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**“She is Waiting”: Political Allegory and the Specter of Secession in
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun***

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Abstract

“She is Waiting”: Political Allegory and the Specter of Secession in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Barbara Harlow

Though the Nigerian-Biafran War has been the subject of numerous literary and other artistic representations in the four decades since its conclusion, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2006 novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* has recently received tremendous international attention for its treatment of the 1967-1970 conflict. Contrary to the assertions of many critics, the novel’s complex representation of the war functions as much more than a setting for a series of family dramas at the foreground. Providing a counterargument to such readings, which emphasize the personal over the political in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, this paper will propose and trace a political allegory legible within the characters’ personal relationships and historical circumstances. Specifically, I will argue that the relationship between two protagonists, the twins Olanna and Kainene, aligns with the relationship between (Northern) Nigeria and the Eastern Nigeria, known as Biafra between 1967 and 1970, during its attempt to secede. In the way that Kainene grows emotionally distant from Olanna, eventually stops speaking to her, and suddenly

disappears, so Eastern Nigeria increasingly clashed with Northern Nigeria during the early 1960s, seceded as the Republic of Biafra in 1967, and eventually “disappeared” at the end of the war in 1970, as it was absorbed back into Nigeria.

Rather than indicating a sense of finality, however, Adichie’s text refuses closure in ways that ultimately suggest an alternative both to the notion that the novel has an apolitical, purely tragic ending, and to dominant narratives about the Biafran secession’s “inevitable” failure. This reading thus intervenes in critical conversations about *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the Biafran state, and secession and self-determination throughout Africa. If Kainene’s disappearance does not only testify to the tragedies of war, and if her character allegorically corresponds to Biafra, then what political possibilities might her disappearance allow? Does Biafra—and in turn, the possibility of secession—remain at large too? Far from the prevalent scholarly and political rhetoric that relegates Biafra to a narrow three-year time frame, Adichie’s novel conceives of a Biafran existence beyond the pages of some finalized history.

Table of Contents

Text	1
References	37

I believe the struggle going on in Biafra has a significance that ranges far beyond Biafra, that has tremendous implications for the African continent. For the first time an indigenous African people have taken their destiny into their own hands and for a whole year have been struggling against immense odds and are still going. What else do you need of a nation?

--Ifeanyi Menkiti, 7 December 1968

In December 1968, a year and a half into the war that secessionist state Biafra waged in an attempt to gain its independence from Nigeria—or, from its adversary’s perspective, the war that Nigeria waged to maintain its unity in the face of its Eastern region’s attempt to secede—both African and non-African activists met at Columbia University in New York to discuss possibilities for humanitarian aid to Biafra. Among the speakers at the First International Conference on Biafra was Ifeanyi Menkiti, identified in the conference program as a “Biafran poet” (1). In contrast with most of the other presenters, Menkiti not only addressed aspects of the conflict specific to Biafra, but also drew connections to related concerns throughout Africa; as the poet argued in his introductory remarks, the Biafran secession marked “the first time an indigenous African people have taken their destiny into their own hands,” insofar at least as Africans were attempting to draw their own national boundaries, defying those that European colonizers had left behind. Despite the Biafrans’ “struggl[e] against immense odds” throughout the war, however, they would lose to Nigeria in 1970, seemingly bringing an end to their effort to stand as an independent, sovereign nation.

Though the Nigerian-Biafran War¹ has been the subject of numerous literary and other artistic representations in the four decades since its conclusion, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2006 novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* has recently received tremendous international attention for its treatment of the conflict. The book narrates the war through the experiences of its five main characters: the twins Olanna and Kainene Ozobia, their partners Odenigbo and Richard, and Odenigbo's servant Ugwu. Contrary to the assertions of many critics, the novel's complex representation of the Biafran War entails more than "a recreation of history for a didactic purpose" or use "as a backdrop for interpersonal ethical questions" (Kehinde 137; Hawley 15).

Providing a counterargument to these and other readings that emphasize the personal over the political in the novel, this paper will propose and trace a political allegory legible within these characters' personal relationships and historical circumstances. Specifically, the relationship between the sisters Olanna and Kainene aligns with the relationship between (Northern) Nigeria and Eastern Nigeria, known as Biafra between 1967 and 1970. In the way that Kainene grows emotionally distant from Olanna, eventually stops speaking to her, and suddenly disappears, so Eastern Nigeria increasingly clashed with Northern Nigeria during the early 1960s, seceded as the Republic of Biafra in 1967, and eventually "disappeared" at the end of the war in 1970, as it was absorbed back into Nigeria. I will further argue, however, that the "disappearances" of Kainene and Biafra are not necessarily final. In fact, the ways in

¹ This conflict goes by many names today, but most commonly: the Biafran War, the Nigerian-Biafran War, and the Nigerian Civil War. In this paper, I use the first two of these terms interchangeably but avoid use of the last term because of its rhetorical erasure of Biafra and the implied absorption of Biafra into Nigeria.

which the novel refuses closure suggest an alternative both to the notion that the novel has an apolitical, purely tragic finale, and to dominant narratives about the Biafran secession's "inevitable" failure. This reading thus intervenes in critical conversations about Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the Biafran state, and secession and self-determination throughout Africa.

After providing historical context and an overview of political and scholarly discourse surrounding Biafra, the paper next traces this allegory and concludes by parsing its political implications for both Nigeria and the African continent. If Kainene's disappearance does not only testify to the tragedies of war, and if her character allegorically corresponds to Biafra, then what political possibilities might her disappearance allow? Does Biafra—and in turn, the possibility of secession—remain at large too? Addressing these and other pressing questions, the paper begins with the lead-up to the European creation of Nigeria in 1914.

“Contrivances of Colonial Rule” and the Nigerian-Biafran War

King Leopold II of Belgium, perhaps the most notorious personality behind the so-called “Scramble for Africa,” once famously proclaimed, “We must obtain a slice of this *magnifique gâteau africain*” (qtd. in Reader 525). As this statement illustrates, nineteenth-century European colonizers understood Africa as an enormous treat to be frivolously divided and consumed by Europe. At the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which no Africans attended, thirteen European countries laid the groundwork for a

massive imperial project (Reader 551). Over the next few years, European leaders formalized the lines across their maps of Africa to designate their respective “slices of cake,” or colored spaces of the map, without any consideration of African peoples, their histories, or the political realities. As a result, “the territorial boundaries, legal identities, and often even the names of states” were purely “*contrivances* of colonial rule” (Jackson and Rosberg 14, italics mine). The border between Senegal and Gambia, for example, includes arbitrary “arcs and straight lines that in some cases run directly through villages, severing trade routes and dividing populations between French- and English-speaking administrations” (Reader 574). These capriciously drawn boundaries, which remain almost completely undisturbed, today divide approximately one hundred and seventy-seven “ethnic ‘culture areas’” on the African continent, and “every land boundary cuts through at least one.” The boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon, for instance, divides fourteen different “ethnic ‘culture areas,’” the most of any single border on the continent (Reader 575). In addition to creating partitions between ethnic groups, these boundaries also indiscriminately clustered together numerous diverse groups within a single territory. These amalgamations of varied ethnic groups within each colony, coupled with the divisions of ethnic groups across colonial borders, made solidarity against the colonizers an improbable prospect, in turn establishing such arbitrary partitions as “critical in the colonial taming of the wild and the control of space” (Ashcroft 162). In Nigeria, by far the most populous country in Africa at independence in 1960 and today, the effects of these demarcations have been especially consequential.

The Nigerian boundaries that Europe forged join together more than one hundred different ethnic groups—the most of any African country (Ekeh 95; Nayar 324).

Though Britain had been involved in the region throughout the nineteenth century, the 1900 formation of a British protectorate over Northern and Southern Nigeria formalized its control, and the 1914 merging of the two administrations assigned Nigeria essentially the same boundaries it has today (Nwankwo and Ifejika 21-22). As European colonizers geographically consolidated these regions, however, “the territorial separateness and individuality of each of the component units of the country were encouraged” (Nwankwo and Ifejika 24). To this effect, Nigerian legislator Abubakar Tafawa Balewa—who would later serve as independent Nigeria’s first and only prime minister—remarked in April 1947, “Since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper. It is still far from being united” (qtd. in Nwankwo and Ifejika 30). Despite debates over the extent to which religious and political differences existed prior to colonization, the “colonial taming” project clearly called attention to and exacerbated them in its simultaneous efforts to unify the physical territory and to divide culturally and politically the peoples of its Nigerian colony.

In the middle of the twentieth century, a series of constitutions further altered the political and legal structure of Nigeria in ways that advanced these tensions. The 1946 Richards Constitution established a “tri-regional federal structure,” abolishing the previous “central legislative authority” and dividing the colony into Northern, Western, and Eastern regions (Nayar 322; Forsyth 18). Constitutions in 1951 and 1954 fortified

these distinctions. Despite the triple-digit number of ethnic groups within Nigerian boundaries, about half of the Nigerian population was comprised of the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa groups (Nayar 326).² Because of the way that the British administration had divided the territory, these three peoples “emerged as the ruling groups,” as the Igbo had the greatest numbers in the East, the Yoruba dominated the West, and the Hausa were the most populous group in the North (Ekeh 95). Rather than any “historical or ideological justification for this sudden preeminence” of these three groups, the constitutionally-based colonial divisions were primarily responsible for establishing the distribution of power dynamics (Ekeh 95).

For rising Nigerian political parties, an emphasis on “tribal differences” soon emerged as the most expedient means for garnering support within each region (Amoda 27). Over the course of the 1950s, “a campaign of hate and calumny against certain politicians who came from particular ethnic or tribal areas” proved increasingly advantageous for political leaders but unsurprisingly also fostered a sense of ethnic and regional separation (Nwankwo and Ifejika 35). Several leaders proposed drawing new borders, but they could not agree on the terms; tensions were such that (unexecuted) threats of secession came from the North in 1953 and from the West in 1954 (Amoda 54, 55; Ekeh 100).

As a result, when Nigeria gained its independence in October 1960, the new nation was, in the words of *Half of a Yellow Sun*’s young protagonist Ugwu, “a collection

² In common usage, the term “Igbo” is interchangeable with “Ibo.” To minimize confusion, however, in this paper I have chosen to use only the spelling that Adichie uses in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, “Igbo,” unless spelled otherwise in citations.

of fragments held in a fragile clasp” (195). In fact, many Eastern Nigerians resoundingly condemned the 1960 Nigerian Constitution, claiming that the federal structure it delineated “was predicated on the perpetual rule by one unit over the others” and had “installed the North in perpetual dominance over Nigeria,” due to the larger area and population of the Northern region (“Proclamation” 666). In any case, the old colonial “divide and rule” boundaries remained in place, continuing to foster conflict between and among the regions (Mutua 1136).

These tensions did not remain within the realm of theoretical political debate. Without a balance in the division of power upon which all parties could agree, tremendous political discontent and interethnic violence erupted, culminating in a January 1966 military takeover that was generally received with approval in the East but regarded with suspicion in the North. During the coup, several Northern leaders were killed—including the ethnically Bageri and Fulani Prime Minister Balewa—but only one Easterner, an Igbo officer, died (Forsyth 37; Siollun). Many Easterners read this discrepancy as confirmation that Northerners had held the important government posts, while most Northerners believed it was an “Igbo conspiracy” (Reader 669). Furthering Northern dissatisfaction, the new Nigerian Head of State, Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, was Igbo. Within four months in office, Ironsi abolished the regions within Nigeria to create a unitary government, essentially dismantling the federal system and converting Nigeria’s extant regions into “groups of provinces...with the same boundaries” as the British-forged regions (Forsyth 47). While Igbo and many other Easterners largely supported Ironsi’s stated effort to “remove the last vestiges of the

intense regionalism,” most Northerners remained wary of the administration, suspecting that the unitary government would simply become an Igbo-dominated hegemony, giving way to still further calls for Northern secession (qtd. in Prescott 133; Forsyth 49).

Following Ironsi’s announcement, further violence against the Igbo erupted in a matter of weeks, resulting in thousands of Igbo deaths and thousands more Igbo fleeing to the southeast. In July 1966, just two months after Ironsi’s formation of the unitary government, another coup occurred, whereupon General Yakubu Gowon, an ethnically Ngas Northerner—and Ironsi’s former Chief of Staff—took control of the government and reinstated the federal system (Forsyth 52; Reader 669; Prescott 133). The consequent violence against the Igbo in the North escalated to such a frenzy that politicians and historians have variously (and controversially) described the atrocities with terms like “pogrom,” “genocide,” and even “holocaust.” Among others, African scholars Okwudiba Nnoli, Arthur Agwuncha Nwankwo, and Samuel Udochukwu Ifejika use the term “pogrom” in their analyses of the conflict, while American anthropologist Stanley Diamond, international studies scholar John Stremlau, and US President Richard Nixon all called the violence a “genocide” (Nnoli 123; Nwankwo and Ifejika 4; Diamond 17; Stremlau xii; Forsyth 163). Yet another observer, British thriller writer Frederick Forsyth, described these tragedies as a “holocaust” (Forsyth 76). The various uses of these terms remained polemical; an observer team from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) acknowledged the level of violence but nonetheless asserted that “there was no evidence of genocide” (Akuchu 48).

Regardless of the label applied to the atrocities of late 1966, estimates indicate that thirty thousand Igbo lost their lives, over fifty thousand were “wounded, maimed or disfigured,” and two million had to flee the North (Nwankwo and Ifejika 4, 208). Significantly, many of these attacks “were indiscriminately directed against people from Eastern Nigeria, known in the North by the generic name of ‘Yameri’” (Akpan 152). In other words, even though the East was largely identified with its Igbo population, the hostility affected all “Yameri,” or all people from the region, regardless of ethnicity. To be sure, though, Easterners were not the only victims of this enmity, as late 1966 also saw numerous violent “reprisals against Northerners resident in the East” (Amadi 16).

In early 1967, both Northern and Eastern political leaders attempted to negotiate the situation through peaceful means, meeting only with failure. Representatives from throughout Nigeria almost reached an agreement through the Aburi Accord that January, but the day before the Accord was to go into effect, the agreement collapsed (Nwankwo and Ifejika 220).³ The next month, Eastern Nigeria attempted to prove to the United Nations’ Commission on Human Rights that Nigeria had committed genocide. Its case was briskly dismissed, essentially on the grounds that “the Nigerian Crisis was the internal affair of Nigeria, that could only be handled by Nigerians themselves” (Odogwu 131). (The Commission’s response to these claims of genocide would presage the international refusal to intervene in the face of the mass Biafran starvation that would come to characterize the Nigerian-Biafran War.) Finally, in May 1967, two

³ To date, no consensus exists as to which party or parties might have been responsible for the failure of this effort at reconciliation.

demonstrations—one involving eighty thousand people in Enugu and another with an astonishing one hundred thousand demonstrators in Port Harcourt—called for an independent, sovereign Biafran nation (Nwankwo and Ifejika 246). In a final attempt to control the situation, and the borders, General Gowon divided Nigeria's regions into twelve smaller states and declared a state of emergency (Stremlau xv). In the way that Ironsi's declaration of a unitary Nigerian government became the last straw that provoked the July 1966 coup, Gowon's division of Nigeria would top off the tensions and lead to the declaration of the independent Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967, with then-Governor of the Eastern Region Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu as its leader (Brandler 230). Five weeks later, Gowon declared war on Biafra (Nwankwo and Ifejika 6).

Reflecting an initial popular belief among Biafrans, Adichie's character Olanna tells the young servant Ugwu at the start of the war, "Our soldiers will drive the Nigerians back in a week or two" (223). Defying such predictions, however, the Biafran War would endure almost three years and cost an estimated two to three million lives, many due to military and civilian starvation (Jacobs 4). One of the most significant humanitarian aid crises of the twentieth century, this widespread starvation, as Ugwu reminds Adichie's readers, "made the International Red Cross call Biafra its gravest emergency since the Second World War" (297). In large part due to Biafra's comparative lack of resources, like food and arms, Nigerian forces were able to encroach gradually upon the secessionist state's territory, finally winning the war in January 1970.

“Set For Ever”: Discourse Surrounding Biafra

Upon this defeat, Biafra was absorbed back into Nigeria, restoring the prewar national boundaries. Since the war's conclusion, most scholarly and political discourse surrounding Biafra has consigned it to that narrow, three-year time frame, thereby foreclosing possibilities for a Biafran future. The entry for Biafra in the scholarly *Encyclopedia of Historic Places*, for example, reports briefly but provocatively that “Biafra surrendered on January 15, 1970, and ceased to exist” (“Biafra (Nigeria)”). These facts are accurate, but the truncated summary also firmly establishes the Biafran narrative as one that has already come to a foregone conclusion, implying that Biafra came to a definitive end—“ceased to exist”—in 1970. The entry then closes, “The central government's leniency toward the rebels did much to heal old wounds” (“Biafra (Nigeria)”). In this way, an ostensibly objective encyclopedic entry not only brings its narrative about Biafra to an abrupt ending, but it also implies a privileged position for the Nigerian federal government, able to exercise “leniency” generously, and it casts supporters of Biafra as wayward “rebels,” refusing to acknowledge that they might have any legitimate claims. Further, in this summary, the Biafran struggle's historical impact consists only of “old wounds”—nothing more than injuries to the Nigerian nation, and injuries that were somehow already “old,” or obsolete, at the time of the war's conclusion.

Critical writing about Biafra also affirms this rigid temporal restriction. The topic of M. G. Kaladharan Nayar's 1975 article “Self-Determination Beyond the Colonial

Context: Biafra in Retrospect” might initially seem liberatory, since it addresses possibilities for self-determination, but it does so only by placing Biafra squarely in the past, as its subtitle underscores. Nayar argues from the first line that “Biafra is a part of history now. It represents the secession that failed” (321). With these words, even before entering the body of his argument, Nayar sums up and dismisses Biafra’s existence as “a part of history.” This pervasive, largely unquestioned rhetoric presupposes that Biafra was a historical irregularity, an anomaly that has long since been resolved.

This temporal enclosure of Biafra is often a politically charged move, too, since the best interest of Nigeria and other states concerned about motions to secede is to confine Biafra safely within the historical past. At the end of the Nigerian-Biafran War, General Gowon declared, “The so-called ‘Rising Sun’ of Biafra is set for ever. It will be a great disservice for anyone to continue to use the word ‘Biafra’ to refer to any part of East Central State” (qtd. in Odogwu 181). Preempting any possibility for Biafra to “rise again,” Gowon assured the citizens of the recently reunited Nigeria that the secessionist threat to a unified Nigerian state could never recur. His evident anxiety about the political currency in the very “word ‘Biafra,’” however, suggests otherwise. A “domino theory of secessions” developed among members of the OAU, and Northern Nigeria was even concerned that a successful Biafran secession would lead to the secession of Western Nigeria, as the latter had threatened to do in the past (Kamanu 367; Nixon 490). Self-determination, trumpeted elsewhere as a guiding principle of African decolonization, was apparently only to apply within those European-drawn borders in place at the moment of decolonization, as the OAU and the federal Nigerian government would reject

Biafra's claim for self-determination within borders of its own choosing. In dismissing the possibility for this more expansive vision of self-determination, Gowon and others clearly had much at stake politically that would motivate his insistence that Biafra's "rising sun" was "set for ever."

Despite the fatalist narrative that Gowon promoted, however, Biafra was by no means "doomed." To the contrary, many African, European, and North American texts from the late 1960s had taken for granted that the war would end with Nigeria and Biafra as two separate nations—and had, at the very least, insisted upon Biafra's enduring political currency. Less than a year before the end of the conflict, Nigerian scholars Arthur Agwuncha Nwankwo and Samuel Udochukwu Ifejika published their book, *Biafra: The Making of a Nation*, which ends with the triumphant proclamation: "I see Biafra as a proud nation... For out of this suffering will emerge a world power with something new to improve the lot of the human species. Biafra must live" (294). In a similar vein, influential American anthropologist Stanley Diamond argued in his 1968 article "The Biafran Possibility": "Politically, economically, and socially, Biafra has the potential to become the first viable state in Black Africa and the crystallizing center around which a modern Africa could build itself" (16). Not only does Diamond express hope for Biafra's success, but he also envisions the secessionist state as a future model for the rest of Africa.

The speakers at the First International Conference on Biafra at Columbia in 1968 demonstrated a similar optimism. The conference title alone indicates an anticipation of the new nation's future—if this conference was dubbed the "first," surely more were to

come. Further, during this weekend, participants from Africa, Europe, and the United States asserted their faith in the young nation-in-waiting. The Swedish Count Carl Gustav Von Rosen, for example, was a pilot who worked to deliver relief supplies into Biafra. Viewed by Northern Nigerians as “the self-appointed avenger of the secessionists,” Von Rosen flew numerous relief missions from São Tomé to Uli, the location of the last extant Biafran airstrip, and his actions were representative of the low-budget, often dangerous humanitarian aid efforts on the part of concerned individuals and small organizations, working despite most nations’ refusal to intervene formally (Amadi 179). At Columbia, he remarked, “Personally, I am, and have been all the time, convinced that though there have been heavy losses and innocent suffering, Biafra will come out on top” (Von Rosen 4). During the same conference, David Robison, a reporter on Biafra for US and British newspapers, avowed, “The Biafrans will continue fighting and no matter how many years it takes, something called Biafra will survive. Almost everybody I have spoken to, everybody who is a foreigner in Biafra, has felt the same thing” (Robison 3). Indeed, missionary and “foreigner in Biafra” Father Joe Prendergast stayed in Biafra throughout the conflict and told reporter Michael Mok in 1968, “Remember now: however this thing is settled militarily, somehow, somewhere, something called Biafra will continue to exist” (qtd. in Mok 92). Like many African and European writers, these non-African activists asserted that Biafra was not doomed to fail and disappear from the Eastern Nigerian political imaginary.

Reclaiming this hopeful rhetoric, Adichie’s 2006 novel frequently shows its characters’ faith in the young nation: “Biafra would win, Olanna knew, because Biafra

had to win” (476). The teenaged Ugwu takes an even more aggressive stance, thinking, “The war would last just long enough for the Biafran army to gas the Nigerians to kingdom come” (225). Drawing more directly from historical events, *Half of a Yellow Sun* also includes the moment during the war in which the Pope, the OAU, and the Commonwealth all come to Nigeria to propose peace with Biafra (348). By retrieving and normalizing these perspectives, the novel reminds readers that the conclusiveness and inevitability implied in the prevailing narratives about Biafra are flawed in their failure to represent historical possibilities and their tendency to preclude political possibilities in the present.

An Allegorical Reading of the Novel

Since the pro-Biafra protagonists of *Half of a Yellow Sun* lose both the war and their sister and friend Kainene, Adichie’s novel might at first glance appear to end in a clear-cut tragedy. An allegorical reading of the novel, however, suggests an alternative that leaves open political possibility—and threat. This section provides a reading of the twin sisters, Olanna and Kainene, as representative of (Northern) Nigeria and Biafra, respectively. To be sure, both sisters are proud Biafrans; my intention is to outline how their sometimes tense relationship to one another speaks to the conflicted relationship between Nigeria and Biafra, not to engage with the characters’ political preferences. This reading also does not imply a one-to-one correspondence between events of the novel and

events of the Nigerian-Biafran War. To propose such an easy correlation would oversimplify both the novel's project and Biafran history.

Though the twins are always different in appearance and personality—the “sullen and often acerbic” Kainene is “very thin and very tall,” while the “more approachable” Olanna boasts “the softer face and the smiling graciousness and the fleshy, curvy body”—Kainene and Olanna are close as children growing up under the British colonial regime in Lagos, then Nigeria's capital (45, 71, 74-75). Similarly, during the colonial era, tensions between Northern and Eastern Nigeria were not nearly as great as they would later become, despite extant ethnic, political, and religious differences. After receiving their early education at a private school in Nigeria, both sisters move to the colonial metropolitan capital, London, to receive a “proper” colonial education. Olanna earns a master's in sociology, but the novel never reveals exactly which master's degree the “withdrawn” Kainene obtains (50, 62, 45, 71). When the women return to Nigeria around 1960 (the year of Nigeria's independence from Great Britain), Olanna realizes how “distant” she has grown from Kainene. In other words, the sisters, like the regions of Nigeria, realize upon separation from London the extent of their differences: “It was now that they were *back from England*...that Olanna realized just how distant they had become” (45, italics mine). This “back from England”—in this case, the sisters' getting back from their education by England—might also be legible as the regions and peoples of Nigeria getting “back” their autonomy from Britain.

The twins' relationships with their power-hungry, Anglophile parents also evoke Northern Nigeria-Britain and Biafra-Britain relationships. Like Northern Nigeria in its

greater openness to British assistance, Olanna is somewhat more willing to placate and to accept favors from her parents. Though she sometimes defies their wishes, in such acts of “rebellion” as joining the Students’ Movement for Independence at Ibadan and refusing to have an affair with a well-connected chief, Olanna feels guilty and still consents to most of their material offers with the “limp no with which she greeted the frequent deposits to her bank account and the new Impala with the soft upholstery”—a cautious agreement that might well prefigure Nigeria’s wartime acceptance of weapons and other assistance from Britain, its so-called colonial “parent country” (Adichie 43, 131). Kainene, on the other hand, consistently “did not try to please their parents” (45). In the way that Biafra would contest its colonial placement within Nigeria, Kainene insists upon her independence, remaining completely uninterested in, and even openly opposed to, her parents’ wishes. Later, amidst building tensions between the twins, their parents “pretended not to notice” this friction, in much the same way that European nations “pretended not to be aware of Nigeria’s social factors” that would eventually lead to the war (Adichie 166; Nwankwo and Ifejika 2).

In the early 1960s, at the time of the development of the Nigerian political parties that dramatized ethnic and regional differences to garner popular support, the physical and emotional distances between the sisters likewise become increasingly evident. At this time, Kainene manages her father’s businesses (including a cement factory and vague “oil interests”) along the southernmost coast of Nigeria in Port Harcourt, which would become one of the last Biafran strongholds in the secessionist war (39). Novice sociology lecturer Olanna, on the other hand, resides approximately one hundred and

thirty miles away, in Nsukka, the northernmost major city of a future Biafra, and one of the first places to be occupied by Nigerian forces. While Kainene (linked to Biafra) never seems to regret their distance from each other, Olanna (tied to Nigeria) sorrowfully tries to pinpoint the moment when their relationship changed for the worse, reflecting, “Nothing had happened—no momentous quarrel, no significant incident—rather, they had simply drifted apart, but it was Kainene who now anchored herself firmly in a distant place so that they could not drift back together” (45-46). The women’s gradually increasing differences seem almost insurmountable; Kainene’s remoteness is “firmly anchored,” and Olanna regrets that they “could not” simply reestablish their closeness.

With this indefinite distance between the twins, the novel’s first section, “The Early Sixties,” concludes. *Half of a Yellow Sun* contains four parts in total: “The Early Sixties,” “The Late Sixties,” another “The Early Sixties,” and another “The Late Sixties.” At the beginning of the first part labeled “The Late Sixties”—the second part of the text as a whole—the reader learns that a more significant break in the sisters’ relationship has occurred. The novel does not reveal the events behind this decisive turning point, however, until the end of the second “Early Sixties” portion (that is, the third section overall): having been betrayed by her partner Odenigbo, who has had an affair with his mother’s servant Amala, Olanna sleeps with Kainene’s partner, Richard Churchill.

Particularly because Richard is English, we might understand his sexual encounter with Olanna on a number of levels. In an economic register, in the 1960s the national Nigerian government permitted Britain to take advantage of resources further to

the southeast, especially oil.⁴ This authorization, to which conservative Northerners were generally more amenable than Easterners—whose territory these British linkage groups were “invading”—was not necessarily intended to be deleterious to the region, but it nonetheless took advantage of those resources, largely to the benefit of the Northerners who primarily ran Lagos (Nnoli 141). This acting on self-interest to the detriment of the other party operates in a similar way to Olanna’s casual sex with Kainene’s British lover. Olanna does not intend to hurt her sister, but instead aims to regain “a sense of well-being” after the devastation of learning about Odenigbo’s cheating (Adichie 293). In this way, Olanna and Northern Nigeria both ostensibly succeed in their respective self-serving endeavors with a British character and British linkage groups, while in turn causing damage to their relationships with Kainene and Eastern Nigeria.

Thinking about Richard’s name, too, in addition to his nationality, suggests some useful possibilities for reading this betrayal. As *Half of a Yellow Sun* notes, Richard’s surname, Churchill, evokes Sir Winston Churchill—who, in his last years, famously (and failingly) attempted to maintain the British empire. It also, however, calls to mind the prime minister’s grandson, Winston Churchill III, who acted as a reporter on Biafra, not unlike Richard Churchill by the end of the novel (Jacobs 169). In thinking about how Richard’s betrayal further divides the two already-distant sisters, one might also recall the 1946 Richards Constitution, which entrenched Nigeria’s regional boundaries by establishing the federal structure that the so-called “Igbo coup” would eventually seek to

4 Tremendous conflict surrounding the use of resources in oil-rich southern Nigeria continues to raise problems in the twenty-first century.

overturn. In doing so, the Richards Constitution solidified the dividing line and ultimately the political tensions between Northern and Eastern Nigeria that would lead to the secession of Biafra.

Additionally, the two affairs between Adichie's characters might align with the two coups of 1966. In both cases, the first event (Odenigbo's affair with Amala, or the alleged "Igbo coup" in early 1966) leads to a second event in reaction to the first (the spurned Olanna's affair with Richard, or the mid-1966 counter coup). In each of these second events, the first "victim" becomes the instigator. That is, feeling disempowered, the "victim" of the first event takes action to regain control: Olanna has sex with Richard to divest herself of the "shackles" she feels on her wrists following Odenigbo's infidelity, and the Northern region aimed to retake the political voice it believed itself to have been unjustly denied during the first half of 1966 (Adichie 293). As a result of the second of each pair of events, tensions surge: in the fictional instance, between the twins, and in the historical case, between the regions of Nigeria.

Indeed, when Kainene finds out about the second affair, she forgives Richard, but she refuses to speak to Olanna for years. Their gradual separation thus culminates in this definitive break of the sisters' relations. Although this split does not correspond in time exactly to the secession of Biafra, the novel's organization places these events next to each other within its own chronology. In other words, this rupture in the sisters' relationship occurs at the end of the final "Early Sixties" section, and the Biafran secession from Nigeria happens at the beginning of the first "Late Sixties" section. Further, when Kainene hangs up on Olanna at the end of their last phone conversation

before the war, Olanna feels “a sharp cracking inside her” (319). This emotional “cracking” might function similarly to the geopolitical “cracking,” or division, of the Nigerian map that occurs when Biafra separates from the rest of the nation, in the way that Kainene separates from Olanna.

Alternatively, Kainene’s silent treatment toward Olanna might correspond to the Eastern Nigerian boycott of Nigerian general elections in 1964, following allegations of fraud on the part of the federal government (Nwankwo and Ifejika 86). The placement of one of the novel’s few clear historical markers, a report of the September 1963 church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, suggests such a correlation between Kainene’s silence and the boycott. Not long after Olanna finds out that Amala is expecting Odenigbo’s child, Olanna hears word of the Alabama bombing from an African American friend. Then, after Amala gives birth, and after Odenigbo and Olanna have adopted that child, Kainene finds out about Olanna’s betrayal and breaks off communication with her sister; particularly because a few more months of Amala’s pregnancy must have passed since the autumn 1963 tragedy in Alabama, then, their argument probably occurs sometime in 1964—again, potentially aligning Eastern Nigeria’s angry response to (at least perceived) dishonesty in Northern Nigeria, with Kainene’s angry response to Olanna’s dishonesty.

The twins’ broken relationship changes drastically, however, over the course of the war. As Nigerian troops encroach upon Biafra, shrinking its territory, both sisters must flee their respective homes, and Kainene agrees to get in touch with Olanna. Eventually, they even live in the same refugee camp in Orlu. In the limited space of their

new home and their shrinking new nation, the twins begin to grow close again. Because Kainene can no longer remain “anchored...in a distant place,” they are emotionally (and geographically) reunited. They even develop a regular bonding routine: “In the evenings, Olanna and Kainene walked home together. They talked about the people at the camp, about their school days at Heathgrove, about their parents, about Odenigbo” (489). Tracing their new path in Biafra, the women experience a new bond, or perhaps a new iteration of their old bond. As Nigeria nears its goal of defeating Biafra, and physically nears the center of what remains of Biafra, Olanna fulfills her own ambition to rekindle her emotional closeness with Kainene.

Although the women’s restored intimacy is clearly a positive development in the novel, Nigeria’s encroachment upon Biafra is disastrous for the characters. Near the end of the war, the Biafran relief centers cease to supply food and other essentials to the refugees, and hungry Biafran soldiers steal from what little remains. Farming efforts will inevitably be insufficient to “feed millions of people on the tiny territory” still in Biafra’s possession (Adichie 507). Desperate, Kainene resolves to cross the nearby border into Nigeria illegally to trade some artisanry for necessary goods. She promises she will be back at the refugee camp by late afternoon, but the day ends without her reappearance. Her anxious family and friends try to investigate, but they find that everyone who had encountered Kainene that day only saw her on the way to the Nigeria/Biafra border; no one had glimpsed her return.

As the missing woman’s family and friends console each other, keeping up hope that she will reappear, they repeatedly insist that she must have been unable to return the

way she came, and that she must be looking for another place to reenter Biafra. Odenigbo tells Olanna that their friend Major Madu “is certain she is still on the other side. The vandals must have blocked the way she had gone in and she is waiting for a new route to open. It happens all the time” (512). What exactly the “it” is that “happens all the time” might be the enforcement or patrolling of borders, or the challenging of those borders—or perhaps a combination of these elements, which seem to go hand-in-hand in cases like Kainene’s. Odenigbo’s association of Kainene with “waiting” also plays into a trend that occurs throughout the novel. Early in the text, for example, Kainene tells Richard that her name means “Let’s watch and see what next God will bring”—calling to mind a kind of patient looking toward the future (73). Following her disappearance, Richard assures himself: “Kainene was not missing; she was just taking her time before she came home” (512, 535). In this sense, Kainene’s absence recalls Jacques Derrida’s notion of the specter, seemingly departed yet forcing everyone to remain “*waiting* for” its return (2).

As the characters of *Half of a Yellow Sun* continue their wait for Kainene’s reappearance, Odenigbo repeatedly insists upon “the same thing, that Kainene had to be safely on the other side” (512). Just hours after he repeats these words of assurance, the war comes to an end, erasing the Nigeria/Biafra border of which Kainene is hoped to be “safely on the other side.” The characters never learn anything more about her fate, and the novel leaves Kainene waiting for a “new route” across a border that has evanesced. Kainene, the twin who had for so long sought independence from the other, has

disappeared almost precisely at the moment at which Biafra and its borders dissipate. Both Kainene and Biafra have disappeared somewhere within Nigeria.

Despite Olanna's initial belief that the dissolution of the Nigeria/Biafra boundary will enable her to roam more freely and therefore find Kainene, she eventually equates the search to "scratching desperate fingernails on a hard scarred wall" (539). A terrible, "hard scarred wall" arises, in other words, to replace the geopolitical border that these characters, as Biafrans, had once desired. The Nigeria/Biafra line had increasingly restricted Biafrans' movements over the course of the war, but that boundary's dissipation becomes even more confining and treacherous. In this way, the return to colonial Nigerian boundaries traps the pro-Biafra characters seeking the disappeared (Kainene, or perhaps Biafra) concealed somewhere beyond the "hard scarred wall."

The dramatic changes in the twins' relationship in the last section of the book also raise the question as to why the sisters should grow close again, only to become so starkly separated. Perhaps one of Colonel Ojukwu's statements in January 1967—just a few months before the Biafran secession—can provide some insight here. The young governor of the Nigeria's Eastern region and the soon-to-be leader of a short-lived Biafra, Ojukwu forewarned, "It is better that we move slightly apart and survive. It is much worse that we move close and perish in the collision" (qtd. in Forsyth 72). Rather like Kainene in her relationship with Olanna, Ojukwu hoped for Northern and Eastern Nigeria to "move slightly apart," but as a result of the war, each pair grew closer, eventually causing Kainene's—and Biafra's—disappearances. If greater separation had been

possible, perhaps Kainene and Biafra too might have enjoyed a greater chance of remaining in place.

Given this seemingly bleak ending, why should we believe Kainene's disappearance inconclusive and her return possible? Critics like Jane Bryce have largely taken for granted that Kainene "disappear[s] at the end of the novel never to be seen again," but such readings overlook the textual evidence that creates a sense of indeterminacy surrounding Kainene's fate (Bryce 61). In different ways, the structures of both Adichie's and her character Ugwu's narratives about Biafra provide indefinite endings to their versions of the conflict. Given that the war concluded in January 1970, and the end of the narrative extends either weeks or months beyond the end of the conflict, the novel's conclusion under the subheading "The Late Sixties" maintains the impression that the characters remain in the late 1960s, and therefore in Biafra—in a time and place where Kainene was unquestionably present.

The excerpts of a Biafran political history that appear interspersed throughout *Half of a Yellow Sun* also form a narrative that leaves a somewhat open ending. The character who authors this fragmented history goes unidentified throughout most of Adichie's novel, though Richard seems a likely candidate, as he makes frequent references to his efforts to write a book. Near the end, however, *Half of a Yellow Sun* makes clear that Ugwu has been composing these textual moments all along. The authorial voice, then, belongs to an African, and specifically to a young servant who witnesses the conflict from both refugee camps and the front lines, during his compelled service as a Biafran soldier—all making him a kind of "national scribe." Notably, when

pieced together, Ugwu's Biafran history echoes the structure of most historical narratives about Biafra, beginning with the nineteenth century and including a prologue, chapters, an epilogue, and a dedication, but his narrative ends with the horrors of starvation in Biafra, and not with the conclusion of the war. Like Adichie's conclusion structurally located in the "Late Sixties," Ugwu's version of events leaves Biafra—and perhaps therefore Kainene—extant, if suffering tremendously.

In addition to these refusals on the part of both Adichie and Ugwu to finalize the history of Biafra, two previous character disappearances show that Kainene's absence is not necessarily permanent, despite some of the characters' pessimism. Prior to Kainene's vanishing across the border, Odenigbo and Ugwu each "disappear" from refugee camps into the heat of the conflict. In each case, neither the other characters nor the reader know what has befallen the missing individual, but each eventually returns to the camp from which he disappeared. First, when Odenigbo and Olanna are in a refugee camp in Umuahia, Odenigbo hears that his mother has been killed by Nigerian troops in Abba, the hometown she would not leave. Insistent upon going to bury her, Odenigbo crosses occupied roads to travel to Abba. That night, Olanna awaits Odenigbo, but as Richard later does with Kainene, she stays up all night without his return. As Ugwu frequently assures his employers, he tells Olanna, "Master will come back, mah" (378). Although Odenigbo reappears "clutching a shadow," having been unable to complete his goal, he nonetheless survives his journey through the contested region (403).

Later, Ugwu's disappearance takes places under even more dramatic circumstances, as his departure is completely unanticipated, and he is missing for several

weeks. Toward the end of the war, Biafran soldiers capture the unsuspecting teenager and conscript him into military service. After an exceptionally bloody battle, Kainene reports to Olanna, “Ugwu has died... They did not find his body, but they did not find many of the bodies” (477). Taking the absence of Ugwu’s body as evidence of his death, they hold a funeral service in his memory. Despite these gestures toward finality, secondary characters like Olanna’s neighbor Mrs. Muokelu insist that Ugwu “will come back,” using language much like that which Ugwu draws on to reassure Olanna in the face of Odenigbo’s and Kainene’s absences (475). Additionally, in the way that Olanna will later refuse to accept Kainene’s death, “she found herself rejecting the finality of Ugwu’s death” (480). This “rejection of finality,” while in part a coping mechanism, also indicates the actuality: Olanna is correct to have believed that Ugwu was not dead, after all.

Toward the end of his absence from the refugee camp, Ugwu drifts in and out of consciousness in a makeshift hospital. Riding in the car afterwards, on the way back to the refugee camp, he “wonder[s] if he had died” (494). When Ugwu finally returns to his employers, they are thrilled to see him alive but still react with immense “shock” at seeing him again (495). Ugwu’s “resurrection” is especially significant because of his association with Biafran history, in his capacity as the “national scribe” that *Half of a Yellow Sun* proposes. Significantly, he becomes most dedicated to writing this narrative after his return from the war—effectively, after his return from the “dead.” As the Biafran historian is revived, so too, perhaps, is the Biafran history he is more compelled to record after this “resurrection.” Regardless of what the other characters are led to

believe, his disappearance, far from indicating death, consists of a period during which Ugwu is absent from the main storyline, and it ultimately leads to his more profound engagement with Biafra. Like Odenigbo, Ugwu has returned, despite the wartime trauma he experienced while away from the refugee camp. These two survived disappearances might well serve as textual precedents suggesting Kainene's eventual return as well.

The importance here, to be clear, is not some sure guarantee that Kainene—and with her, Biafra—will reappear just as they were, following some indeterminate period of “waiting,” but rather that *Half of a Yellow Sun* leaves open the possibility for these returns. Echoing the characters' earlier presumption that Ugwu is dead because they cannot find his body, Olanna's trip to the nearest makeshift mortuary in Orlu yields no results, either. Derrida writes of the anxiety surrounding the body that must be identified and made to “stay in its place. In a safe place,” so that the threat of return can be contained and controlled, but Kainene—and the cause of the secessionist state she represents—cannot be laid to rest so easily (9). The novel confirms neither Kainene's death nor a Biafran failure, enabling the potential for the return of either. This ambiguity in itself constitutes a threat; as Amy Novak has written, “Kainene's absence haunts the closing of the text” (46). The novel must of course come to a close, but Kainene's “absence”—not her death, not her known fate, but her “absence”—continues to “haunt.” Despite Odenigbo's attempts at consolation, the text never resolves whether Kainene remains, in Odenigbo's terms, “safely on the other side,” or in Derrida's strikingly similar language, “in a safe place” (Adichie 512; Derrida 9). Neither those who wish for her return nor those who want to bury the threat she represents can be certain of “safety”

here: either the safety of their missing friend, or safety from the specter of Biafran ambitions of self-determination.

The Specter of Secession

Using almost the same phrasing as Derrida and Adichie, political scientist Charles Nixon wrote in 1972 that “the Nigeria/Biafra case has raised the *specter* that many have feared” (493, italics mine). Indeed, borrowing from Derrida’s suggestion that the specter is a “*re*-apparition” that “will end up coming” back in some form (2), the specter of secession evokes a threat to the stability of Nigeria, as well as to other African states. The notion of a successful Biafra threatened the rest of Africa on at least three different levels: in terms of the unity of individual states, the unity of the OAU, and pan-African unity. As Ugwu notes, “[M]any Black African countries feared that an independent Biafra would trigger other secessions” (324). Further, the debate that began among OAU members over whether to recognize Biafra—heightened as a result of recognition by Tanzania, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, and Zambia—soon “threatened to destroy the fragile OAU alliance” that had existed only since its 1963 formation (Stremlau 181). While the OAU Charter explicitly upholds “the integrity of the national borders existing at the attainment of independence,” Biafra, along with its four African supporters, challenged this status quo (Nziramasanga 237). Finally, in a less direct way, the specter of secession acted as a menace to those African leaders under the common (if flawed) impression that “the unity of each state is essential to the unity of the whole continent” (Kamanu 365).

Such anxieties, whether based in likely possibilities or not, nonetheless confirm poet Ifeanyi Menkiti's broad declaration at the Columbia conference that the Biafran efforts had "a significance that ranges far beyond Biafra" and "tremendous implications for the African continent" (1).

Despite the fact that the "struggle for African independence was waged under the banner of the right of self-determination," this right was only applicable, from the perspective of the OAU, within the national borders established by European colonizers (Kamanu 355). Political scientist Onyeonoro Kamanu pointed out in 1974 that the OAU "denounced Biafra's attempted withdrawal from Nigeria and similar struggles in Southern Sudan, Chad, and Eritrea, without reference to the possible merits of their peoples' claims to the right of self-determination" (355). The specific phrase "territorial integrity" appears three times in the OAU Charter and twice in the United Nations "Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples," released the same year as Nigeria's independence (Organization of African Unity; United Nations 66-67).⁵ The principle of territorial integrity was held in such esteem that legal scholars John Dugard and David Raič have recently argued that, in the case of Biafra at least, it was "placed above humanitarian considerations" (136).

How can this emphasis on territorial integrity—that is, the maintenance of colonial boundaries—be reconciled with the adamant calls for African self-determination? Part of the problem here lies in the ambiguities surrounding the concept

⁵ Like these older documents, the 2002 *Constitutive Act of the African Union* also upholds "territorial integrity," indicating its continued primacy (African Union).

of “self-determination.” More than on any fixed definition, legal scholars mostly agree on the high “number of inconsistent meanings ascribed to the term” and the apparent impossibility of reaching a consensus on the question (Cass 22; Nanda 259). Attorney Debra Valentine sees territorial integrity and self-determination as “two conflicting principles,” and professor of international relations James Mayall criticizes what he sees as the OAU’s hypocrisy in “claim[ing] to support the self-determination of all African peoples but which in practice is commit[ing] to the existing state order” (Valentine 803; Mayall 78). In particular, the inclusion of secession within the right to self-determination is hotly contested. While some parties oppose outright all instances of secession, even those policy-makers and scholars who are willing to “consider the right of secession inherent in the right of self-determination do not advocate an arbitrary and unrestricted application,” or else states might be at risk of limitless disintegration (Chen 243). Essentially, as international law and finance attorney Lee Buchheit wrote in 1978, “[R]eluctance to accommodate the claims of secessionist groups within the principle of self-determination seems to be motivated primarily by a fear on the part of most independent States” in the then-recently decolonized global south (19). Clearly, a “fear on the part of most independent States” of the threat to territorial integrity promotes this reluctance to engage with secessionist claims. Self-determination was a driving force for African independence, but only within the framework and geopolitical borders that European colonizers left behind.

Arguably, then, the Biafran secession movement in the late 1960s, the first decade of African independence, not only disturbed the Nigerian political order and the careful

diplomatic balance of the young OAU, but also contested the supremacy of colonial borders. In this sense, secession threatened the whole colonial and postcolonial order—or that which remained and remains in place in the form of national borders. That the initial Biafran boundaries followed regional lines created by the British colonial administration complicates these questions further. As S. K. Panter-Brick pointed out in 1968, the borders of Nigeria and those of Biafra are all “artificial” constructions of the erstwhile British leadership (263). According to this understanding, the Biafran leadership basically cherry-picked different European-drawn boundaries in order to serve the interests of the Igbo population. While this point may be valid, the international anxiety surrounding the Biafran secession indicates that any disturbance of the borders in place at independence—or the breakdown of what legal scholar Makau Mutua has called “the colonial state in another guise”—becomes threatening, even if the Biafran borders were ostensibly just as much of European origin as are those of Nigeria (Mutua 1160).

In contrast with the apprehensive political and legal debates surrounding secession and self-determination, the Proclamation of the Republic of Biafra in 1967 explicitly and in the same breath asserted the right to “self-determination” and its own sovereignty, completely independent of Nigeria (672, 678, 680). This emphatic association of secession and self-determination, declared at the end of the series of years that saw the most rapid African decolonization, in itself constituted a threat to the status quo. Later, over a decade after the conclusion of the Biafran War, and quoting the OAU Charter, political scientist and Africanist Crawford Young would write, “Whatever else may lie ahead, ‘respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State’ appears

one of the *safer* political forecasts” (229, italics mine). The “disrespect” for “territorial integrity,” which the Biafran case exemplified, thus creates danger—it is, in Young’s terms, “unsafe.” Once again, Kainene and Biafra refuse to stay contained “in a safe place”; they remain at large, even in their absences contesting territorial integrity and the “colonial state in another guise.”

“It Happens All the Time”

At the time of the Biafran War, the precedents for a postcolonial type of secession, involving a disruption of colonial borders, were essentially nonexistent. No secession had occurred since the 1947 Partition of India, which created an independent Pakistan. In contrast with the Biafran movement’s non-European origins, however, Partition was largely effected by the British Parliament at the time it granted Indian independence. Later, though, the 1971 independence of Bangladesh, occurring less than two years after the Nigerian-Biafran War ended, would become a major turning point in international conceptions of secession. Legal scholar Lung-chu Chen wrote in 1976 that prior to Bangladesh’s independence, “it was widely assumed that there is no room for secession, meaning for a group to break off from an established nation-state, in the contemporary world... The success of Bangladesh has begun to change people’s expectations” (243). Indeed, since the Biafran War’s 1970 conclusion, two African secessionist states have obtained official international recognition, drawing new and UN-approved borders on the continent. Professor of law Donald Horowitz calls the Eritrean

independence from Ethiopia in the early 1990s “a victory unprecedented in independent Africa” and a “watershed” event (187, 190). Most recently, of course, was South Sudan’s 2011 independence from Sudan. Both of these secessions arose from conflicts with origins older than the Biafran secession—as the Eritrean War of Independence dated back to 1961, and the First Sudanese Civil War began in 1955—but were finally achieved through referenda that indicated close to 99% support for secession (Parmelee; “South Sudan voters”).

Alongside these recent secessions, and even though the Nigerian-Biafran War came to an end over forty-two years ago, contemporary political movements and rhetoric show that the idea of Biafra strongly maintains its relevance and political currency. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) continues to grow in strength and numbers, and its concerns are not just representative of the beliefs of some fringe minority. Prominent Nigerians, including President Goodluck Jonathan and the Nobel laureate (and one-time Biafra supporter) Wole Soyinka, have called attention to similarities between today’s interregional and interethnic tensions and those of the Biafran conflict (“Is Nigeria”). Recent activity on the part of several other prominent regionally- or ethnically-based organizations, like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Yoruba nationalist organization Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), has also called attention to these continuing tensions, though most notorious have been the efforts of the Northern Nigerian Islamist group Boko Haram.

The death of Colonel Ojukwu last November, as well as his March 2012 burial in Nigeria with highest military honor, has sparked controversy more explicitly surrounding

the memory of the Biafran War. Many Nigerians were angry that Ojukwu would receive a state burial at all, given his role in leading the Biafran secession, while others viewed him (either genuinely or for political ends) more broadly as a great Nigerian leader who loved his people. General Gowon, Ojukwu's great adversary during the Nigerian-Biafran War, released a conciliatory statement that Ojukwu "loved Nigeria so much; he merely wanted to opt out over perceived injustice against his people," and Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State, formerly part of Biafra and the state where Ojukwu was buried, suggested that this huge memorial "showed that the Igbo nation is now truly part of Nigeria" (Ossai; Nnadi, Anyanwu, and Onuorah). Other mourners, however, waved Biafran flags in memory of Ojukwu's most famous cause, and many Biafran war veterans "were unhappy at the prominent role played by Nigeria's army," his former enemy, in organizing his memorial services ("In Pictures"). In contrast with Gowon's and Obi's attempts to tame Biafran history in favor of a unified Nigeria, MASSOB leaders read the state burial as "confirmation that Nigeria had recognized the late Igbo leader" and planned what they called a "Biafran state burial" in Ojukwu's memory (Obi). The organization honored the Biafran leader's death through such actions as closing down all the markets in Onitsha for a day, and helping to mobilize over fifty thousand people to "receive" Ojukwu's body at a single event in February (Okutu). Ojukwu's burial thus brought clashing efforts to control the Biafran narrative to the fore; all interested parties seem to want to ensure, again, that the body in question remains secured "in a safe place" within their histories.

Forebodingly, Charles Nixon wrote of the questions of Biafra: "Surely the life of modern states has not become so stable that the issues will not rise again" (497). The

successful secessions of Eritrea and South Sudan, along with the ongoing interregional conflict throughout Nigeria, demonstrate the continuing relevance of Nixon's prediction. Especially as presented in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the specter of secession is not "docilely given a date" that would help to relegate Biafran potential to history, but rather, it leaves open the possibility that secessionist threats might "rise again" (Derrida 3; Nixon 497). Nixon did not confirm any concrete future for these Biafran "issues," but instead cagily reminded his reader not to rule out the possibility of their resurrection. In a similar way, and just as far from the claim that Biafra is only "a part of history now," Adichie's novel conceives of a Biafran existence beyond the pages of some finalized history. *Half of a Yellow Sun* proposes at least two narratives about Biafra—one that recounts the troubled relationship between Olanna and Kainene, and another that the young would-be Biafran Ugwu records—and refuses to bring either version to a definitive close. Though undoubtedly tragic, Kainene's disappearance, like Biafra's defeat in Ugwu's telling, remains unresolved. Reclaiming and reimagining Biafra in such ways, *Half of a Yellow Sun* conjures a specter that threatens and promises to return.

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