure. Similarly, Richard struggles with an inner conflict at the end of the novel when he realises that his only link to Biafra is gone. However, Richard "knew that he would never see Kainene again" (430), rationalising her disappearance and seeking ways to find closure even when he knows that "his life would always be like a candle-lit room; he would see things only in shadow, only in half glimpses" (430). Adichie's use of the word "shadow" to describe Richard's grief not only conveys his melancholy at the lack of closure, but also references her own feeling of being in the "Shadow of Biafra", as she calls it in her essay that introduces the novel; contemporary Nigerians still feel the reverberations of war decades after it ended. Unlike Richard who attempts to accept Kainene's disappearance, Olanna refuses to give up hope. Olanna's pain at the end of the novel is described as "stranger than grief [because] she did not know where her

sister was. She did not know” (431). The ambiguity of her sister’s disappearance causes her to turn to traditional practices that she once scorned Odenigbo’s mother for believing in. Grief has caused an inner conflict, where Olanna rationalises her use of the *dibia*⁷ by claiming: “I do believe in it. I believe in everything. I believe in anything that will bring my sister home” (433). The strength that Olanna displayed at the beginning of the civil conflict is dissipated by the loss of her sister; unlike earlier in the novel, Olanna fails to channel her grief into more optimistic projects which Kainene inspired her to do. At the end of the novel, both Olanna and Richard are broken by grief and lack of closure, losing their sense of self and sense of place.

Odenigbo is also transformed by grief, and as such comes to represent the disillusionment of the Biafran dream. His irreversible melancholy leads to the breakdown of his and Olanna’s relationship as the passion for the future of Biafra that initially attracted Olanna to Odenigbo disintegrates with the loss of his mother. At the beginning of the novel, Adichie describes the first meeting of Olanna and Odenigbo as if “a crackling magic [was] in the air” (29). Olanna is deeply attracted to Odenigbo’s passion and declares that “the intensity [of their relationship] had not abated after two years, nor had her all at his self-assured eccentricities and his fierce moralities” (29). However, when Odenigbo’s mother, Mama, comes to stay in Nsukka with the couple, Olanna is made aware of their difference in socio-economic backgrounds and the relationship begins to break down. When Mama hears that Olanna “did not suck [her] mother’s breasts” as her image-conscious mother employed a wet nurse, Mama implores Olanna to “tell your fellow witches [...] that nobody’s medicine will

⁷ “The *dibia mgborogwu* is taken as an indigenous or a traditional farm ecologist [and] denotes a great healer who is versed and effective. He or she is powerful, influential, and efficient in healing illnesses and also in rendering amazing effects in uncertain situations” (Iroegbu 326-327).

work on my son. He will not marry an abnormal woman, unless you kill me first. Only over my dead body!” (97). Odenigbo’s refusal to take the matter seriously with the defence that his mother is “just a village woman [and] trying to make her way in a new world with skills that are better suited for the old one” incenses Olanna as his values and beliefs are jeopardised by emotional familial connections (100). Mama’s visit “ripped a hole in [Olanna’s] safe mesh of feathers, startled her, snatched something away from her,” foreboding the breakdown of her relationship with Odenigbo (104). Mama’s reported death later in the novel acts as a catalyst to the breakdown of Odenigbo and Olanna’s relationship, but also signifies the disillusionment of the Biafran dream. Odenigbo initially rationalises the tragedy of his mother’s death by reasoning that “certainly one must expect casualties. Death is the price of our liberty” (300), but his logical response gradually gives way to his despair. Again, Adichie uses the same metaphor to describe Odenigbo’s loss; Olanna sees him as “clutching a shadow” after visiting his mother’s burial place and explains that his grief “dug a gully between them that she had not known how to bridge” (321); the loss of his mother is the cause of not only the breakdown in their relationship but also the reason for his “confusion of values”.

Odenigbo’s loss of hope symbolises the breakdown of the Biafran dream, but his former idealism endures through the promise of his houseboy, Ugwu. Ugwu idolises Odenigbo and his intellectual circle, including Okeoma and Professor Ekwenu who impress Ugwu with their respective talents: writing poetry and designing technological devices. Adichie modelled Okeoma’s character on a key figure in Biafran history, Christopher Okigbo, “who exemplifies the monumental loss of human capital that Biafra represented” (Adichie, “African” 51). When Okeoma stops writing poetry and turns his talents to the Biafran army, he is inevitably killed, but his writing transcends death through Ugwu, who initially imitates Okeoma’s satirical wit in his own writing style. The subsequent

loss of Professor Ekwenugo also deeply affects Ugwu, as the professor “had always been his proof that Biafra would triumph, with the stories of rockets and armoured cars and fuel made from nothing”, but the irony that the professor met his end by being “blown up” by his own creation highlights the tragic reality of the Biafran dream shattering with the death of its visionaries (354). Adichie chooses Ugwu to become the voice of Biafra by the end of novel but he also goes through a process of loss before emerging as the figure of hope. During his time as a forcibly conscripted teenage soldier in the Biafran army, Ugwu displays a “confusion of values” by raping a stranger, so he tries to seek redemption through writing. Whilst Achebe’s “Girls at War” ends in tragedy and an uncertain future, Adichie’s civil war novel takes agency over the narrative of suffering by revealing Ugwu as the narrator of the civil war metafiction *The World was Silent When We Died*, which is embedded throughout the novel. Adichie aims to “combat and challenge and complicate stereotypes” of Nigeria by adding an element of achievement to the end of her narrative of suffering (Adichie, “African” 46). Initially, Richard’s title “haunted” Ugwu and “filled him with shame [as] it made him think about that girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor” (396). However, Ugwu “seeks personal redemption through writing, as well as through taking responsibility for being a witness to - and participant in - the conflict” (Rushton 189); it becomes a cathartic process of erasing his past self and a form of therapy because he gradually found that “the more he wrote, the less he dreamed” of his past crimes (398). As Ruth S. Wenske puts it, Ugwu “does not become a ‘bad’ character because he is seen not only as a rapist, but also as a brother, a houseboy, a believer, a teacher, a writer” (Wenske 76). The multidimensionality of Adichie’s characters furthers her intention to deflect the blame of Biafra’s downfall from any particular party and the ending refocuses the narrative on the possibility of reconciliation. Although Adichie confronts the reader with the overwhelming loss felt by the former Biafran community and the detrimental impact it

continues to have on new generations of Nigerians, she also empowers the victims of the civil conflict by giving them a voice. The older generations in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, represented by Olanna, Odenigbo, Kainene and Richard, impart the moral principles that in the past fuelled their political vision onto the future generations represented by Ugwu, therefore restoring the values that were corrupted and confused by the Nigerian-Biafran war.

Conclusion

As Pal Ahluwalia points out, after decolonisation in October 1960, Nigeria needed “a new national culture” to unite a culturally, religiously, politically and ethnically diverse nation-state by means of “planning and conflating the values of development with the values of the nation” (Ahluwalia 43). Both Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972) and Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) foreground the difficulties that the Nigerian people were confronted with (and continue to face) in conflating the values of a fragmented nation-state. Alfred Memmi’s criticism that a “colonised society is a diseased society in which internal dynamics no longer succeed in creating new structures” is evidenced in both Achebe and Adichie’s representation of post-Independence Nigeria, as the Biafran dream collapses as a result of inherited and corrupted socio-political systems (Memmi 98-99). By depicting the fall of the Biafran dream as resulting from ingrained corruption inherited from their former colonising power, both writers suggest that “no society can ever be entirely free of [the effects of colonisation] and the contemporary forces such as globalisation” due to “the continuing control of the ‘West’ over the ‘Rest’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 194). Achebe and Adichie show how the Nigerian-Biafran War perpetuated the internal corruption and shattered the Biafran dream, which ironically was established in the hope that an independent nation-state would provide the Igbo community with a space removed from the ingrained systems of injustice that permeated post-Independence Nigeria. Despite Achebe and Adichie’s Igbo heritage and Biafran sympathies, both writers emphasise a “confusion of values” within Biafra (as well as outside of it, in the case of Adichie) not only to provide a realistic representation of the civil conflict but also to avoid placing blame on other homogenous masses. As Achebe himself puts it, the reason for looking back at the civil war

is to “try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat [us]”⁸; looking back on the civil conflict helps to reconcile the past and enables recovery from what was lost (Achebe, “Novelist” 3).

For Achebe, “The Role of the Writer in a New Nation” (1973) is to “be concerned with the question of human values” (10). In Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), the exploration of human values is at the centre of his civil war stories, which focus on the changes and developments in an individual’s set of values when faced with the challenging events surrounding the Nigerian-Biafran War. When Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on 1st October 1960, the different ethnic groups that formed the new nation-state struggled to navigate their liberty due to the “difficulty [in] running the new systems foisted upon [them] at the dawn of independence by [their former] ‘colonial masters’” (Achebe, “Country” 2). Achebe’s civil war trilogy illustrates how Nigeria’s inherited socio-political systems caused a “confusion of values” which, to Achebe, is “one of the most distressing ills [to] afflict new nations (“Role” 10). Akin to Achebe’s criticism of the values held in post-Independence Nigeria, Adichie argues in “The Role of Literature in Modern Africa” (2010) that the reason why “modern African states have not lived up to their potential [is because their] citizens [have] not yet absorbed the idea of a nation”; they fail to recognise that the building of a new nation-state is “not about the geography of land but the geography of the mind” (96). Both Achebe and Adichie aggrieve the wasted potential of post-Independence Nigeria and the “confusion of values” that led to the civil war and the downfall of Biafra. Achebe’s “Civil Peace”, “Sugar Baby”, and “Girls at War” depict the rise and fall

⁸ This quotation is taken from Achebe’s essay “Novelist as Teacher” (1973), in which he discusses the responsibilities of the postcolonial writer in “the task of re-education and regeneration” (4) in order to help their “society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (3). I wanted to acknowledge that in this essay Achebe is criticising the continuing influence of colonial oppression in Africa, but point out that his sentiments can also be applied to oppressors within the former Biafran and current Nigerian society.

of Biafra as a result of the ingrained corruption that caused “confusion of values”. Achebe’s civil war stories represent the damaging consequences of self-serving behaviour during a civil conflict and the lack of resolution to the stories foregrounds the long-lasting repercussions that the Nigerian-Biafran war had on an individual and a societal level. When looking at Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, published thirty-four years after Achebe’s civil war trilogy, Adichie’s civil war novel examines the internal corruption within and outside Biafra and, with her advantage of temporal distance from the civil conflict, she focuses on how recovery and reconciliation from the Nigerian-Biafran war can be made possible. As Eve Eisenberg observes, “the beauty of Adichean pedagogy [reveals] that African literature has a redemptive role to play in opening minds to new possibilities” (Eisenberg 99); both writers revisit the past in order to build hope for the future of a united Nigeria.

Achebe’s *Girls at War and Other Stories* examines the “depth [of] the human condition” at each stage of the Nigerian-Biafran war (Achebe, “Role” 8). In “Civil Peace”, “Sugar Baby” and “Girls at War”, Achebe chooses characters from a cross-section of Biafran society to illustrate how the rise and fall of the Biafran dream affected citizens at each social level. Reginald Nwankwo in “Girls at War” represents a member of the Biafran social elite who Achebe often shows to prioritise his own needs over the more pressing needs of others during the civil war. Nwankwo exploits his social position as an official at the Ministry of Justice to unjustly keep himself and his family comfortable whilst the rest of Biafra crumbles under the strain of mass starvation and unprecedented violence. At the end of “Girls at War”, Achebe emphasises Nwankwo’s “confusion of values” by juxtaposing his selfish behaviour with Gladys’s selflessness. Gladys, Civil Defense worker turned escort, endangers her life to save a wounded soldier from an air raid whilst Nwankwo ignores the soldier’s desperate pleas. Here, Achebe subverts the postcolonial trope of “woman-as-nation” where the nation is seen as the personification of “an idealized, patriarchal image of ideal womanhood” (Young 63-

64) to highlight the disillusionment of the Biafran dream. Gladys's is far from the idealised image of woman as Achebe tracks her moral corruption throughout the story; she is violently destroyed with the fall of Biafra to show the wasted potential of the nation-state that was corrupted by a "confusion of values".

Similarly, Cletus in Achebe's "Sugar Baby" and Jonathan Iwegbu in "Civil Peace" represent the Biafran community's "confusion of values" at the end of the civil war when faced with an abrupt reintegration into Nigerian society. As Stephen David notes, Achebe "calls our attention to the often-ignored fact that the end of wars is not an end in itself, it is a beginning". Achebe's civil war stories end with "the sense of loss felt by former Biafrans [that] was not addressed [after the war]" and the ambiguity of the story endings suggest that former Biafrans "continue to struggle with the trauma of loss" (David 118). In "Sugar Baby", Cletus's superficial recovery from his sugar addiction signifies the long-lasting repercussions of the Nigerian-Biafran war. Cletus refuses to accept the damage he inflicts when prioritising his individual needs over the needs of others during warfare. Similarly, in "Civil Peace" Jonathan's self-serving actions in the aftermath of the civil war highlight his own and his community's "confusion of values". When Jonathan and his family are mugged by fellow Igbos, his neighbours remain silent and refuse to help, demonstrating the breakdown of community trust and values after the civil war. The ambiguous endings to all three of Achebe's civil war stories stress the countless uncertainties that the former Biafran community had to contend with at the end of the civil conflict. All three civil war stories result in tragedy: Gladys's death, Cletus's denial of trauma and Jonathan's poverty. However, the ambiguity of the endings not only heightens the tragedy, but purposely point towards the possibility of reconciliation by acknowledging a conflicted past.

Like Achebe's civil war trilogy, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* spans the entirety of the Nigerian-Biafran War, tracking the building of the Biafran dream in 1967 to its disastrous

downfall in 1970. In Adichie's civil war novel, the eagerness and hope for an independent nation-state are depicted in the older generations of characters: Odenigbo, Olanna, Kainene and Richard, who desire the security and socio-political agency that the Biafran dream promises. Odenigbo and Olanna see the potential in Biafra to create a nation-state free from the corrupt socio-political systems that Nigeria adopted from the pre-Independence era; the couple work towards educating the younger generations in their colonial history and the possible future of a postcolonial independent nation-state. For Richard, Biafra offers a sense of belonging and purpose that he has been unable to find in his native country, and with his love for Kainene he feels that he has a legitimate claim to a Biafran identity. However, Adichie's characters become gradually disillusioned by corruption, grief and loss. Odenigbo collapses under the weight of grief, and Olanna and Richard are consumed by the loss of Kainene, leaving the responsibility of educating the next generation and documenting the Biafran experience to Ugwu.

Like Achebe, Adichie ends her civil war narrative ambiguously but with a message of hope and reconciliation. Representing the younger generation, Ugwu is chosen to be the spokesperson of Biafra, narrating the events of the war from a Biafran perspective in the highly academic metafictional text *The World Was Silent When We Died*. As Frantz Fanon has said, "to educate man is to be *actional*, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world" (222). Adichie gives narrative agency to Ugwu at the end of the novel to legitimatise the Biafran experience of the civil war and provide steps towards reconciliation with a conflicted past. As Leela Gandhi puts it, "it is in the unfolding of this troubled and troubling relationship [between the oppressor and the oppressed] that we might start to discern the ambivalent prehistory of the postcolonial condition" (4). Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* unearth a difficult period in Nigerian history to acknowledge what was lost and build a new hope in what can be.

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