

(Re)Fashioning Biafra: Identity, Authorship and the Politics of Dress in *Half of a Yellow Sun*
and Other Narratives of the Nigeria-Biafra War

Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), is one in a long line of works by Nigerian authors to portray the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970). While Adichie has stated that she wanted to make modern Nigeria aware of its history by writing the novel, the writer has also revealed that she drew from past literary portrayals to construct her narrative. In order to untangle the complex construction of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, this article explores the way the novel negotiates the literary legacy of Biafra through material fashion, which I argue elucidates this complex intertextuality. Furthermore, I contend that the novel draws attention to and critiques the way that understanding of Biafra has been dominated by novels written by male authors, and weaves threads of material fashion in order to offer a new way of negotiating Nigerian history.

Interwoven Histories: Reformulating the Legacy of the Nigeria-Biafra War

Our histories cling to us. (Adichie, "To Instruct and Delight")

The above epigraph is taken from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2012 Commonwealth Lecture. Although primarily concerned with propounding the merit and importance of narrative realism, Adichie also provides an account of her inspiration for writing *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which won the Orange Women's Prize for fiction in 2007.¹ I want to begin this dissertation by indicating the significance of the phrase, "[o]ur histories cling to us", which Adichie employs to intimate her motivation for retelling the history of Biafra.

Half of a Yellow Sun is set in the 1960s in newly independent Nigeria, a period of growing social and political tension that led to the secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra, and which culminated in the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970).¹ Nigeria's three largest groups--the Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the north and the predominantly Christian Yoruba and Igbo groups that hail from the south-west and east respectively--make up around two thirds of Nigeria's overall population (Diamond 458) and dominated its political landscape post-independence (Forsyth 18).² After a military coup in January 1966 overthrew the government of the prime minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912-1966), political tension gave way to persecution (Forsyth 24). Members of the Igbo population were massacred in northern and western parts of the country, and the situation deteriorated further when Hausa military figures led a counter-coup and General Yakubu Gowon (b. 1934) became the new military Head of State.

On 30 May 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu-Ojukwu (1933-2011), the Governor of the largely Igbo Eastern region, proclaimed the state's secession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria under the banner of "the Republic of Biafra" (Odumegwu-Ojukwu). Following Biafra's secession, Gowon mobilized the Nigerian army vowing to reunite the country. At dawn on 6 July 1967, Nigerian forces fired their first shells into Biafra's northern territory. The war ended some 30-months later on 13 January 1970 with Biafra's surrender (Tembo 180) and with the deaths of between 1 and 3 million soldiers and Biafran civilians (Bartrop 526).

Despite being born in 1977, 7 years after the war's denouement, Adichie, who is Igbo, is well aware of the significance of this period for postcolonial Nigeria. Both of Adichie's grandfathers were killed during the war, and she has stated that she feels a deep connection to her family's history. In the essay "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience", a companion piece of sorts to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie describes growing up Igbo in post-

war Nigeria: “I was born seven years after the Nigeria-Biafra war ended, and the war is not mere history for me, it is also memory, for I grew up in the shadow of Biafra” (“African ‘Authenticity’” 49-50). Adichie’s configuration of Biafra’s cultural legacy tallies with Ifi Amadiume’s argument that “Biafra is still important in the national political discourse as a wound that has not healed, an issue of conscience in our collective memory” (46-47). Thus, as the epigraphic quotation suggests, the history of Biafra is not only significant for Adichie as an Igbo woman, but as a Nigerian as well.

However, another important kind of history clings to Adichie. During her Commonwealth Lecture, the author notes the important influence of the acclaimed Igbo-Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa and Chukwuemeka Ike; each of whom have written fictional responses to the war which aided Adichie’s own retelling.³ Adichie has also named Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka’s prison diary *The Man Died* (1972), and Christopher Okigbo’s poetry sequence *Labyrinths* (1971) as playing important roles in the development of the novel.⁴ Chidi Amuta sums up the constitutive legacy of the Biafran war for Nigerian literature by arguing “that in the growing body of Nigerian national literature, works, directly based on or indirectly deriving from the war experience constitute the largest number of literary products on any single aspect of Nigerian history to date” (85).

While Adichie suggests that these older Biafra narratives both inspired and provided plot material for *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she also stresses her desire to “make Nigerians, particularly Nigerians of [her] generation, aware of their history” (“African ‘Authenticity’” 53). Adichie notes the problematic ignorance of Nigeria’s youth regarding Biafra, which for her has perpetuated damaging social tensions in the country. So although self-consciously indebted to her literary forebears and keen to inscribe herself into the canon of Nigerian literature, Adichie also wants to assert her individuality within that tradition.

The dual histories of the Nigeria-Biafra war and the written narratives that have

interpreted it are intricately interconnected in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. However, the crucial word that both instantiates and strains this connection in the phrase, “[o]ur histories cling to us” (Adichie, “To Instruct and Delight”) is ‘cling’, a verb that resonates with the ways clothes embody and fashion our identities. I will argue that it is through the text(ile) embodiment and transformation of the complex story of Biafra that Nigerian writers negotiate this painful history in their own particular contexts. I have chosen fashion as my methodological access point for this article because, as Ulrich Lehmann argues in *Tigersprung: Clothing in Modernity* (2000), fashion “is the supreme expression of that contemporary spirit. It changes constantly and remains necessarily incomplete; it is transitory, mobile, and fragmentary” (xii). Clothes fashion identities and express the “contemporary spirit” (Lehmann xii) because they function at the interface between the individual and the collective, thus they provide a useful but often disregarded focus for thinking through the ways writers have reinterpreted history. Fashion confers particular identities in particular contexts, but it also changes. A reading of clothes and their presentation will thus enable me to appraise *Half of a Yellow Sun* and other narratives of the Biafran war as simultaneously distinct and interconnected.

Writing in *Elle Magazine*, Adichie explains that while growing up in Nigeria, “[o]urs was a relatively privileged life, but to pay attention to appearance—and to look as though one did—was a trait that cut across class in Nigeria” (“Why Can’t a Smart Woman Love Fashion?”). Fashion is an important cultural marker in Nigeria, as it both differentiates between and provides common ground for the country’s many peoples and groups.⁵ I also explore the implications of fashion, dress and textiles as not only anthropological and sociological markers in these novels, but as embedded textual phenomena. Dagmar Venohr argues that “[t]he use of textiles in language is of great value, because it always offers more than just a metaphorical content; it offers a blissful form of textual materiality” (165). This notion of text(ile) materiality, which Venohr suggests “is a structural indication for another

text level [...] found not under or behind the obvious, but within” (161), will help me to situate *Half of Yellow Sun* in the nexus of historical, literary, and subjective threads that construct the legacy of Biafra.

I will argue that by both emulating and critiquing her literary heritage, and by grounding her (re)fashioning of Biafra in 21st-century styles and aesthetics, Adichie produces a densely woven fabric of voices, texts and histories in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and offers a new future for Biafran literature. In the first section of the article I examine the way Adichie appropriates and transforms the literary legacy of Biafra through clothing as a form of national uniform. In the second section, I focus on the way Adichie draws on women writers to fashion female characters in the novel and compare the portrayal of womenswear in the text with Biyi Bandele’s 2013 film adaptation; I argue that the clothing worn by women in the text are informed by fashion styles and gender politics from multiple eras. In the final section, I contend that the novel foregrounds the textual subjugation of women by male authors, but also creatively resists this kind of gendered sublimation. I further suggest that while narratives of Biafra tend to reinscribe the pain and loss of this history within Nigeria’s national consciousness, Adichie counters this tendency by refashioning loss into faith in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and by weaving an aesthetic thread of hope and bliss into this text(ile) representation of both past and present Nigeria.

Tailoring Biafran Identity, (Re)Dressing Nigerian Literature

The image of the half yellow sun was the central emblem of the Biafran flag and continues to be a powerful symbol of the hope garnered by the Igbo population after Biafra’s secession from Nigeria, but also of the failure of the post-independence Nigerian nation.⁶ The title *Half of a Yellow Sun*, therefore, is laced with both hope and despair, and resonates with the title of

Chukwuemeka Ike's Biafra novel *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), which also draws attention to the icon's contradictory connotations.

Ike (b. 1931), an Igbo writer, was the refugee officer for Umuahia Province in Biafra during the war, so experienced the conflict firsthand (Okafor 221). *Sunset at Dawn* opens with the description of "a young Second Lieutenant, trim and smart in his well-starched green khaki uniform, shiningly ironed in a manner that displayed three horizontal lines across his back" (9). The uniform is embellished with "[t]he brand-new Biafra emblem, a yellow half sun on a black background, symbol of the four-month old nation" (Ike 9), and a few pages later, the narrative voice provides an explanation for the symbolic significance of the emblem:

The Biafra Sun shone brightly from 30 May until the outbreak of war on 6 July. Its presence as an emblem on a soldier's uniform instilled in him a sense of national identity and pride. Civilians clamoured for the emblem as a keepsake, or to sew on to military uniforms made for their little boys. The Sun's dazzling rays dispelled the clouds of insecurity and hopelessness which had eclipsed the lives of Eastern Nigerians, particularly the Igbo, for over a year. (16)

Important here is the "sense of national identity and pride" (16) that the yellow sun conjures and represents for the Biafran people. By embroidering this image onto clothing it becomes an embodied symbol which confers identity both to individuals and a collective, because clothing stands "at the interface between the individual and the social world . . . the private and the public" (Entwistle qtd. in Allman 2). Ike uses the iconic fashion to capture the jubilation experienced (particularly by the Igbo population) in the first months of Biafra's secession.

Adichie also materially embodies the yellow sun icon in *Half of a Yellow Sun* in the description of the soldier Okeoma's Biafran uniform, upon which is sewn "a skull-and-bones image next to the half of a yellow sun" (201). The macabre addition of the skull-and-bones embroidered on the uniform distances Adichie's interpretation of the yellow sun icon from Ike's more optimistic portrayal. However, the icon is doubly significant in this moment because its wearer, Okeoma, is Adichie's reimagining of the famed Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo. Okigbo (1930-1967) was a member of the famed "Ibadan quartet" (Jeyifo 5) along with Achebe (1930-2013), Soyinka (b. 1934) and poet J. P. Clark (b. 1935), who all attended University College Ibadan during the 1950s (Wren 17). Igbo and a vocal supporter of Biafra's secession, Okigbo was quick to enlist in the Biafran army and was killed in action in August 1967 (Achebe, *There Was a Country* 184).

In "African 'Authenticity'", Adichie describes how she constructed her own version of Okigbo in the novel, and reveals that it was Wole Soyinka's prison memoir *The Man Died* that, as she puts it, "gave me the image of Christopher Okigbo, which ultimately inspired the character of Okeoma in my own *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (51). Here can be perceived the depth of textual and historical layering that is involved in Adichie's portrayal of the Nigeria-Biafra war. One character, Okeoma, is the author's reimagining of Okigbo, but this reimagining is itself a refraction of another writer's own interpretation of the poet. Adichie goes on to further explore the influence of Soyinka's rendering of Okigbo upon *Half of a Yellow Sun* in this essay:

I imagined this immensely talented poet and thinker, this wonderfully complex man who had dared to believe, and who consumed life so fiercely. And I fear that it is on this terribly romanticized image of Okigbo that the character of Okeoma was based. [...B]ut I used only an essence of the real Okigbo. My character

Okeoma, for example, does not comb his hair, though I suspect that Christopher Okigbo did comb his hair. (“African ‘Authenticity’” 51)

Okeoma first appears in Chapter 1 of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, written in the third person from the perspective of the Houseboy Ugwu, and set before the war in early 1960s Nigeria.⁷

Okeoma is attending a drinks party hosted by Odenigbo, a university mathematician and Ugwu’s new employer, and is described as having “bushy hair with a parting at the side that stood higher than Master’s. It looked rough and tangled, unlike Master’s, as if Okeoma did not like to comb it” (Adichie, *HYS* 18). This focus on Okeoma’s uncombed hair corroborates Adichie’s description of her rendering of the character in her essay, but this decorative detail is of greater consequence in this moment because it enables Ugwu to assess Okeoma by comparing him with his master Odenigbo, whose hair is much more immaculate.

Later, in Chapter 2, the attention paid to Okeoma’s appearance is reiterated, although this time from the perspective of Odenigbo’s new girlfriend, Olanna:

Olanna liked Dr Patel, but it was Okeoma whose visits she most looked forward to. His untidy hair and rumpled clothes and dramatic poetry put her at ease. And she noticed, early on, that it was Okeoma’s opinions that Odenigbo most respected, saying ‘The voice of our generation!’ as though he truly believed it. (*HYS* 51)

The above quotation tallies with Ugwu’s estimation of Okeoma’s appearance, but the reference to clothing in this quotation has deeper significance because it works to literally fashion and embody the “dramatic” (*HYS* 51) essence of a figure that Odenigbo describes as “[t]he voice of a generation” (51).⁸ Adichie is thus able to textually evoke Okigbo’s poetic

identity through the detailed, exaggerated emphasis she places on the avatar Okeoma's appearance and dress. This tallies with Joanne Eicher and Otto Thieme's assertion in *The Study of African Dress* (1970) that "[i]n its largest sense, the concept of dress acknowledges all those forms which serve to enhance and reveal the wearer's identity" (3). Adichie tailors Okigbo's dress in order to invoke and underline his impact on Nigerian literature and culture; as she puts it in the introduction to a recent edition of Okigbo's work, *Labyrinths*, "he has become THE most talked about poet of his generation, a cult hero whose life, death and work remain passionate subjects for many African intellectuals" ("Okigbo: An Introduction" X).

However, Okeoma does not remain the unkempt and romantic figure of this early passage set before Biafra's secession. In Chapter 18, set during the 'Late Sixties' post-secession time frame, Okeoma attends the wedding of Olanna and Odenigbo and appears transformed:

Okeoma looked nothing like Ugwu remembered: the untidy hair and rumped shirt of the poet were gone. His smart-fitting army uniform made him look straighter, leaner, and the sleeve had a skull-and-bones image next to the half of a yellow sun. (*HYS* 201)

The transformation of Okeoma's identity from Nigerian poet to Biafran soldier, mirroring Okigbo's own experience, is once again facilitated by alterations made to his clothed appearance. Brenda Cooper argues that "Adichie is attempting to tell her truth about Biafra [...] in the coded language of the material" (138), and contends that in the novel's historical movement between sections set before and during the war, "[t]he everyday will not shape shift into animation, but into another, demonic, version of what I am paradoxically calling the abnormal ordinary" (134). Cooper does not mention Okeoma in her essay, but the character's

fashioned transformation acts as a synecdoche for the narrative's progress from peace to war, and from creativity to destruction.

However, while Cooper rightly draws attention to the significance of material objects and clothing in her conception of the "coded language of the material" (138) in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, we must be careful not to read these material signs as transparent metonyms for historical and political developments. As Lehmann argues, "we cannot expect to ascertain historical facts merely from looking at clothes. [...F]ashion will always remain too transient and ephemeral to simply explain historic causality [...I]t can never be seen as simply mirroring that society; instead, it projects forward" (299). While uniforms are commonly depicted in novels about Biafra, Adichie uses descriptions of Okeoma in military attire to illuminate the poet Okigbo's decision to fashion himself a new identity as a soldier, and thus not only demonstrates Okigbo's own transformation, but also revitalizes the symbolic potential of military uniforms as more than transparent signifiers of national struggle.

In *Sunset at Dawn*, Ike emphasizes the hope and unity evoked by the rising Biafran sun during the war, but the icon provides only a brief cause for celebration. Later in the same chapter, which offers a historical overview of the conflict, Ike explains that once war began in July 1967, "Biafran territory shrank like a cheap fabric after its first wash. The yellow-on-black Biafra Sun lost its dazzle and much of its authenticity" (18). Ike shows the fragility of this symbol of Biafran identity by emphasizing the ephemeral materiality of cloth, which tallies with Jane Schneider and Annette B. Weiner's estimation that the "softness and ultimate fragility of these materials capture the vulnerability of humans, whose every relationship is transient, subject to the degenerative processes of illness, death, and decay" (2).

But Ike goes further than Adichie to explicitly tie Biafran identity to fashion in *Sunset at Dawn* by engaging with the notion of a Biafran dress code for civilians. One character, Mr. Bassey, is forced to abandon his preferred style of dress because of its Nigerian connotations:

Within a couple of years he had established a reputation at Enugu for his lovely, beautifully tailored, expensive and well-kept *agbada* which sat most becomingly on his neat frame. With the birth of Biafra, the *agbada* had become one of the symbols of Nigerianism that must be cast overboard. (Ike 21-22)

The *agbada* is a distinctive wide shouldered gown worn by men (Lyndersay 304), which originates from Yorubaland in southwestern Nigeria. This rejection of a material representation of “Nigerianism” (Ike 22) demonstrates the centrality of fashion in conjuring a sense of identity for both Biafrans and Nigerians. While Adichie is preoccupied with the textile icon of the yellow sun as a symbol of both Biafran identity and as a textual sign that reverberates through the literary legacy of the civil war, she never aligns everyday civilian fashion with Biafra as Ike does. In order to explain this contrast, I now turn my focus to the depiction of female fashion in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and other Biafran literature by female writers.

Writing Women and Womenswear: Gender Politics and Biafra

In her essay “‘Half and Half Children’: Third-Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel”, Jane Bryce argues that a new group of Nigerian women writers offer a “reconfiguration of national realities in which the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized, but unapologetically central to the realist representation of a recognizable social world” (49). Women of Adichie’s generation, she suggests, are “rewriting

the script of national identity-construction” (Bryce 50) by empowering and centralizing female voices and identities in their works. However, such a reading of *Half of A Yellow Sun* assumes too readily Adichie’s revisionist credentials, and does not pay close enough attention to the tradition of Nigerian women’s writing that the novel enters into.

Although Flora Nwapa’s novel *Never Again* (1975) and Buchi Emecheta’s (b. 1944) *Destination Biafra* (1982) are the only examples of Biafra-related war novels written by Nigerian women before the early 21st-Century (Nzegwu 152), a revival has occurred since the new millennium, with women writers at the forefront.⁹ Nwapa (1931-1991) and Emecheta (b. 1944) are both Igbo writers and were adults at the time of Biafra’s secession, but only Nwapa lived in Biafra during the war (Ezeigbo 479). Emecheta, by contrast, spent the duration of the conflict studying and campaigning for the Biafran cause in London (*Destination Biafra*, vii). These differences in the writers’ personal relationship to the war help explain why Nwapa, who experienced it first-hand, writes in detail about the struggles of a small Biafran village in *Never Again*, while Emecheta, who never saw Biafra in person, constructs a far more geographically expansive account of the war.

An early moment in *Never Again* demonstrates the multi-layered significance of fashion and fashioning for Nwapa’s portrayal of Biafra, when the main protagonist Kate and her mother discuss the dangers of remaining in their village with the Nigerian army marching further into Biafra:

As we were talking, one of my [*sic*] mothers friends came in. She was from the farm, and so her dress was tattered and dirty. ‘Are you just returning from the farm?’ my mother asked her. [*sic*] she did not like seeing her in tattered clothes. ‘Yes,’ she said.

‘Why then don’t you have on something respectable to wear?’ What is the matter? my mother asked. (29)

No mention of Biafra is made in this quotation, but the fierce reprimand provoked by the woman’s “tattered clothes” (29) demonstrates the importance of dress as a signifier of both a woman’s respectability in society and her particular emotional state. In response to this criticism “[t]he woman hissed, then said simply, ‘my son is missing’” (Nwapa 29). This reveals that her poor appearance is a direct result of the destructive effects of war, and a synecdochic representation comparable to those demonstrated in the novels by Adichie and Ike.

A comparable description occurs at the end of Part Two of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is set in the ‘Late Sixties’ time frame just before the beginning of the war. Adichie chooses to conclude this section of her novel with a celebration: the wedding of Olanna and Odenigbo. However, “just before they cut their cake in the living room, the swift *wah-wah-wah* roar in the sky” (HYS 202) drowns out the jubilation and plunges the narrative into war. As the wedding party runs for cover, Olanna’s wedding dress becomes a vulnerable textile marker of her Biafran identity:

A woman from the opposite house tugged at Olanna’s dress. ‘Remove it!
Remove that white dress! They will see it and target us!’
Okeoma yanked off his uniform shirt, buttons flying off, and wrapped it around
Olanna. Baby began to cry. (HYS 203)

As the scene is disrupted by the outbreak of war, the celebratory symbolism of the wedding dress is instantly subverted. Now a glaring target for the Nigerian bombers, Olanna’s dress is

covered up and protected by Okeoma's army uniform, which is itself a material symbol of Biafra's secession from Nigeria. When the air raid is over, Olanna is helped to her feet by Dr. Nwala, who shows an almost bathetic concern for the state of Olanna's outfit, cautioning her that "[t]he dirt will stain your dress" (*HYS* 203). The dress, an inter-text(ile) symbol that ties *Half of a Yellow Sun* to *Never Again* has been figuratively and tangibly disfigured by the war.

This concern for the state of women's clothing in *Never Again* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* has deeper significance when we consider the importance of fashion politics in all facets of Nigerian society. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi uses the Yoruba fashion tradition of *Aso ebi* as a metaphor for textual solidarity and diversity within Nigerian women's literature:

The idea of being similarly dressed is a carryover from Nigeria. The Yoruba refer to identical clothing as *aso ebi*, 'cloth of kin'. *Aso ebi*, the 'uniform' worn by friends and/or kin to identify those who belong from outsiders, [...] is important in Yoruba psychosocial consciousness. (10)

While the characters I engage with in this article are predominantly Igbo and not Yoruba, O. A. Ajani explains that "[t]he *aso ebi* phenomenon crossed the cultural boundaries of the Yoruba world a long time ago and was mainstreamed as one of the key elements of Nigeria's national culture" (116). This analysis shows that this fashioned solidarity is constructed through Nigerian rather than Biafran female fashion styles, implying that it is Nigerian national identity being negotiated through these images.

Nigerian identity is explored by Emecheta in *Destination Biafra*, which tells the story of the Nigeria-Biafra war from the perspective of a young Nigerian woman, Debbie Ogedemgbe: the daughter of a politician. While Adichie and Nwapa mostly portray Igbo characters in their Biafran war novels, Emecheta chooses to make the main character of her

narrative Itsekiri rather than Igbo, and geographically situates the majority of the text's narrative in Nigeria rather than Biafra.¹⁰ At one point, Debbie reflects, "What was her position in all this mess? She was neither Ibo nor Yoruba, nor was she Hausa, but a Nigerian" (Emecheta 126). Emecheta uses fashion to explore the fissures between Debbie's personal, cultural and national identities.

In another moment, Debbie, who is about to go on a date with her English lover Alan Grey, "sailed in wearing a brightly colored Itsekiri outfit, with two pieces of vivid cotton George material tied round her. Her flaming red silk head tie was intricately and artistically knotted" (Emecheta 111). Wearing the outfit affects both her appearance and her sense of identity:

When Debbie walked in her native attire she seemed to move with measured grace; it gave her an air of still formality, almost bordering on artificiality, but all told it added grace and femininity, qualities which were lost when she put on the shapeless green army trousers she had insisted on wearing of late. (Emecheta 112)

The Itsekiri dress makes Debbie look artificial because it suppresses her individuality and conflates her appearance with a generalized cultural identity. This reductive transformation is further emphasized by the contrast made with Debbie's "green army trousers" (Emecheta 112), which are representative of the author's striking decision to make Debbie a Nigerian soldier. While the uniform is "shapeless" (Emecheta 112) and unfeminine, an earlier moment in the novel reveals that her decision to join the army was "a move to fashion a life for herself" (45). Debbie attempts to assert her individuality by utilizing a new form of fashion: which evades the restrictive gender identity conferred by the Itsekiri dress. And while the military uniform also attributes a prohibitive identity, it has more modern and progressive connotations than the

Itsekiri outfit, which Debbie wears principally to impress her lover rather than assert her own personality.

Adichie is also preoccupied with the connection between fashion and identity politics in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Early in Part One, set during the ‘Early Sixties’ time frame, Olanna’s mother brings her daughter a gift from Chief Okonji, a suitor whose advances Olanna has spurned (33): “[‘]It’s the latest lace from Europe. See? Very nice, *i fukwa?*’ Olanna felt the fabric between her fingers. ‘Yes, very nice’” (*HYS* 34). This reference to European fashion is significant because, as Okechukwu Nwafor suggests, “cosmopolitanism in [...] post-independence Nigeria was associated with the idea of the ‘modern’ woman who came to the city and imbibed the Western dress culture of the modern city” (53), which this scene ostensibly illustrates. However, when Olanna’s mother asks her daughter which fabric she would like to be made into clothes, Olanna rejects the offer: “No, don’t worry, Mum. Make something for yourself. I won’t wear rich lace in Nsukka too often” (*HYS* 34). Olanna rejects the contemporary fashion for wearing expensive and imported fabrics in order to repudiate the Chief’s attempts to buy her love, but by choosing to fashion herself in cheaper and locally sourced fabrics, Olanna also distances herself from her elite background and aligns herself more closely with Odenigbo’s intellectual circle in Nsukka.

Olanna’s body and dress are scrutinized throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun*; early in the novel before the war, a moment occurs when Ugwu becomes transfixed by her appearance:

At first, he was sure it was his imagination[...] But Olanna was really at the door. She was walking across the yard towards him. She had only a wrapper tied around her chest, and as she walked, he imagined that she was a yellow cashew, shapely and ripe. (*HYS* 24)

The wrapper is a unisex fashion worn across West Africa, consisting of a large piece of fabric tied around the body of the wearer (Lyndersay 38). Although Ugwu is initially unsure whether the striking image of Olanna is real or not, the textile detail of the wrapper both confers a materiality to her presence, which causes him to imagine her as “a yellow cashew, shapely and ripe” (24): aligning her with gendered tropes of African fecundity.

In “African Feminism: Mythical and Social Power of Women of African Descent”, Diedre Badejo explores the symbolic position of women in the cultural imagination of African societies, suggesting that “as icons, African women symbolize the continuity of life, flowing like the rivers with mutual receptivity and sustenance of humanity through planting and harvesting of the earth” (100). Ugwu’s equation of Olanna’s body with a ripe yellow cashew tallies with Badejo’s own deployment of plant metaphors to demonstrate how “African women symbolize the continuity of life” (100). This sublimation of the lived experiences of African women into idealized symbols of national identity has been critiqued by Elleke Boehmer, who notes that “[f]igures of mothers of the nation are everywhere emblazoned but the presence of women in the nation is officially marginalised and generally ignored” (6). While Emecheta explicitly critiques the restrictive gender connotations of Itsekiri dress in *Destination Biafra*, which are designed to appeal to Alan’s male gaze, Adichie seems to uncritically reproduce such a cultural tradition in *Half of a Yellow Sun* when the narrative is focalized through Ugwu. This demonstrates Hildi Hendrickson’s view that “[w]hether or not bodily signs are intended to be read as indicators of specific motivations and identities, they may be taken as such by an onlooker” (15).

However, Adichie’s portrayal of female fashion is complicated when Olanna’s appearance is juxtaposed with that of her non-identical twin sister, Kainene. In Chapter 3, told from the Englishman Richard’s perspective, the other male focalizer of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the difference between the sisters’ appearances is underscored:

Olanna took after their mother, although hers was a more approachable beauty, with the softer face and the smiling graciousness and the fleshy, curvy body that filled out her black dress. A body Susan would call *African*. Kainene looked even thinner next to Olanna, almost androgynous, her tight maxi outlining the boyishness of her hips. (*HYS* 60)

Richard's gaze sexualizes both sisters, but Kainene evades the kind of reductive essentializing of the "*African*" (*HYS* 60) female body experienced by Olanna because, in stark contrast, her body is so "androgynous" (60).

The significance of this distinction is further developed when Kainene later tells Richard, who has since become her lover, "[t]he benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait" (*HYS* 35). Kainene here refers to the many rich suitors that have pursued Olanna because of her more conventional, historically unspecific African beauty: a reductive stereotype both opposed and confirmed by Kainene's own androgynous body, which is the archetype of the modern Nigerian woman. Later in this scene, Kainene is seen "flipping through the copy of *Lagos Life*, her silk robe tied tightly around her skinny waist" (*HYS* 35). By fashioning her with these items and an androgynous body, in contrast with the ahistorical African femininity of Olanna, Adichie places Kainene in the urban elite of 1960s Nigeria. But Adichie also focalizes this archetypal fashioning of Olanna and Kainene through the perspective of men--Chief Okonji, Ugwu, Richard--who are instrumental in the construction of such essentialized descriptions in the text.

Indeed, the complex and contextually shifting gender politics of the novel are further emphasized when it is compared with Biyi Bandele's 2013 film adaptation. The film does not capture the novel's intricacy, but the costume designer, Jo Katsaras, succeeds in producing a

sumptuous vision of fashion in the 1960s. However, this vision contrasts with the way the novel fashions Olanna and Kainene. For example, the physical and tailored contrast between the sisters present in the text is not emphasized in the film, which uses costume, hair and make-up to visually align the pair. In the opening scene, set on the eve of Nigerian independence, Olanna (Thandie Newton) and Kainene (Anika Noni Rose) sit together applying make-up before the dinner with Chief Okonji--a scene set chronologically and historically later in the novel--and their appearance is complementary rather than oppositional. Both wear 1960 dresses in contrasting cuts and colors--Olanna is dressed in a gold long-sleeved sack dress while Kainene wears a blue patterned v-neck cocktail dress--and both wear coiffed, straight hair wigs. These asymmetrical but complementary styles couple rather than oppose the sisters in the scene; a contrast with the novel further emphasized by the jovial and intimate relationship presented between the sisters in the film, which counters their strained relationship in the first part of the novel. These costumes also differ from the novel by subverting Richard's archetypal interpretation of Olanna's body as 'African' and Kainene's as 'androgynous'. Kainene's curvy figure is accentuated by her figure-hugging costume, while the shape of Olanna's body is hidden under the unstructured sack dress.

These differences are partly explicated by the admission from the costume designer Katsaras that she found 6,000 unworn clothing pieces from the sixties prior to filming, which helped to produce the film's period quality (Katsaras). Such an emphasis on authentic, if not specifically Nigerian, period clothing styles in the film explains why the wedding dress worn by Olanna is made of the kind of rich lace material that she rejects in the novel. The wedding dress's provenance is not explicitly revealed in the film--and so does not carry the same significance as the lace gifted by Chief Okonji in the text--but the contrasting deployment of this fabric reveals a fissure between historical specificity of the novel and film adaptation. In trying to accurately portray 1960s Nigeria, the film differs from and underlines the novel's

less historically earnest--but more politically pointed--construction of women through fashion styles.

This comparison demonstrates that in order to make the narrative of the Biafran war more relevant for Nigerians born after the conflict, Adichie has to partly de-contextualize that history in order to refashion it in the text. Such a creative endeavor can be elucidated by Dagmar Venohr who, drawing on Nietzsche's notion of the "mantle of the ahistorical" (quod. in Venohr 164) argues: "[t]he ahistorical condition causes a special disposition, not of arrogance or objective criticism but of distance. This distant attitude is, as Nietzsche says, necessary to create something new with the knowledge of the old" (164). Indeed, the fashion politics of *Half of a Yellow Sun* is profoundly affected by being conceived in the early 21st-Century.

Modern cosmopolitanism in Nigeria "purports the city woman whose wardrobe is replete with classic 'traditional' dresses" (Nwafor 53), which represents a shift away from an "initial desire and lure of Western fashions sewn in Europe to a renewed predilection for locally sewn clothes (53). The novel's attention to identifiably Nigerian styles such as the wrapper thus reflects such a 21st-Century aesthetic. Also, Adichie is herself well known for dressing in outfits made from Nigerian fabrics, patterns and styles: a form of self-fashioning which has led commentators to brand her as one of a new generation of internationally known writers described as 'Afropolitan'.¹¹ Indeed, when questioned in interviews about her life in Lagos, she often talks about her love of the local markets, which she visits "mostly to buy fabrics which I then take to my tailor" ("Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Literary Lagos"). Although the employment of tailors is common practice in Nigerian society, Adichie emphasizes this fact in interviews in order to emphasize her Nigerian identity in interviews, even though she also lives in the USA.

In her essay "We Should All be Feminists", adapted from the TED Talk of the same

name, Adichie uses references to clothing in order to explore modern day attitudes towards women in Nigeria and around the world. In one instance, she reflects on the tendency for women to dress in order to be taken seriously by men:

Many of us think that the less feminine a woman appears, the more likely she is to be taken seriously. [...] I have chosen to no longer be apologetic for my femininity. [...] I am girly. I am happily girly. I like high heels and trying on lipsticks. (*We Should All Be Feminists* 39-40)

Adichie configures clothing as intricately related to 21st-Century gender politics, and argues that embracing ones femininity through fashion is a profoundly empowering experience for women. Indeed, to underscore this, Adichie playfully self-identifies as “a Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men And Who Likes To Wear Lip Gloss And High Heels For Herself And Not For Men” (*We Should All Be Feminists* 10). Such gender politics are played out in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where the ahistorical fashioning of Olanna and Kainene is as much a product of the essentializing and inhibiting perspectives of male characters as it is a result of their own style choices.

The sisters’ relationship is the most complex in the text, and this is precisely because Adichie chooses to fashion them so distinctly whilst linking them inextricably by birth. At the beginning of the novel Olanna reflects on how their close childhood relationship disintegrated when they went to university in England (*HYS* 37). While the disparate threads of this central female relationship begin to weave back together,¹² they are torn apart when, towards the end of the novel, Kainene travels across Biafra’s border into occupied Nigerian territory to trade for goods, a journey called “*affia attack*” (*HYS* 407), and never returns. Kainene becomes, it appears, irrevocably parted from Olanna at the narratives’ close. Amy Novak suggests that this moment is metonymically representative of the way that “[f]emale voices [...] remain cut

off and silenced” (46) in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, because Kainene’s “disappearance creates a startling void in the narrative; while the situation may allow for Ugwu’s voice, Kainene’s retreats into silence” (Novak 46-47). Novak here refers to the textual fragments that constitute Ugwu’s own written account of the Nigeria-Biafra War, called *The World Was Silent When We Died* in the novel.

Fragments of Ugwu’s narrative appear throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun* and indicate, according to John Marx, that “Adichie delegates the authority to compose the definitive book on Biafra to a home-schooled refugee” (Marx 599). However, Ugwu’s textual authority is also a form of gendered power. Given the way that Olanna and Kainene are fashioned in the text, and Kainene is subsequently lost from the text, Bryce’s argument that “the feminine is neither essentialized and mythologized nor marginalized” (49) in *Half of a Yellow Sun* appears to be refuted. While Adichie might foreground the gender implications of clothing through the dense fabric of narrative threads that both construct the novel and attempt to refashion and update the history of the Biafra war, any attempt to present progressive and empowered female figures seems to fall worryingly short.

Text(ile) Transformations: Fashioning a New Future for Biafran Literature

Returning to Adichie’s refashioning of Christopher Okigbo in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the writer reveals in “African ‘Authenticity’” that she didn’t simply want to pay tribute to Okigbo the man in the novel, but also to his poetry. The single embedded piece of verse attributed to Okeoma in *Half of a Yellow Sun* comes in Chapter 28, set in the novel’s ‘Late Sixties’ time frame in war-torn Biafra. Okeoma visits Olanna and Odenigbo to pay condolences for the recent death of Odenigbo’s mother, and Olanna asks him, “Do you have a poem for us [...]? From your head?” (HYS 324). Okeoma initially rebuffs her, telling her, “I am a soldier” (HYS 324), which reiterates the fashioned transformation from poet to military man already

explored. However, when Odenigbo leaves to drink alone, Okeoma reveals, “I do have a poem in my head” (*HYS* 324):

‘Brown

With the fish-glow sheen of a mermaid,

She appears,

Bearing silver dawn;

And the sun attends her,

The mermaid

Who will never be mine.’

(*HYS* 324-325)

The mermaid in the poem is Olanna herself, who Dr Nwala later remarks “was [Okeoma’s] muse” (*HYS* 391). When Okeoma is first introduced to Olanna in Chapter 2, he remarks: “I thought Odenigbo’s girlfriend was a human being; he didn’t say you were a water mermaid” (*HYS* 49). Once again, a description of Olanna’s body works to transform her into an icon of artistic inspiration with a “fish-glow sheen” (*HYS* 324).

However, Adichie also explains that this verse is a refashioning of one of Okigbo’s own poems, ““Water Maid[...]” (“African ‘Authenticity’” 51). Adichie’s own version of the poem replaces the word “lioness” (Okigbo 11)--another iconic feminine symbol of Africa--with “mermaid” (*HYS* 324), which shows Adichie trying to reconfigure Okigbo’s use of the female body in his poem. But the addition of the phrase “*the sun attends her*” (*HYS* 325), which does not appear in the original work, aligns the mermaid Olanna with the yellow sun icon that so evocatively represents Biafra.

Thus, Olanna is both appropriated as a symbol of the Biafran nation by Okeoma in his

poem, and robbed of her materiality by being refashioned as a textual image. While Adichie might want to reclaim female voices and reconfigure the damaging history of Biafra in *Half of a Yellow Sun* through the refashioning of her literary heritage, she appears to elide the voice of the major female presence in the novel through recourse to nationalist symbolism employed by her predominantly male forebears in order to do this.

At the end of chapter 30, which takes place at the height of the conflict, Adichie inserts a poem titled "Were You Silent When We Died?" (*HYS* 375). It is one of the fragments that make up the meta-textual novel within a novel titled *The World Was Silent When We Died*: sections of which appear at the close of several chapters. The poem, which Adichie has also suggested was inspired by Okigbo ("African 'Authenticity'" 52), is attributed to Ugwu, who late in the novel is conscripted into the Biafran army and participates in the rape of a female civilian (*HYS* 365); Ugwu's writing of the book in the latter stages of the novel acts as a kind of symbolic atonement for this war crime. The first verse of the poem, which is described in the novel as being "modelled after one of Okeoma's poems" (*HYS* 375), reads: "Did you see photos in '68 / Of children with their hair changing to rust? / Sickly patches nestled on those small heads / Then falling off, like rotten leaves on dust" (375).

This description of hair is used as a synecdochic stand-in for the destructive effects of war, textually echoing Adichie's earlier preoccupation with Okeoma's hair. But in this instance, the "hair changing to rust" is also transformed from bodily decoration into a purely textual sign, like the treatment of Olanna's body in Okeoma's poem, which is itself part of a new textual rendering of the war. Although Adichie suggests in the essay that it is Okigbo's imaginative inspiration that guided her writing of the poem, the image of the "children with their hair changing to rust" (*HYS* 375) is actually one employed by Chinua Achebe in his poem "A Mother in a Refugee Camp", which describes a mother combing the "rust-coloured hair" (Achebe 16) of her starving child. That Adichie appears to mistake Achebe's poetry for

Okigbo's in this moment demonstrates the knotted fabric of texts and histories that the writer interweaves in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Adichie also makes a significant nod to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in the novel, when the authority to write the next book about Biafra passes from Richard to Ugwu: "Richard paused. 'The war isn't my story to tell, really.' Ugwu nodded. He had never thought that it was" (*HYS* 425). Richard becomes the representative of British colonialism in this scene and is resonant of the District Commissioner figure in Achebe's text, whose writing of a book titled "*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*" (*Things Fall Apart* 152) demonstrates the power of colonial institutions to oppressively speak for and marginalize subjugated people. Adichie takes this authoritative and authorial power from the Englishman in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and hands it to a Nigerian, but to a man rather than a woman. Despite the textual echoes of Nwapa and Emecheta in the texture of the novel, Ugwu's book seems to show that women remain marginalized from the closed circle of male writers who have the power to construct knowledge and narratives about Nigeria. This view is supported by Ogunyemi, who argues that "[Nigerian] literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns" (60).

However, when asked by Okeoma what she thinks of his poem, Olanna's response is ambivalent. At first, she glibly repeats Odenigbo's line about Okeoma being, like Okigbo, "[t]he voice of a generation!" (*HYS* 325). But when pressed by Okeoma for her own opinion, Olanna simply states: "The voice of a man" (*HYS* 325). Olanna thus both denigrates Odenigbo's treatment of Okeoma's poetry as the encapsulation of revolutionary nationalism, and suggests that the poet's symbolic treatment of her body reflects his male bias. This contrasts strikingly with Olanna's original reaction to Okeoma's poetry before the war, when it "put her at ease" (*HYS* 51).

From the beginning of the novel Kainene mocks Odenigbo for his idealism, derogatorily calling him Olanna's "revolutionary lover" (*HYS* 36). The disruptive potential of Kainene as an antidote to Olanna, the symbolic muse figure for Okeoma and Ugwu, is further realized when Kainene burns the manuscript of Richard's book about colonialism in Africa (*HYS* 234), after it is revealed that he has slept with Olanna. Kainene's behavior thus counteracts the dutiful deference paid to Okigbo, Soyinka, and Achebe elsewhere in the novel. But this disruptive and progressive female presence, which undermines the efficacy of male authorship as a form of commemoration for Nigeria's traumatic history, is not sustained to the novel's close.

As previously noted, Novak suggests that while the novel "may allow for Ugwu's voice, Kainene's retreats into silence" (47). Ugwu's own narrative of Biafra is, like *Half of a Yellow Sun*, fashioned out of and mediated by the writing of other male writers such as Okigbo, Achebe, Soyinka, and Ike: all of which works to silence and cut off female voices and textual threads. The novel ends with the final fragment of Ugwu's text: "Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For My Master, my good man*" (*HYS* 433). Adichie's novel concludes with the opening of the next great novel of Biafra written by a man and dedicated to another man. Hugh Hodges argues that "there is no closing of the book; indeed, the novel's last gesture is towards a book yet to be opened [...]. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, then, rejects the possibility of a 'total assessment'" (11).

However, the dense layering of Biafran war narratives past and future in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, mediated through fashion as both a textile marker of the effects of war and the process through which it is reconstructed by writers in different periods, could be seen to offer a total assessment of the war's complex legacy. It demonstrates how Adichie is driven to begin the next reiteration of the Biafra novel before her own has even finished, and seemingly reinscribes the wound of Biafra in Nigeria's contemporary national psyche. Thus,

Flora Nwapa's proclamation in *Never Again* that "there will be no more war. It will not happen again, never again" (70), appears to have been emphatically revoked.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the novel's final chapter, described by Novak as haunted by the absence of Kainene and other female voices, Nigerian soldiers interrogate and harass Olanna and Odenigbo, who have returned to their ransacked home in Nsukka after the war's close. Olanna decides to burn her remaining Biafran money in order to protect her family from reprisal attacks:

Odenigbo watched her. He disapproved, she knew, because he kept his flag folded inside the pocket of a pair of trousers.

'You're burning memory,' he told her.

'I am not.' She would not place her memory on things that strangers could barge in and take away. 'My memory is inside me.' (HYS 432)

The flag bearing the image of Biafra's rising sun, so saturated with signs of history and identity in the novel, is folded and hidden away. However, Olanna's affirmation that "[m]y memory is inside me" (HYS 432) suggests that the painful history of Biafra and her personal losses have been internalized, and that the textile image of the half of a yellow sun has become incorporated into her very body.

This embodiment is reiterated and complicated when the novel's narrative voice describes the loss of Olanna's Lagos bank account:

It was like being forcibly undressed; somebody had snatched at all her clothes and

left her shivering naked in the cold. But she saw a good sign there. Since she had lost her savings, then she could not possibly lose her sister, too; the custodians of fate were not so wicked. (*HYS* 432)

The fashioning of Olanna and other characters is central to Adichie's engagement and critique of Nigerian gender politics in the novel, and is reflective of the author's use of fashion to authenticate her credentials as an African writer. The decision, therefore, to compare this loss with "being forcibly undressed" (*HYS* 432), metaphorically stripping Olanna of the textile markers so central to the construction of the novel at this moment, is a significant one.

This trade-off, in which Olanna's rejection of textile markers facilitates her belief that Kainene will return, can be elucidated by a final reference to Okigbo's poem "Water Maid". In his introduction to the sequence of which the poem is a part, titled *Heavensgate*, the poet suggests that "[c]leansing involves total nakedness, a complete self-surrender to the water spirit that nurtures all creation" (Okigbo xi). Olanna, who is Okeoma's own water mermaid refashioned by Adichie from Okigbo's verse, enacts this cleansing ritual by rejecting the textile code so central to her identity formation in the novel, and makes the leap of spiritual faith necessary to see "a good sign" (*HYS* 432) in her family's material destitution. Venohr explores the implications of such a process of textual as well as bodily nakedness by suggesting that the "act of disclosing, unveiling, and undressing could be seen as a step towards truthfulness" (165) and an embodied experience of bliss, which "can be understood here as a disclosing, a discovery of another textual coating, the woven tissue, the textile's texture" (161).

This at once emotional, embodied, and textual transformation is confirmed in the novel's final dialogue. Odenigbo tries to explain to Olanna why the advice of the "*dibia*"

(HYS 433), a Nigerian medicine-man figure she has visited to help find Kainene, has failed:

‘The war has ended but hunger has not, *nkem*. That *dibia* was just hungry for goat meat. You can’t believe in that.’

‘I do believe in it. I believe in everything. I believe in anything that will bring my sister home.’ She stood up and went to the window.

‘We come back again,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘Our people say that we all reincarnate, don’t they?’ she said. ‘*Uwa m, uwa ozo*.

When I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my sister.’ (HYS 433)

The wound of Biafra and the failure of post-independence Nigeria may be fated to be reopened by Nigerian authors, but with a final gesture to the female influence of Nwapa’s novel *Never Again*, Olanna affirmatively asserts that “[w]e come back again” (HYS 433). Nwapa’s conviction that the tragic narrative of Biafra would never be repeated may have been disproved, but if this painful history must be retold then the spirit of the people lost can also be reincarnated, offering the Nigerian nation a chance to heal the wounds of the past and collaboratively author a new future where a texture of bliss can be evoked and felt. While Adichie is centrally concerned with continuing the legacy of the literature of the Nigeria-Biafra war and with paying homage to Okigbo and his generation, she also offers something different for 21st-Century Nigeria. *Half of a Yellow Sun* offers the hope and faith that in the dense fabric of painful histories that cling to the Nigerian people and which will continue to fashion them in the future, all that was lost and destroyed during the conflict can be remade as well as rewritten.

Endnotes

- ¹ Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule on 1 October 1960.
- ² The Nigerian population is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, comprised of over 250 ethnic groups and 395 languages (Amadiume 42). Tensions arose between these groups when Britain handed the governmental prerogative to the Hausa-Fulani over the Yoruba and Igbo groups, who dominated the country's civil service and business sectors. Unlike the Igbo, the leaders of the Hausa-Fulani had resisted integration during colonization, and were keen to maintain strong political and economic ties with Britain (Diamond 458).
- ³ Nwapa wrote several novels and short stories in response to Biafra, including *Never Again* (1975) and *Wives at War, and Other Stories* (1980); Ike wrote one Biafra novel--*Sunset at Dawn: A Novel of the Biafran War* (1976); Achebe wrote the short story "Girls at War" (1971) soon after the war's end, and a more substantial response to the conflict four decades later in *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012).
- ⁴ *Labyrinths* is a posthumous collection of poetic sequences penned by Okigbo: *Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964), *Silences* (1962-65), *Distances* (1964) and *Path of Thunder* (1965-67).
- ⁵ The importance of black hair in Adichie's third novel *Americanah* (2012) has been repeatedly noted in reviews and interviews. Speaking to Kate Kellway from *The Observer*, Adichie states: "Hair is hair--yet also about larger questions: self-acceptance, insecurity and what the world tells you is beautiful" (Adichie, "My new novel is about love, race... and hair").
- ⁶ Biafran iconography remains a potent symbol in Nigerian society. Okonta and Meagher argue that "[w]hile Biafra was very much a product of elite politics in the 1960s, it has been reappropriated since the 1990s as a symbol of subaltern politics" (5).
- ⁷ The novel's structure is delineated by two non-specific time frames: 'The Early Sixties' and 'The Late Sixties'. Adichie cuts these structuring time frames into four parts that progress non-chronologically; beginning with 'The Early Sixties', the narrative moves onto the 'Late Sixties', then jumps back to the earlier time frame before the novel's close in the weeks following the end of the war in 1970. The novel is a third-person narrative, but each chapter is told from the perspective of three characters: Ugwu; Olanna; Richard.
- ⁸ Achebe describes Okigbo as "the finest Nigerian poet of his generation" ("Preface", viii), who had a "vibrancy and heightened sense of life [that] touched everyone he came into contact with" (v).
- ⁹ As well as Adichie's *Half of a Yellow*, other Biafra-inspired texts by female writers include *Broken Lives and Other Stories* (2003) by Anthonia C. Kalu, *Roses and Bullets* (2011) by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, and *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) by Chinelo Okparanta.
- ¹⁰ The Itsekiri group live in the westernmost part of the Niger Delta, bordered by the Yoruba Ilaje to the West and the Ijaw to the South (Lyndersay 351).
- ¹¹ The term Afropolitan was coined by Taiye Selasi to classify a new generation of cosmopolitan Africans living in the diaspora: "You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes" (Selasi). Adichie,

however, does not like the term, and describes herself instead as Nigerian and African (Adichie qutd. in Barber).

¹² The sisters' relationship is damaged when Olanna sleeps with Richard in Chapter 20 (*HYS* 234), and the war is cited as an important factor in their eventual reunion: "'There are some things so unforgivable that they make other things forgivable,' Kainene said" (*HYS* 347).

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