

# Half of a Yellow Sun



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Adichie was born as the fifth of sixth children to an Igbo family in Nsukka, Nigeria. Her father was a professor at the University of Nigeria and her mother was the university's first female registrar. Adichie studied medicine at the university and then moved to the United States at age 19. She received master's degrees from Johns Hopkins and Yale, and she was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship "Genius Grant" in 2008. She has published poems, short stories, a play, and three novels – [Purple Hibiscus](#), *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and [Americanah](#) – which have been awarded the Orange Prize among other honors. Adichie is currently married and divides her time between Nigeria and the United States.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Half of a Yellow Sun* concerns the events of the Nigerian Civil War (also called the Biafran War) and the years preceding it. Nigeria gained independence from the British Empire in 1960, but its existence as a country was an arbitrary structure set up by Britain, and contained many different cultural groups. Ethnic tensions led to the massacre of Igbo peoples in 1966, which then led to the secession of southeastern Nigeria and the creation of Biafra. Aided by Britain and Russia, the Nigerian government then declared war to annex Biafra. The war lasted for three years, from 1967 to 1970, with the Nigerians using starvation and genocide to ultimately defeat the Biafrans. More than a million civilians died from famine and fighting during the war.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Adichie was inspired and influenced by Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian fiction writer most popular in the West and author of [Things Fall Apart](#). She was also inspired by Camara Laye, author of *The Dark Child*. Both Achebe and Laye gave Adichie a "shock of recognition" that "people who looked like [her] could exist in books." Other Nigerian writers who have written about the Biafran War are Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and Flora Nwapa.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Half of a Yellow Sun*
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Nigerian Literature

- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Nigeria
- **Climax:** Ugwu fights on the front lines
- **Point of View:** Third person limited, switching between following Ugwu, Olanna, and Richard

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Chinua Achebe.** The great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe was one of Adichie's most important inspirations and influences, and when she was a child Adichie's family even lived in Achebe's former house.

**Father.** Adichie wasn't even born until years after the Biafran War, but her parents were both affected by it. Her father James lost his home and his own father during the war, and his experiences were Adichie's main source for the events of the novel.



## PLOT SUMMARY

*Half of a Yellow Sun* takes place in Nigeria in the 1960s. The book begins when Ugwu, an Igbo boy from a bush village, goes to Nsukka to work as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a professor and radical. Odenigbo is in love with Olanna, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Nigerian. Olanna moves in with Odenigbo and meets his friends, who argue about politics every night. Ugwu becomes an excellent cook and goes to school. Meanwhile Richard, a white Englishman in Nigeria, leaves his girlfriend Susan when he falls in love with Kainene, Olanna's sardonic twin sister. Richard moves to Nsukka and befriends Odenigbo and Olanna. Odenigbo's mother "Mama" visits and calls Olanna a witch, which upsets her greatly. Olanna and Odenigbo start trying to have a child.

The narrative jumps a few years ahead, when the Nigerian government is overthrown. The Northern Hausa blame the Igbo for the coup. There is then another coup, and this time many Igbo soldiers are killed. Olanna now has a child she calls "Baby," and she takes her to Kano to visit her relatives. The violence against the Igbo becomes a pogrom, and Olanna's relatives are brutally murdered. She escapes on a train to Nsukka and sees a woman carrying her daughter's severed head in a basket. Meanwhile Richard watches Igbo civilians being murdered at the airport. Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo leader, announces that Southeast Nigeria will secede and become the Republic of Biafra. All the characters are overjoyed at this.

Nigeria then declares war on Biafra to annex it. Britain and



## CHARACTERS

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Olanna Ozobia** – One of the novel’s main protagonists, the beautiful daughter of Chief Ozobia. Olanna’s parents are shallow and greedy, but she has a strong character and sense of morality. She studied sociology in London and then moved back to Nigeria. She was seriously involved with a Hausa named Mohammed, but then left him for Odenigbo, whom she loves deeply. Olanna and her family are Igbo, and so are greatly affected by the massacres and the war. During the war Olanna teaches children and helps with the refugee camps.

**Kainene Ozobia** – Olanna’s twin sister, who is less beautiful than Olanna and has something of a dour, sarcastic personality. Kainene is always the less popular of the two, and she builds up many emotional defenses against the world. Kainene also studied in London, and then takes over her father’s business in Port Harcourt. Richard falls deeply in love with her when they meet. She returns his love but rarely displays open affection. Kainene runs a refugee camp during the war.

**Ugwu** – The novel’s first protagonist, a young Igbo boy from the small bush village of Opi. Ugwu becomes Odenigbo’s houseboy and initially marvels at all his possessions and education. Ugwu possesses a natural brilliance, and quickly excels at school and becomes an excellent cook. He goes through puberty and lusts after girls (and Olanna), but is usually frustrated in love. Ugwu is forcefully conscripted into the army and almost killed. While in the army he also kills enemy soldiers and participates in a gang rape of another Igbo women, an act he deeply regrets. He ends up writing *The World Was Silent When We Died*, the story of the Biafran conflict.

**Richard Churchill** – An English expatriate and journalist. He first came to Nigeria after he fell in love with the **roped pots** of ancient Igbo-Ukwu art. Richard is very good-looking but extremely shy and awkward. He falls deeply in love with Kainene and they start a relationship. Richard feels like a true Biafran, but in the end he recognizes that as a white man he will always be an outsider to the Igbo’s suffering. He finds a purpose when he begins using his privilege to publish articles about the Biafran War.

**Odenigbo** – A mathematics professor and pseudo-revolutionary, and Olanna’s lover/husband. Odenigbo is strong and hairy, and speaks forcefully about many subjects, mostly arguing about international politics. Olanna falls in love with his confidence and they are happy together for a long time. Odenigbo takes in Ugwu and helps educate him. Odenigbo loves Olanna but cheats on her with Amala and then possibly with Alice. He is a patriotic Biafran, but as the war drags on he starts drinking and gets depressed.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

Russia supply arms to the Nigerians, who advance against the confident Biafrans. Nsukka is evacuated, and Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and Baby move to the cities of Abba and then Umuahia. Their living situations get progressively worse as the war continues and Biafra’s food and money runs out. Odenigbo and Olanna get married, but there is an air raid during the reception. The narrative is sometimes interrupted by a book called *The World Was Silent When We Died*, where an unknown author describes the larger political forces at work in the war.

The story returns to the early sixties, to the time before the war. Olanna goes to London, and while she is away Mama visits Odenigbo with a girl named Amala. Odenigbo sleeps with Amala, and when Olanna returns home she finds out. She moves out and gets very depressed. Olanna learns that Amala is pregnant with Odenigbo’s child. She gets drunk one night and seduces Richard. Richard and Olanna both agree not to tell Kainene, though Olanna soon tells Odenigbo.

Olanna and Odenigbo get back together. Olanna decides to adopt as her own Amala’s child, which is a girl and unwanted by Amala and Mama. Olanna names the child Chiamaka but calls her Baby. Kainene then finds out about Olanna and Richard, and she stops speaking to Olanna. She burns the manuscript Richard was writing but doesn’t leave him.

The story returns to the late sixties. The situation in war-torn Biafra rapidly declines, and there is starvation and violence everywhere. Nigeria blockades all aid to Biafra, and most foreign countries ignore the conflict. Richard starts writing articles about the suffering Biafrans, and Kainene runs a refugee camp. Odenigbo’s mother is killed, and he gets depressed and starts drinking.

Kainene finds Olanna and, her perspective changed by the war, forgives her. The sisters grow close again. Ugwu falls in love with a girl named Eberechi, but then he is forcefully conscripted into the army. He fights some battles and then takes part in the gang rape of a bar girl. He is badly wounded in a subsequent battle, and everyone thinks he is dead. Umuahia falls to the Nigerians and Olanna’s family moves in with Kainene. They find Ugwu in a hospital and take him home. Children start regularly dying of kawashiorkor, a disease of starvation and malnutrition.

One day Kainene crosses enemy lines to find food if possible, and doesn’t return. Richard and Olanna search for her frantically but find nothing. Finally Biafra surrenders and Nigeria is reunified. Olanna’s family returns to Nsukka to find their house looted and all their savings liquidated. Ugwu returns to his village and learns that his sister was gang raped by soldiers. He starts writing about his experiences, and it is revealed that he is the author of *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Kainene’s disappearance remains a mystery.

**Odenigbo's Mother (Mama)** – A village woman who is a stranger to Odenigbo's educated modern world. Mama thinks Olanna is a witch because her mother didn't breastfeed her, and she plots to get Odenigbo to have a child with Amala. Mama refuses to leave her village and is killed in the war.

**Chiamaka (Baby)** – Amala's child by Odenigbo. Olanna takes the girl in as a baby and raises her as her own. Baby grows up amidst constant danger and moving from place to place, but she seems happy.

**Amala** – A village girl who helps Mama and then unwillingly bears Odenigbo's child.

**Eberechi** – A girl Ugwu falls in love with in Umuahia.

**Madu Madu** – Kainene's friend, an army major and then colonel. He is a huge, confident man, and Richard is always jealous of him.

**Okeoma** – A poet and friend of Odenigbo's. Okeoma gives up writing to become a soldier, and then is killed in the war.

**Susan Grenville-Pitts** – Richard's first girlfriend in Nigeria, a jealous, racist English expatriate who looks down on all the Nigerians.

**Harrison** – Richard's houseboy, a middle-aged man who boasts about his English cooking.

**Jomo** – The gardener for Richard and Odenigbo.

**Miss Adebayo** – A Yoruba woman who argues with Odenigbo but possibly likes him romantically.

**Chief Ozobia** – Olanna and Kainene's father, a fat, wealthy, flashy Nigerian businessman.

**Mrs. Ozobia** – Kainene and Olanna's mother, a vain and beautiful woman.

**Mohammed** – Olanna's ex-boyfriend, a kind, good-looking, extremely wealthy Hausa man.

**Arize** – Olanna's cousin who is murdered while pregnant during the anti-Igbo pogroms that occur before Biafra breaks away as an independent country.

**Aunty Ifeka** – Arize's mother, a strong-willed village woman.

**Uncle Mbaezi** – Arize's father from Kano.

**Abdulmalik** – A Hausa man who was once friends with Mbaezi but when the pogroms break out helps slaughter the Igbo, including Mbaezi.

**Anulika** – Ugwu's sister. She is witty and kind but then changes drastically, losing all her spark, after she is raped during the war.

**Ugwu's Mother** – A village woman who suffers from a coughing sickness.

**Nnesinachi** – A girl from Opi whom Ugwu lusts after as a youth.

**Professor Ezeka** – A usual guest at Odenigbo's. He becomes the Director of Mobilization in Biafra.

**Dr. Patel** – A usual guest at Odenigbo's who treats him and his

family when they are ill or injured.

**Ugwu's Aunty** – The woman who gets Ugwu his job at Odenigbo's.

**Chinyere** – A housegirl who has an emotionless sexual relationship with Ugwu in Nsukka.

**Nnaemaka** – A friendly customs officer. Richard watches him get murdered at the airport.

**Special Julius** – A corrupt army contractor who befriends Odenigbo and Olanna.

**Professor Ekwenugo** – A man who helps develop the *ogbunigwe* (Biafran land mines) but then is "blown up" during the war.

**Dr. Nwala** – A friend of Okeoma's who treats Baby during the war.

**Mrs. Muokelu** – A fervently patriotic Biafran woman who befriends Olanna.

**Ikejide** – One of Kainene's stewards. His head is cut off by shrapnel.

**Count Von Rosen** – An elderly Swedish aristocrat who fights for Biafra.

**Mama Oji** – A short-tempered, sarcastic woman who befriends Olanna in Umuahia.

**Alice** – A small, childlike woman who plays the piano. She possibly has an affair with Odenigbo.

**Adanna** – A little girl who befriends Baby and dies of kwashiorkor.

**Pastor Ambrose** – A man who prays loudly in the yard, pretending to be a pastor to avoid conscription.

**High-Tech** – A thirteen-year-old boy in the Biafran army who does reconnaissance missions and befriends Ugwu.

**The Bar Girl** – An Igbo girl who is raped by Ugwu and his fellow soldiers.

**Redheaded Charles** – A racist American journalist covering the Biafran War. Richard dislikes him.

**Plump Charles** – A more likable American journalist.

**Father Marcel** – A priest working at Kainene's refugee camp who takes advantage of young girls.

**Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu** – The inspiring, overconfident leader of Biafra during the war, referred to as "His Excellency."

**General Yakubu Gowon** – The Nigerian head of state during the Biafran War and for five years afterward.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes

occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## COLONIALISM AND NIGERIAN POLITICS

*Half of a Yellow Sun* mostly deals with the Nigerian Civil War (also called the Biafran War), which took place between 1967 and 1970. Nigeria had only recently freed itself from British colonial rule at the time, and the country of Nigeria was itself an arbitrary unification (by its colonizers) of over 300 different ethnic groups. The largest of these were the Igbo in the Southeast, the Yoruba in the Southwest, and the Hausa in the North. Adichie paints a picture of this hopeful young country in its new independence through scenes at Odenigbo's house, where politicians, professors, and poets argue and laugh together. But despite Independence in 1960, Nigerian politics were still under British influence (which wanted to maintain its access to Nigerian resources), mostly through the way the government was arranged – so that the autocratic Northern Hausa had the most control. Ultimately the tensions between the ethnic groups (exacerbated and sometimes even created by England) led to the massacres of Igbo people in 1966 and the Civil War that followed, with the secession of the Republic of Biafra in the Southeast.

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is told from the point of view of mostly Igbo characters – Ugwu, Odenigbo, Olanna, and Kainene – who are all affected by the massacres and the war, and hold a desperate hope in the future of Biafra. Adichie also gives us the viewpoint of an outsider, the white Englishman Richard, who though he belongs to the colonizers comes to identify closely with the Biafran cause through his love of Kainene (and yet, at the same time, can never actually be Biafran or completely extricate himself from the colonialist context or to separate his own objectification of Biafrans from his love of Kainene. Ultimately none of the political sides come out blameless in the conflict, just like the characters in the novel. England started all the trouble by colonizing and oppressing Nigeria, stirring up ethnic tensions, and supplying arms to Nigeria during the war; Nigeria used starvation and genocide as weapons of war, and the Biafran soldiers committed their own atrocities against the Nigerians and even their own people. The power of the novel is then to show human faces of different aspects of this conflict, and to portray individual tragedies and victories that bring to life events most Westerners aren't even aware of.



## LOYALTY AND BETRAYAL

On the political level, Adichie shows a “betrayal” within Nigeria through the massacre of the Igbos, and also in the secession of Biafra and the powerful Igbo devotion to the Biafran cause. The book focuses mostly on the individual level, however, and its main characters experience personal loyalty and betrayal as well. The two

central characters, Olanna and Kainene, are twin sisters who in many ways act as a microcosm of the Nigerian conflict, as they painfully break apart but are eventually reunited. The twins don't look at all alike, and they are close in their youth but grow apart as they get older. Olanna then betrays Kainene by seducing her lover, Richard, and Kainene responds by totally cutting Olanna out of her life. In a similar way Odenigbo betrays Olanna by sleeping with Amala, his mother's helper, and Richard betrays Kainene by sleeping with Olanna.

All of these betrayals cause great pain and times of personal reflection for the characters, but they ultimately lead to forgiveness and a stronger loyalty than before. Olanna takes Odenigbo back, Kainene burns Richard's manuscript but stays with him, and Olanna and Kainene are eventually reunited and grow closer than ever. In her well-developed characters Adichie shows the human tendencies toward loyalty and betrayal, while at the same time showing how these impulses play out in the larger political arena.



## WAR AND VIOLENCE

Most of the novel centers around the Nigerian Civil War, and the excessive cruelty and violence of this conflict affects all of the characters. This war was sparked by the massacres of Igbo people in 1966, when angry mobs killed soldiers and citizens as “retribution” for a government coup. The creation of Biafra was then a time of hope for the battered Igbo, but this was quickly tempered by the declaration of war from Nigeria. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie contrasts scenes of peace and optimism (like the dinner parties at Odenigbo's house) with sudden scenes of violence and fear. In this way she creates a tone of constant suspense, as the country becomes a place of danger and casual violence.

Anywhere from one to three million people died of starvation and fighting during the Biafran War, and Adichie draws out the personal tragedies in these astronomical numbers. She shows small horrors like a woman carrying her daughter's severed head in a basket, the girl's hair still carefully braided, or Ikejide having his head cut off by a piece of shrapnel. There are other tragedies as well, like the poet Okeoma giving up writing in order to fight, or Ugwu contributing to the horrors of war by participating in the rape of a bar girl. War and violence is often overwhelming in both the world and in the novel, and sometimes the only redemption seems to be trying to avoid history's mistakes by fully confronting them, as we do in Adichie's merciless writing.



## RACE AND CULTURE

Much of the conflict in Nigerian politics and between the characters of the novel has to do with race and culture. The root cause of this is the racist, oppressive colonization of Nigeria by the British Empire. This is



illustrated in characters like Susan, who sees all Africans as less-civilized and inferior to white people. Colonialism also exacerbated cultural conflicts among the Nigerians themselves, as the country's borders are a "unified" region created by England, forcing together over 300 different cultural groups. The main tension is between the Muslim, autocratic Hausa and the mostly-Christian, republican Igbo. The British colonizers gave most of the government control to the Hausa, as they were easier for the British to influence from afar, but the Igbo and the Yoruba developed the strongest middle class.

Adichie's characters then represent many of these different cultures and races. Olanna and Kainene are upper-class Igbo, Odenigbo is a middle-class, intellectual Igbo, Ugwu is an extremely poor Igbo from a bush village, and Richard is a white English expatriate. Adichie is from an Igbo family herself, so she clearly identifies more with the Biafran cause, but she doesn't shy away from portraying the mistakes and atrocities committed by Biafra. Overall her portrayal of the conflicts between race and culture shows the common humanity of all, and how even someone like Richard – a member of the oppressive culture – can be a force for good when he is willing to recognize the equal value of all people and try to help them.



## LOVE

*Half of a Yellow Sun* deals with political and historical events but it is also deeply personal, particularly in the love between its characters. The romantic relationships between Olanna and Odenigbo, Kainene and Richard, and Ugwu's infatuation with Eberechi are at the center of the novel, as well as the sibling love between Olanna and Kainene. As with everything in the book, the personal is affected by the political and vice versa: Olanna's love for Odenigbo brings her into his world of radical politics, and Richard's love for Kainene causes him to cross racial and political boundaries.

The love between the sisters becomes a sort of symbol for the unity of Nigeria, as they painfully cut off ties but are eventually reunited. Ugwu's longings for Nnesinachi and Eberechi are thwarted by the war, and then as a soldier he commits the atrocity of rape – the ultimate corruption of love. The love between Kainene and Richard and the love between the sisters seems the most enduring of the book, which makes it all the more tragic when Kainene disappears. Ultimately Adichie delves into all the deep aspects of the human experience: sex as well as violence, romance as well as cruelty, and though she shows great injustice and pain she also portrays love that can withstand such suffering.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and

Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE BIAFRAN FLAG

The title of the novel comes from the image of the Biafran flag, which is composed of half of a yellow sun over stripes of red, black and green. In the novel Olanna teaches her students about the flag – the red symbolizes the blood of the Igbo slain in the 1966 pogrom, the black is to mourn their deaths, the green is for Biafra's future prosperity, and the yellow sun is for the country's "glorious future." Adichie often points out the yellow sun on the uniforms of Biafran soldiers, and sometimes contrasts this image of hope with scenes of violence or tragedy. The flag ultimately comes to represent the optimism of the Biafrans when they first seceded from Nigeria, and then the horrors of starvation and war that came to crush that hopefulness.



## ROPED POTS

As a youth in England, Richard is first intrigued by Nigeria when he sees an image of its roped pots. The roped pots were part of ancient Igbo-Ukwu art and artifacts unearthed in Nigeria in 1959-60. They show complex metalworking that existed as early as the 9th century among the Igbo-Ukwu (ancestors of the present-day Igbo). Archeologists now agree that this intricate metalworking developed without foreign influence or aid and was solely invented in the isolated community of the Igbo-Ukwu. In the novel the roped pots represent Richard's fascination with Nigeria and also his genuine love of its people and culture, unlike the racism of his other white counterparts. When Richard tries to explain his love of Igbo-Ukwu art to his fellow English expatriates, they assume that he just wants to exploit it for money.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *Half of a Yellow Sun* published in 2006.

### Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ “There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books.” Master stopped to sip his tea. “They will teach you that a white man called Mungo Park discovered River Niger. That is rubbish. Our people fished in the Niger long before Mungo Park's grandfather was born. But in your exam, write that it was Mungo Park.”

**Related Characters:** Odenigbo (speaker), Ugwu

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 13



### Explanation and Analysis

Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old boy from the village Opi, has been brought to Odenigbo's house to serve as his houseboy. In exchange, he is provided with room, board, and an education at the campus primary school.

In this quote, Odenigbo expresses his discontent with the colonial history that he knows Ugwu will be taught in school. He advises Ugwu as to what he must write to do well in school, but also wants to make sure that he passes on the true history of Nigeria, not the history that British colonialism has written into the textbooks. This quote epitomizes Odenigbo's frustration with postcolonial Nigeria: the true answers for an independent nation are very clear, but obscured by the shadow that remains of the imperial British empire. In order to succeed and maintain social mobility, one must pander to colonial enterprises; but to preserve any sort of native identity, one must also defy them.

“Of course, of course, but my point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe,” Master said. “I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am *black* because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came.”

**Related Characters:** Odenigbo (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

In the evenings, Odenigbo's house becomes a salon for many of the faculty members at the University. Ugwu enjoys listening to the academics debate literature, science, and primarily, politics. In this quote, Master (Odenigbo) argues vehemently against the broad "Nigerian" identity that white British colonists imposed upon a diverse array of tribes that resided for centuries in one particular region of Africa.


Odenigo identifies as tribalist (meaning he sees himself as "Igbo" rather than "Nigerian"), and works towards overthrowing the various sociopolitical structures that the British put into place. He points out that Nigerians see

themselves as black only because the white British colonists told them they were, and that they live in a place called "Nigeria" because white settlers decided that a particular region was to be grouped under one nation. Odenigbo is vehemently against these ideas because they are artificial, foreign creations that diminish the importance and identity of all individual Africans, and also the Igbo tribe, which he and his ancestors have been a part of for as long as they can remember. This identity is not as fully recognized politically because it did not serve the needs of the British colonists (and indeed, most colonial powers tried to exacerbate conflicts between tribes or groups in order to maintain their power over a divided populace). In his quest to overthrow colonialism in the artificial Nigeria, Odenigbo first identifies as a member of his tribe, the Igbo, before seeing himself as black and Nigerian.

## Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

“The new Nigerian upper class is a collection of illiterates who read nothing and eat food they dislike at overpriced Lebanese restaurants and have social conversations around one subject: ‘How’s the new car behaving?’”

**Related Characters:** Kainene Ozobia (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 79

### Explanation and Analysis

After meeting at one of Susan's parties, Richard becomes infatuated with Kainene. They begin to meet for lunches at one of her father's hotels, which soon lead to somewhat unsuccessful trysts, due to Richard's inexplicable inability to sexually perform. Kainene, however, does not seem upset by his lack of arousal, and they resume their conversations as normal.

In this quote, Kainene complains about her parents and the social class they occupy. She argues that they are undereducated yet wealthy, resulting in a banality that centers around their "nouveau-riche" purchases like foreign cars and expensive meals. Richard is fascinated with her biting wit and prescient observations, and her strong sense of self despite having grown up in the very social class she is deprecating. Though critical of the nouveau riche (people with "new money," often seen to be tasteless and garish) like her parents, Kainene exhibits some hypocrisy in that she very much benefits from the wealth and education she has received as a result of her family's sociopolitical status. Still, Richard is in awe of her determination to make her own way

in the world as a shrewd businesswoman.

## Part 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ Ugwu suddenly wished that Master would not touch his mother because her clothes smelled of age and must, and because Master did not know that her back ached and her cocoyam patch always yielded a poor harvest and her chest was indeed on fire when she coughed. What did Master know about anything anyway, since all he did was shout with his friends and drink brandy at night?

**Related Characters:** Ugwu (speaker), Odenigbo, Ugwu's Mother

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 113-114

### Explanation and Analysis

Ugwu's aunt comes to Odenigbo's house to tell him that Ugwu's mother is very sick, and that he must go to see her immediately before she dies. Odenigbo tells Ugwu and his aunt to get in his car, and that he will bring Ugwu's mother from her village so that she can be treated by a doctor.



In this quote, Odenigbo insists on carrying Ugwu's mother to his car, and Ugwu suddenly feels both embarrassed and angry. Though he previously idolized Odenigbo for all of his worldly knowledge, he suddenly comes to realize Odenigbo's shortcomings: as an educated academic, Odenigbo assumes that he must know how most village Nigerians live. Ugwu feels that Odenigbo's kindness in ensuring that his mother receives modern medical help is a kind of pity, and not entirely altruistic. Ugwu does not know that Odenigbo himself comes from a village similar to Opi. This lack of transparency between Odenigbo about his past and Ugwu about his present reinforces the problems with class in postcolonial Nigeria, where social mobility is available to some and not others, and there is a severe disparity in the ways in which the poor and the rich live. Even though Ugwu and Odenigbo eventually become as good as family, they will always remain a Master and his servant.

## Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ She would not let him make her feel that there was something wrong with *her*. It was her right to be upset, her right to choose not to brush her humiliation aside in the name of overexalted intellectualism, and she would claim that right. "Go." She gestured toward the door. "Go and play your tennis and don't come back here."

She watched him get up and leave. He banged the door. They had never had a quarrel; he had never been impatient with dissent from her as he was with others. Or it may simply be that he humored her and did not think much of her opinions in the first place.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia (speaker), Odenigbo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 129

### Explanation and Analysis

When Odenigbo's mother meets Olanna at Odenigbo's house, she accuses her son's girlfriend of being a barren, overeducated "witch" who is cursed because she did not nurse with her mother. Upset, Olanna leaves Odenigbo's house abruptly. When Ugwu tells Odenigbo what happened, he goes to Olanna's university-issued flat, where she rarely sleeps, and tells her not to worry about his mother, who he claims struggles with being a village woman in a modern world. Olanna is offended that he does not defend her (Olanna), but rather excuses his mother, and in this quote, she tells Odenigbo to leave. Olanna soon realizes that this is the first time they have fought, though Odenigbo quarrels nightly with the people who visit his salon. Olanna wonders if, like her parents and Miss Adebayo, he sees her as a pretty face whose education is dismissible and whose ideas are quaint but do not matter. She suddenly becomes ill at ease with Odenigbo's presumptuous intellectualism, and the confidence that she used to admire, and instead views it as pompous and pretentious. As a pretty rich girl, Olanna has fought her whole life to be heard for her thoughts and not for her status and appearance. This is a fight that few would pity, but it has left her weak and voiceless in many situations, and this quarrel marks the first fight in a long journey for Olanna to find her personal strength.

●● Olanna had wanted to give the scent of his mother's visit some time to diffuse before telling him she wanted to have a child, and yet here he was, voicing her own desire before she could. She looked at him in wonder. This was love: a string of coincidences that gathered significance and became miracles.

**Related Characters:** Odenigbo's Mother (Mama), Odenigbo, Olanna Ozobia

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 135



### Explanation and Analysis

Even before Olanna and Odenigbo reconcile, Olanna decides that she wants to have a baby with Odenigbo, as a kind of proof of their love and future together. While in bed one morning, Odenigbo sleepily tells Olanna that he wants them to have a child together. As Olanna has not yet voiced her wish to Odenigbo, she sees this mutual desire as a sign of the strength of their lasting relationship together, despite their occasional differences in opinion (and Adichie phrases this realization in a quite lyrical way). Odenigbo's brash, often overly-intellectualized opinions can sometimes erase his decisions of any kind of compassion or sentiment. By contrast, Olanna, though highly intelligent and educated, tends to follow her heart in matters of opinions and decisions, a difference that usually binds, but occasionally divides them.

## Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

●● It was the look in Okeoma's eyes that worried him the most: a disdainful distrust that made him think of reading somewhere that the African and the European would always be irreconcilable. It was wrong of Okeoma to assume that he was one of those Englishman who did not give the African the benefit of an equal intelligence.

**Related Characters:** Richard Churchill, Okeoma

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 143

### Explanation and Analysis

Richard moves to Nsukka for a university fellowship and soon becomes a part of Odenigbo's regular salons. At one such event, he tells Okeoma about the Igbo-Ukwu roped pots and art that inspired him to move to Nigeria to write. Okeoma accuses Richard of expressing surprise that "these people" could accomplish such artwork. In this quote,

Richard is deeply offended that Okeoma would think his interest is condescending or racist in any way.

By moving to Nigeria due to a genuine interest in Igbo-Ukwu artwork, and particularly after falling in love with an Igbo woman, Richard essentially believes that he is exempt from his native nation's colonial past. Thus, he is shocked when Okeoma accuses him of holding racist ideals that place African people on a lower level of intelligence, as colonial propaganda attempted to make people believe. Richard believes he is exempt from colonialism because he is a "good" white person who does not look down upon Nigerians, yet as Okeoma's criticism points out, it is this kind of thinking that precisely problematizes his interest in the country. Richard is not exempt from the privilege that comes from white skin and a British passport, and as he will come to learn, the story of Nigeria's struggle for independence will never truly be his to tell.

## Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

●● She opened the calabash.

"Take a look," she said again.

Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl's head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth. She stared at it for a while before she looked away. Somebody screamed.

The woman closed the calabash. "Do you know," she said, "it took me so long to plait this hair? She had such thick hair."

The train had stopped with a rusty screech. Olanna got down and stood in the jostling crowd. A woman fainted... She thought about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. She visualised the mother braiding it, her fingers oiling it with pomade before dividing it into sections with a wooden comb.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 188

### Explanation and Analysis

After the massacre at Kano, Mohammed hurries Olanna to a train that can take her back to Nsukka. Unfortunately, she is not spared the sight of her aunt and uncle's mangled bodies, and she realizes that Arize, too, is dead. On the train, she is surrounded by wounded and weeping people. In this quote, a grieving mother shows Olanna and other passengers what is inside the calabash she carries: the ashen, severed head of her daughter. While many of the onlookers have violent reactions of disgust to the child's head, Olanna is transfixed in morbid fascination with the girl



and her hair.

While the book depicts many images of the horrific violence that occurred during the war, this moment of an eerily calm mother carrying and showing the head of her child is one of the most haunting and enduring passages in the novel. Adichie employs this image to tie together the horrors of the war with the humanities of everyday life: even when her child has died and all she has left is a lifeless head, the mother cannot help but think of the effort that she put into braiding her daughter's thick hair. Though colonial and wartime endeavors sought to strip the Nigerian and Biafran people of their humanity through severe acts of violence, humanity and love endure, such as the care a mother takes each day to braid her daughter's hair, the love that does not die even when the daughter does, so much so that a mother is driven to save her daughter's head in remembrance. This image continues to haunt not only Olanna, but other characters who hear of it secondhand, throughout the novel.



left behind by occupation still very much govern the diverse array of tribes grouped under one Nigeria. As a nation born post-colonialism, Biafra has the chance to actively shed these structures and govern itself presciently against foreign influence. Odenigbo is ecstatic to be a part of a cause beyond the debates in his living room, and exhibits a passion at the podium that he seldom releases in his personal life.


To Odenigbo, Biafra is a chance at rebirth for both him and his Igbo people. Yet, neither he nor the joyous members of the audience know that a terrible civil war (largely inspired and supported by foreign powers) is about to ravage the nation. The half of a yellow sun on the flag becomes an important symbol throughout the novel: a rising sun on the horizon, half of a nation that will soon become whole. Yet the lack of a full sun may also come to represent pessimism, a half that remains a half and never comes to fruition. At the end of the war, it is up to each person to decide for his or herself whether the glass is "half empty" or "half full" in the seemingly futile fight for independence.

## Part 2, Chapter 13 Quotes

☛☛ Odenigbo climbed up to the podium waving his Biafran flag: swaths of red, black, and green and, at the center, a luminous half of a yellow sun.  
 "Biafra is born! We will lead Black Africa! We will live in security! Nobody will ever again attack us! Never again!"

**Related Characters:** Odenigbo (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 205

### Explanation and Analysis

The same day that Odenigbo asks Olanna to sign a petition demanding that East Nigeria secede from the rest of the country, Ojukwu announces over the radio that the secession has occurred, with the new nation christened "Biafra." A joyous rally of students and lecturers congregates in Freedom Square, where Odenigbo is urged to speak. In this quote, Odenigbo proudly waves the Biafran flag, depicting the colors red, black, and green, and a rising sun, expressing his joy at independence at last.

As a "revolutionary," as Kainene is fond of calling Odenigbo, Odenigbo has grand dreams of freeing Africa from the colonial clutches of Europeans. Even though Nigeria is technically independent of Britain, the artificial structures

## Part 2, Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ *The notion of the recent killings being the product of "age-old" hatred is therefore misleading. The tribes of the North and the South have long had contact, at least as far back as the ninth century, as some of the magnificent beads discovered at the historic Igbo-Ukwu site attest. No doubt these groups also fought wars and slave-raided each other, but they did not massacre in this manner. If this is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise.*

**Related Characters:** Richard Churchill (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 209

### Explanation and Analysis

As the war rages on, Richard's Aunt Elizabeth sends him foreign news articles that report on the situation. These reports are often incorrect and full of prejudices against Nigerians and Biafrans. Angered, Richard writes an article to send to a British newspaper, correcting their assumptions that they purport to be facts. In this quote, Richard's article refutes the idea that Africans are inherently violent or warlike, but rather that British colonial policy created artificial divisions that have ultimately led to this inhumane conflict.



This quote by Richard condenses much of the novel's

political argument: though the rest of the world pins the root of the war on the African people's inherent inhumanity and violent tendencies, the true cause of the violence is the British colonist's artificial political structures that placed one tribal group in place to govern a variety of other tribes that happen to reside in close proximity to one another. As Richard (who is unable to resist including his love of Igbo-Ukwu art and artifacts in his article) points out, Northern and Southern tribes had peaceful interactions eons before the British even traveled to the continent. It is only when the British decided that the Northern tribes were more European-looking and therefore worthy of governing the Southern tribes that conflict arose. Though it takes him some time to realize the full extent of the privilege that he receives from this very system, Richard acknowledges that as a white man he benefits from the very system that has caused the war, and seeks to use this position to implicate Britain, and the rest of the world that turns a racist or blind eye to Biafra, in this tragedy.

### Part 3, Chapter 19 Quotes

🗨️ Ugwu moved closer to the door to listen; he was fascinated by Rhodesia, by what was happening in the south of Africa. He could not comprehend people that looked like Mr. Richard taking away the things that belonged to people that looked like him, Ugwu, for no reason at all.

**Related Characters:** Ugwu (speaker), Richard Churchill

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 266

#### Explanation and Analysis

Ugwu eavesdrops on Richard and Odenigbo in the living room in Nsukka, where Odenigbo is criticizing the British Empire for the atrocities that they commit in Rhodesia (South Africa). In this quote, Ugwu thinks to himself that it makes no sense that white people feel that they can simply take things away from black people.

Ugwu's heartbreaking confusion at the racist roots of colonialism, that white people are superior to black people, underscores the nonsensical logic of racism and colonialism itself. Oppression and exploitation have occurred throughout human history, but nothing as systematic and large-scale as the European conquest of the African continent (not to mention Asia and the Americas). To Ugwu, the theft of property and freedom only comes as a punishment if people commit a crime; therefore, he is fascinated by the idea that one can rule over another simply

due to differences in the color of their skin. His logic, of course, is absolutely correct: there is no reason that this should ever occur, except for the fact that centuries of racism and colonialism have put structures in place that allow for the systematic exploitation of black Africans by white Europeans. Ugwu's passing confusion underscores why Biafra's cause is so important, even in its failure: that Biafrans sought to create their own nation, free of colonial influence, exerting the innate human independence they deserved and were stripped of by the British.

### Part 3, Chapter 20 Quotes

🗨️ “You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Do you hear me?” Aunty Ifeka said. “Your life belongs to you and you alone, *soso gi*. You will go back on Saturday.”

**Related Characters:** Aunty Ifeka (speaker), Olanna Ozobia

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 283

#### Explanation and Analysis


After Olanna finds out that Odenigbo slept with Amala, she goes to Kano to find some solace with her extended family members. She tells her aunt about her situation, and in this quote, Aunty Ifeka replies unsympathetically to Olanna's complaining. A man, she asserts, should never come to define Olanna's life, as it is her life and hers alone. Thus, the decision whether to forgive him or to leave permanently should be hers alone and not be dependent on anyone else's desires or wishes.

Olanna's desire to please everyone in her life--from her parents to Kainene to Odenigbo--often leaves her distraught when she is left with a choice that involves her own personal happiness. Olanna has always expected and admired Odenigbo's confidence, but as Aunty Ifeka points out, this admiration is often to a fault, as Olanna usually lets Odenigbo's decisions rule her life. For the most part, she has been content to become a part of his life rather than him becoming a part of hers, but she knows she has more self-respect than to let him be totally forgiven for sleeping with his mother's housegirl. The decision to forgive or to leave, Aunty Ifeka can tell, is completely ruining Olanna's life in the present. In this quote, she points out to Olanna that Odenigbo, or any man, should never have this much power over her: a man's presence, or lack thereof, should only ever be an aspect of her life, never the whole. Olanna's subsequent decision will be important, but should not be life-defining, as she has been making it out to be.

## Part 3, Chapter 23 Quotes

☛ Or she should have told him more: that she regretted betraying Kainene and him but did not regret the act itself. She should have said that it was not a crude revenge, or a scorekeeping, but took on a redemptive significance for her. She should have said the selfishness had liberated her.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia (speaker), Kainene Ozobia, Odenigbo

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 306

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Olanna sleeps with Richard, they agree not to tell Kainene what has transpired between them. Olanna tells Odenigbo, who is shaken at the breach in Olanna's loyalty, and the fact that she would discard her morals to the extent that she would sleep with her twin sister's boyfriend. In this quote, Olanna, back at her apartment, wishes she had elaborated more on her feelings about her night with Richard.

As the more attractive, "agreeable" twin, Olanna is perceived as morally and socially superior to Kainene, to a fault. Kainene, whose slender figure appears masculine to many, acts traditionally "masculine" in what seems to be a response to her sister's personality: she is sharp, sarcastic, and relies on shrewd logic in both her own life and in her career as a businesswoman. In a way, sleeping with her twin's boyfriend and not regretting the act is something that Kainene might have done if Richard cheated on her: challenge one morally reprehensible act with one that might be even more despicable. The danger and general badness of the act is delicious to angelic Olanna, and her lack of regret inspires a "liberation" in her feelings towards herself and Odenigbo's infidelity. Now that they are even--and in fact, she has the upper hand--she can forgive him, and herself. And more importantly, the very act of taking full control of her life and agency over her actions makes this seeming sin into an identity-affirming moment for Olanna herself.

## Part 3, Chapter 24 Quotes

☛ "I will never forgive myself if I lose you, Kainene." Her face was expressionless. "I took your manuscript from the study this morning and I burned it," she said. Richard felt a soar in his chest of emotions he could not name. "The Basket of Hands," the collection of pages that he was finally confident could become a book, was gone... But it did not matter. What mattered was that by burning the manuscript she had shown him that she would not end the relationship; she would not bother to cause him pain if she was not going to stay. Perhaps he was not a true writer after all. He had read somewhere that, for true writers, nothing was more important than their art, not even love.

**Related Characters:** Richard Churchill, Kainene Ozobia (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 324

**Explanation and Analysis**



After Kainene finds out that Richard slept with Olanna, Kainene is understandably furious, and Richard spends a fitful night on the couch worried that she will leave him. In this quote, Kainene greets Richard with an eerie calmness the next day, and announces that she has burned Richard's sole copy of his book, which was near completion. Though Richard is aghast at the loss of his work, he mostly feels elation: this act of retribution means that she is not leaving him, presumably to watch his anguish over the loss of the manuscript. Richard realizes he cares more for Kainene than he does for his writing, and wonders if this means that he is not really a "true" writer.


From the moment Richard was born to apathetic parents, Richard has been apologetic and guilty about his very existence, particularly based on the privilege he receives as a white Englishman in postcolonial Nigeria. Both his writing and his love for Kainene become his only anchors to the world in a way nothing else has before. He hopes to do some good for the world by writing a book about a Nigeria suppressed by the British, but finds himself falling deeper in love with Kainene than he ever could with Igbo-Ukwu artifacts. When Kainene announces that the book has been burned, he realizes his relief is significantly greater than his anger, and that he values her more than his writing. His existence, it seems, can perhaps be justified by his love for another person, not just what he will leave behind.

## Part 4, Chapter 25 Quotes

☝☝ She taught them about the Biafran flag. They sat on wooden planks and the weak morning sun streamed into the roofless class as she unfurled Odenigbo's cloth flag and told them what the symbols meant. Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and, finally, the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia (speaker), Odenigbo

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 352

### Explanation and Analysis

After the school is shut down to be used as a refugee camp, Olanna and Ugwu teach classes in their backyard to children whose parents pay a small fee or provide payment in kind, such as gifts of food. In this quote, Adichie describes how Olanna proudly teaches her pupils to be patriots, and explains to them the symbolism of the Biafran flag.

The colors of the Biafran flag signify both remembrance and hope, showing that the country will not blindly be created without remembering the bloodshed that occurred in the fight for independence. Biafra would be a state that knew the dangers of colonialism and the greed of foreign influence, and would be (ideally) impervious to repeating such corruption again. The titular "half of a yellow sun" that all soldiers bear on their shoulders represents an optimistic future, yet there is also something ominous about a sun that is never depicted as whole. Olanna, who has been told who she is and how to think by her parents, sister, random people who appraise her beauty, and Odenigbo her whole life, is elated to find something to truly believe in, something she is a part of in the beginning.

## Part 4, Chapter 27 Quotes

☝☝ "Of course I asked because you are white. They will take what you write more seriously because you are white. Look, the truth is that this is not your war. This is not your cause. Your government will evacuate you in a minute if you ask them to. So it is not enough to carry limp branches and shout *power, power* to show that you support Biafra. If you really want to contribute, this is the way that you can. The world has to know the truth of what is happening, because they simply cannot remain silent while we die."

**Related Characters:** Madu Madu (speaker), Richard Churchill

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 382

### Explanation and Analysis

As Biafra is on the brink of losing one of its major holdings, Port Harcourt (where Kainene and Richard now live together after Richard fled Nsukka), Madu asks Richard to write articles for the Propaganda Directorate. As Richard has always worried that Madu did not like him and was in fact in love with Kainene, he is flattered by this, but also concerned that he is only being asked because he is white.

Though Richard has subconsciously felt that the Biafran cause is his cause, too, since he has been present since its inception, Madu points out that it never has, and never will be, his struggle. As a white Englishman, he still has privileges in a postcolonial Africa and larger world that neither Biafrans nor Nigerians yet have. If he truly believes in the cause, Madu asserts, then the best thing he can do is use his privilege to bring the world's attention to the atrocities being committed in the war.


For Richard, who has found a home in Biafra in a way he never felt at home in England (or Nigeria), Madu's words, like Okeoma's previous accusations at his internalized racism, shake him to the core. However, over time, he does come to accept that Biafra will never be his the way it is for those who are of Igbo descent. He harnesses his white privilege according to Madu's suggestions, and writes articles with the goal of bringing Biafra's struggle to the forefront of worldwide media coverage.

## Part 4, Chapter 29 Quotes

☝☝ The skinny soldiers – with no boots, no uniforms, no half of a yellow sun on their sleeves – kicked and slapped and mocked Ugwu during physical training... the casual cruelty of this new world in which he had no say grew a hard clot of fear inside him.

**Related Characters:** Ugwu (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 450

### Explanation and Analysis

Like Olanna feared, Ugwu is forcibly conscripted into the Biafran army. In the army compound, Ugwu notes the "casual cruelty" he encounters during basic training, receiving brutal treatment from soldiers who don't seem to champion (or even acknowledge) any of the principles of Biafra that citizens hear over the radio.


Ugwu is shocked to see that the soldiers who are supposedly fighting for their freedom are just as crude and uncivilized as the Northern "vandals" who systematically slaughter Biafrans. The lack of the half of the yellow sun on their shoulders, so unlike the smart-fitting uniform that Okeoma wears, is a symbolism of this lack of adherence to patriotism or ideals. As is often the case in war, idealism is sacrificed to violence, and brutal men assume power, taking advantage of strife and fear. The sun is a symbol of a hopeful future, and in its absence, there is seemingly no hope left. Ugwu has been treated well thus far in his life--save a few mean cries of "Ignoramus!" from Odenigbo--and he is surprised at how casually he is treated cruelly by his fellow soldiers. The unorganized, internally crude nature of the army does not bode well for the war effort, and it places Ugwu's kindness and innocence on dangerous grounds.

willing to submit themselves to enemy soldiers in exchange for the promise of rice. Even worse is the thought that without the promised rice, the townspeople feared death from starvation. A war that began to stop the secession of Biafra from the rest of Nigeria has quickly turned into an Igbo genocide.

☞ "Good?"

"Yes, good. There's something very lazy about the way you have loved him so blindly for so long without ever criticizing him. You've never even accepted that the man is ugly," Kainene said.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia, Kainene Ozobia (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 486



### Explanation and Analysis

At Kainene's house in Orlu, Olanna complains to her twin about how Odenigbo has seemingly changed into someone else since the war began. She voices her complaints about his excessive drinking and her suspicions that he slept with Alice. In this quote, Kainene replies that she is happy Olanna has finally stopped blindly accepting her love and confidence in Odenigbo without criticism.

As a beautiful and rich woman, Olanna has rarely questioned the good things that come to her, such as a university degree, jobs, and men. The major choices she has made in life lately have all involved Odenigbo, such as when she left Mohammed and when she decided to forgive Odenigbo after he slept with Amala, more for her sake than his. Kainene, who has had an equally charmed life albeit without Olanna's good looks and eager-to-please personality, has always been more shrewd and discerning regarding decisions that relate to her personal life. She praises Olanna for finally criticizing Odenigbo without loving him and his flaws blindly, a moment of bonding for two sisters who have been distant for so long.

## Part 4, Chapter 31 Quotes

☞ "The vandals took our town many weeks ago and they announced that all the indigenes should come out and say 'One Nigera' and they would give them rice. So people came out of hiding and said 'One Nigeria' and the vandals shot them, men, women, and children. Everyone."

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 481

### Explanation and Analysis

A man from Alice's hometown comes to tell her that her family, and everyone else in her town, has been murdered by the Northern "vandals." In this quote, the man tells her and other onlookers that the townspeople were lured out of hiding by the vandals promising they would give them food if they denounced Biafra by saying "One Nigeria." When the townspeople came out, they were slaughtered by the vandals.



This horrifying event shows the mercilessness that has come to characterize the war. Even if there is to be "One Nigeria," these war crimes will not be easily forgotten by either side. This quote also highlights how dire the food situation has become in Biafra, to the point that people are



## Part 4, Chapter 32 Quotes

☞☞ Ugwu thanked him and shook his head and realized that he would never be able to capture that child on paper, never be able to describe well enough the fear that dulled the eyes of mothers in the refugee camp when the bomber planes charged out of the sky. He would never be able to depict the very bleakness of bombing hungry people. But he tried, and the more he wrote the less he dreamed.

**Related Characters:** Ugwu (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 498

### Explanation and Analysis

While Ugwu is healing from his battle wounds and trauma, he helps out in the refugee camp, where he encounters more suffering than ever before. Haunted by nightmares, he begins to write of the atrocities he has seen, which lessens his night terrors.

Like Richard, Ugwu realizes the solace that writing can bring by easing things stuck into the mind onto the page. Ugwu knows that there are no words to truly describe what he has seen and experienced, but he continues to try, and the more he writes the more his pain is lessened. Here, Adichie parallels her own writing, and accounts of the war included in the novel, to show that writing of the Biafran war is perhaps more important to its writers than it is to its readers--memoirs are a way to lessen suffering by putting them down on the page, a way to share the burden of the pain, to make sure that there is always a memory of what happened, even when everyone who was involved has passed away. Ugwu's reasons for writing are in direct contrast to Richard's however: Ugwu writes for himself, whereas Richard's novel is meant for a wider audience. The irony is, however, that the story we get snippets of throughout the novel is actually written by Ugwu, not Richard--as Richard eventually concedes to Ugwu, it was never his story to tell.

☞☞ When they listened to Radio Biafra, Ugwu would get up and walk away. The shabby theatrics of the war reports, the voice that forced morsels of invented hope down people's throats, did not interest him. One afternoon, Harrison came up to the flame tree carrying the radio turned up high to Radio Biafra.

"Please turn that thing off," Ugwu said. He was watching some little boys playing on the nearby patch of grass. "I want to hear the birds."

"There are no birds singing," Harrison said.

"Turn it off."

"His Excellency is about to give a speech... It will be a great speech."

"There is no such thing as greatness," Ugwu said.

**Related Characters:** Ugwu, Harrison (speaker), Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 500

### Explanation and Analysis

After Ugwu returns from the war, he usually walks away when Harrison insists on listening to the propaganda and platitudes broadcasted over the radio. In this quote, he insists, instead, that Harrison turn it off, saying that there is "no such thing as greatness." This is a brutally, tragically poignant statement, and in the context of Ugwu's experiences, one of the most powerful of the novel.

The war leaves Ugwu shell-shocked, and it is likely that he has PTSD, as evidenced by his nightmares. After seeing the cruelty of the armies on both sides of the war, and performing cruel acts himself (notably the rape of the bar girl), he no longer believes as fervently in the Biafran cause, or in *any* kind of ideal, as he had before he was placed on its front lines. He has been hardened by the "casual cruelty" and gang rapes he experienced, and is angered by the lies he hears over the radio. Ugwu no longer believes that "His Excellency" is so excellent if he continues to let the atrocities carry on with no end in sight. Ugwu, previously the voice of youth and innocence, has now lost much of his faith in humanity, or in any kind of meaning in life itself.


## Part 4, Chapter 33 Quotes

☞☞ Richard showed them Kainene's picture. Sometimes, in his rush, he pulled out the picture of the roped pot instead. Nobody had seen her... On the drive back, Richard began to cry.

**Related Characters:** Richard Churchill (speaker), Kainene

Ozobia

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 510

### Explanation and Analysis



After Kainene has been missing for two days, Olanna and Richard drive around in search of her. In this quote, Richard asks passersby if they have seen her, using a picture he keeps in his wallet to jog their memories. Occasionally, he accidentally pulls out the photo he keeps of the roped pot that inspired his move to Nigeria. No one has any information for Olanna or Richard, and when they drive home, Richard cries in despair.

While there have been many false alarms for the loss of the four narrative characters--Olanna and Odenigbo's impending break-up, Olanna's visit to Kano during a massacre, Ugwu's near-death experience--it is in fact Kainene whose disappearance remains a mystery in the final pages of the novel. She is the one main character whose voice we never hear as a narrator: like Richard's roped pots, she is objectified, othered, and analyzed by each of the other characters, in particular Olanna and Richard. The fact that Richard keeps the picture of the roped pots alongside his photo of Kainene symbolizes the fact that though he indeed loves Kainene and is lost in her absence, he has never quite shed his fascination for Nigeria due to his "othering" of its culture, a remnant of his native Englishness and white skin.

## Part 4, Chapter 34 Quotes

🗨️ Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves.

**Related Characters:** Olanna Ozobia (speaker), Ugwu

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 512

### Explanation and Analysis

One day, while gently brushing Baby's hair, which is falling out from malnutrition, Olanna tells Ugwu that she cannot stop thinking of the little girl's head that she saw in the

calabash on the way back from Kano. Ugwu asks her to say more, and writes down everything Olanna tells him.

Like Ugwu's decreased nightmares after he began writing, Olanna begins to feel a sense of relief as she tells Ugwu all she saw that day in Kano and on the train back to Nsukka. The reader begins to suspect that perhaps the writer of "The World Was Silent When We Died" is not Richard, but in fact Ugwu. Ugwu's determination to record the atrocities Olanna has experienced, and the sense of release and understanding she feels, underscores the importance of recording these events for posterity, and of ensuring that events like these never happen again. It also emphasizes the tragedy of the neglect that Biafra felt from the world at large throughout the war--like Olanna's wish to be heard, Biafra wants to be heard and helped as people starve to death behind enemy lines, cut off from all food supplies. Here, Adichie shows the importance of narratives and memoir to give humanity to even the most gruesome of genocides.

## Part 4, Chapter 36 Quotes

🗨️ Madu got up. Richard reached out and grasped his arm. Come back, he wanted to say, come back here and tell me if you ever laid your filthy black hand on her. Madu shrugged Richard's hand off...

Darkness descended on him, and when it lifted he knew that he would never see Kainene again and that his life would always be like a candlelit room; he would see things only in shadows, only in half glimpses.

**Related Characters:** Richard Churchill (speaker), Madu Madu, Kainene Ozobia

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 537

### Explanation and Analysis

After Kainene's disappearance, Richard goes to Lagos to see Kainene's parents. At their home, he also encounters Madu. After years of pent-up anger and jealousy towards Madu, Richard summons up the courage to ask him if he loves Kainene, to which Madu replies that he does. Richard asks him if he has ever "touched" (slept) with Kainene, and Madu only laughs. Richard feels condescended to by Madu, and in this quote, he thinks a variety of furious, even racist thoughts towards the man he believes may have slept with the woman he loves. Instead of saying these things, he punches Madu, who punches Richard in return and causes him to fall unconscious.

Though Richard has found a home in Nigeria, and then Biafra, in a way that he never felt at home in England, this inner monologue reveals that he still feels an "otherness" for the Nigerian people. So great is his love for Kainene--at times, a kind of fetishization of the way she looks and acts, so different from what he looks like and his own personality--that he thinks the very worst thoughts he can towards Madu, which in his trauma easily descend into racism. Though perhaps subconsciously still ingrained with

racist ideas, Richard would never deign to say these things out loud, and instead he expresses his grief through a punch, which the powerful, confident Madu responds to with an even stronger punch. As Richard slips in and out of unconsciousness, he thinks about how his world will be entirely different now without Kainene by his side, a symbol of how both she and Biafra have forever shaped who he is, despite his worries towards the contrary. He had defined his life around Kainene and Biafra, and now both are lost.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Ugwu, a thirteen-year-old Igbo boy from the bush village of Opi, comes to the university town of Nsukka to work as a houseboy. His Auntie got him this job with Odenigbo, who she calls “Master,” and she leads him through the town. Odenigbo is a professor at the university. Ugwu enters Nsukka and marvels at the buildings, as he has only seen mud huts and dirt roads before. Auntie warns him to always say “yes sah!” to his Master.

Ugwu and his Auntie come to Odenigbo’s house, which is large and filled with books. Odenigbo is young, hairy, wears glasses, and looks like a wrestler. Auntie leaves and Ugwu stands there nervously. He has never seen so much furniture. Odenigbo sends Ugwu to the kitchen to find something to eat. He calls Ugwu “my good man” in English. Ugwu has never seen a refrigerator before, and he is awed to see a whole chicken inside. He eats some and then puts some meat in his pockets to bring as a gift when he returns to his village.

Odenigbo goes out and Ugwu explores the house, marveling at everything. He imagines what would be happening at his village, and thinks of his mother and his sister Anulika. Ugwu pockets some more meat and hopes that it will impress Nnesinachi, a village girl he likes but who has never noticed him. He thinks about Nnesinachi’s breasts and hopes that she won’t move up North before he sees her again and has a chance to touch her breasts. Ugwu falls asleep in a real bed instead of on his usual raffia mat.

Odenigbo wakes Ugwu up and says that the room smells like chicken. Ugwu sheepishly takes the meat out of his pockets. Odenigbo lists the cleaning chores that have to be done, and then he starts to talk aloud about international politics. He shows Ugwu a map of the world and is appalled at how uneducated Ugwu is. Odenigbo says “Education is a priority” for resisting “exploitation.” He promises to enroll Ugwu in the staff primary school.

*The book starts out as almost a social comedy, with a clash between the worlds of Ugwu and Odenigbo. Ugwu’s bush village is extremely poor, and Nsukka seems a place of impossible riches for him – but it is only a short drive away. Odenigbo works at the University of Nigeria, which Adichie briefly attended.*



*We will see that Odenigbo is a pseudo-revolutionary, always railing against colonial oppression, but he still calls Ugwu “my good man” like an English gentleman. It will be hundreds of pages before the tragedy begins, and for now Adichie creates this world of optimism and even comedy, with Ugwu naively saving chicken in his pockets. There is a tragic note to this too, though, as it shows how rare meat is in Ugwu’s village.*



*Ugwu’s adolescent longings make up much of his inner life at first – he is young but is already beginning to experience sexual lust and a fascination with girls. Much of the personal side of the novel is devoted to love, and in her characters’ romantic love Adichie never shies away from sexuality. Nnesinachi will be a kind of unreachable ideal for Ugwu.*



*Part of the Nigerian politics and culture that are explored through the book is the incredible diversity within the country itself – it contains over 300 different ethnic groups, and even within these (Ugwu and Odenigbo are both Igbo) there are still huge cultural disparities, like between the poor, illiterate Ugwu and the modern, wealthy Odenigbo.*



Odenigbo says that Ugwu will be the oldest in his class, so he will have to prove himself the best. He then says that Ugwu will learn two kinds of knowledge in school – British-approved knowledge and real knowledge. As an example, he says that they will teach Ugwu that a white man “discovered” the River Niger, when in actuality people had been fishing there for generations. But Ugwu must copy down the white answer for his exam.

*Odenigbo is a professor of mathematics, but it seems that his great passion is for politics. He introduces the looming shadow of colonialism to the book – the British rule of Nigeria that lasted until 1960 – which still affects everything, even the seemingly apolitical knowledge taught in schools.*



Ugwu says that he can cook, and so Odenigbo has him write down ingredients he needs. He says his gardener Jomo will show him the way to the market. Odenigbo tells Ugwu to call him by his name instead of calling him “sah,” but Ugwu can’t break the habit. Weeks pass and Ugwu learns Odenigbo’s routine – he plays tennis and has visitors every day, and they listen to the radiogram in the living room. One day Ugwu tries to iron Odenigbo’s socks, but he ends up melting them. Odenigbo calls him a “stupid ignoramus” and then rushes off to work.

*There are more comedic moments as Ugwu adjusts to Odenigbo’s lifestyle and culture. Ugwu is wide-eyed and naïve now, but soon he will become a connoisseur of cooking and luxury. Odenigbo adopts many English customs, like playing tennis, and he uses the word “ignoramus” over and over just like “my good man.”*



Ugwu is horrified, and convinced that “evil spirits” made him iron the socks. He worries that Odenigbo will send him home, so he searches for a special herb called *arigbe* that is supposed to “soften a man’s heart.” He finds some *arigbe* and makes a special stew, and when Odenigbo comes home he serves it to him. Odenigbo likes the stew, and after he goes to bed Ugwu realizes that his Master had forgotten all about the burned sock.

*We also see a disparity in the superstitious and religious beliefs of Ugwu and Odenigbo. They are both Igbo, living only a few miles apart, but Ugwu still lives in the world of evil spirits and witchcraft, while Odenigbo is an atheist and reads European philosophers. And yet Ugwu’s “medicine” does work.*



Ugwu starts to realize that he has a much better situation with Odenigbo than most houseboys do – other houseboys in Nsukka sleep on the floor and don’t get to read their masters’ books. Ugwu listens to Odenigbo’s conversations with his friends about international politics. Odenigbo has more visitors on weekends, and Ugwu serves them drinks. The visitors include the fastidious Professor Ezeka, the poet Okeoma, whom Odenigbo calls “the voice of our generation,” and Miss Adebayo, a Yoruba woman from the university who argues with Odenigbo.

*Ugwu basically becomes a member of Odenigbo’s family, and almost a project for Odenigbo. Odenigbo has already stated his beliefs about the necessity of education and escaping from colonial exploitation, so he intends to make Ugwu into an educated, independent member of Nigerian society. Odenigbo’s assortment of friends will keep coming back in different situations.*



Ugwu eavesdrops on them arguing one night as they discuss pan-Africanism and tribalism, and the fact that Nigeria is a creation of the white man, while Igbo is a self-made identity. Miss Adebayo argues flirtatiously with Odenigbo, and Ugwu worries that he will marry her. Ugwu wants everything to stay as it is, and he comes to admire and love Odenigbo even more.

*Odenigbo is a tribalist, preferring to identify as Igbo (one of the largest Nigerian tribes) rather than Nigerian, as Nigeria is a country created and “unified” by England. This idea will become more important later. Ugwu quickly becomes fiercely loyal.*





After four months Odenigbo says that a “special woman” is coming to visit from London, so Ugwu should clean the house. Ugwu is apprehensive about a new woman, but when she arrives he is awestruck by the melodious English of her voice. When he finally looks at her, Ugwu marvels at her beauty, and feels that she should be “in a glass case” for her beauty to be “preserved untainted.” Her name is Olanna, but Odenigbo calls her *nkem*, or “my own.”

Ugwu learns that Olanna will be moving to Nsukka to live with Odenigbo soon. He is worried about this life change, but he is also excited to have Olanna around. He finds everything she does and says to be intriguing, and at night he listens to her moaning in Odenigbo’s bedroom.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 2

The narrative now follows Olanna, who is driving with Odenigbo to the airport and listening to High Life music. She is about to fly to her parents’ home in Lagos. Odenigbo drops her off and Olanna thinks about how exciting their relationship still is. At the airport Olanna talks to a rural family waiting for their brother to return. He was the first family member to go overseas. The plane lands and the family’s grandmother panics, thinking that the plane won’t stop, but Olanna holds her hand and comforts her.

Olanna then has to get on her own flight, and the man sitting next to her compliments her beauty. Olanna knows that the confident Odenigbo laughs at her many admirers, and decides to tell Odenigbo about this man on the plane. She remembers how she first met Odenigbo. She had been in a serious relationship with a man named Mohammed at the time, and one day she was waiting in line for the theater. The ticket seller let a white man go ahead of her, and Odenigbo called him out for this loudly. Olanna was immediately attracted to him and said “well done,” and Odenigbo introduced himself. Since then she and Odenigbo had been together, but only for brief visits at a time. She is nervous about moving in with him.

That night Olanna has to have dinner with her parents and Chief Okonji, the finance minister. Her twin sister Kainene is there too. They have a fancy meal and the family laughs at all of Chief Okonji’s jokes, as Olanna’s father is trying to get a building contract from him. Chief Okonji offers Olanna a job in his department, but she tells him that she is moving to Nsukka soon. He then turns to Kainene, who says that she will be managing the family business in Port Harcourt. Olanna looks at her sister and wishes that they were still close.

*Speaking English is still Ugwu’s measure of people, and he immediately respects Olanna (as opposed to Miss Adebayo) because of her melodious English. Olanna is one of the main protagonists, but she first appears here as a sexual object in Ugwu’s eyes, something to be put under glass and admired.*



*Ugwu’s adolescent sexuality reaches an uncomfortable peak, and he sees nothing wrong with listening at the door while Odenigbo and Olanna have sex. He keeps his strong loyalty to Odenigbo but also begins to admire and long for Olanna.*



*The book’s structure will continually move from Ugwu to Olanna to Richard (divided by chapter), with a kind of free indirect discourse that narrates the action but also incorporates the central characters’ thoughts. All these innocent situations and characters will return in a more tragic manner later. Here we see more of the class divides in Nigeria.*



*Olanna is also an Igbo, but her ex-boyfriend Mohammed is a Hausa (one of the other main tribes of Nigeria), who are almost all Muslim. Olanna is very wealthy and beautiful but she lacks confidence in her own identity, and so she is immediately attracted to Odenigbo’s confidence and willingness to speak his mind. We see Odenigbo’s revolutionary spirit here too, as he shames a fellow Nigerian for flattering the white oppressor.*



*Olanna’s family is a member of the upper class, and she is even wealthier than Odenigbo. Her family is newly rich and her parents act shallow and vain in their luxury, but they somehow still raised two independent, intelligent, well-rounded daughters. The twin sisters will become a kind of microcosm for Nigeria itself. They have already begun drifting apart.*



Chief Okonji invites the family to his house for the weekend, and Olanna realizes that he has been promised an affair with her in exchange for the building contract. She coldly declines, and her parents look disappointed. After dinner Olanna goes onto the balcony and Chief Okonji confronts her. He drunkenly tries to seduce her but she pushes him away and leaves.

*Olanna is again treated as a sexual object, and this time by her own parents. It is this kind of objectification that has kept her from being confident in her identity. She will not flatter Chief Okonji and succumb to him, but she still doesn't want to disappoint her parents either.*



Later that night Olanna's mother comes to her room and praises Chief Okonji's expensive lace. She finally asks about Odenigbo, and questions Olanna's decision to move to Nsukka. Her mother is clearly disappointed, but Olanna is firm. She feels that she is always disappointing her mother with her rebellious ideals and her refusal to marry rich businessmen.

*We start to see more of the shallowness of Olanna's parents, and how different they are from Olanna herself. Olanna's mother is also very beautiful and has been treated as an object all her life, but she has succumbed to this worldview.*



Kainene then comes to Olanna's room and sarcastically discusses Olanna being used as "sex bait." Kainene says that her boyfriend Richard is moving to Nsukka as well, and she asks Olanna to introduce him to her "revolutionary lover." Olanna has never liked Kainene's English boyfriends, but she likes Richard because he is shy and not condescending to Africans. Olanna tries to make small talk but Kainene leaves. Olanna thinks about how they used to be close friends. Lately they have drifted apart, and Kainene always rejects Olanna's offerings of friendship.

*Olanna is always trying to please her parents even as she wants to assert her own independent desires, while Kainene has no problem speaking her mind and being rude and sarcastic. Olanna admires her for this, while Kainene is still jealous of Olanna for being more beautiful and "the good one." We have seen Ugwu almost worshipping Odenigbo, but Kainene mocks him.*



Olanna takes a train to Kano, a town in the North, to visit her Uncle Mbaezi and Auntie Ifeka. They are poor but very welcoming, and Olanna prefers their company to her own parents. She joyfully greets her cousin Arize, and as she enters the house she feels that no matter what else might happen in her life, everything will always be in the proper order here in Kano.

*Adichie shows disparities in culture and class even among Igbo within the same family. Mbaezi and Ifeka are not as poor as Ugwu, but they still live a totally different kind of existence from Olanna's parents' lavish Western lifestyle. The order of Kano will be tragically destroyed later.*



Olanna's family's friend Abdulmalik, a Hausa man who makes slippers, gives Olanna some slippers and invites her to his house on her next visit. Arize gossips with Olanna, saying that she wants to marry a man named Nnakwanze and have children. She laments that Olanna's old boyfriend Mohammed was a Hausa, because he was so good looking.

*In this first section of the book, we see Igbo and Hausa living peacefully alongside each other – Abdulmalik is friends with Mbaezi, and Olanna dated Mohammed. But there are still underlying prejudices, as Arize assumes she could never marry a Hausa.*



That night Olanna lies awake thinking – the family here in Kano all lives in one room, so the children must have heard their parents making love. She contrasts this with her own parents, who now have separate bedrooms and a house with ten rooms. Olanna thinks that her parents' life seems artificial and shameful compared to life in this village.

*Olanna has grown up privileged and so she pities her poor family, but she also sees that their marriage and family life is much more sincere than her own parents'. Kano is a place of idealized order and wholeness for Olanna.*



The next day Olanna goes to visit Mohammed, her ex-boyfriend. Mohammed's family is very wealthy, and Olanna first passes by a guard at the gates of their home. She and Mohammed are still friends, and they banter with each other. Mohammed implies that he is still in love with Olanna, but he teases her about Odenigbo. She remembers how she broke up with him immediately after she met Odenigbo.

Olanna asks Mohammed to take her for a drive around the city, and he jokingly says she is like the white people who "gawk at everyday things." Olanna greets Mohammed's mother, who is friendly to her now that she isn't dating her son and threatening to taint his lineage "with infidel blood." They get in Mohammed's car and Olanna declares that she is not like white people. Mohammed reassures her that she is a "nationalist and a patriot," about to marry a "freedom fighter."

When Olanna finally moves to Nsukka, Odenigbo has to leave the next day to attend a conference about the black American mathematician David Blackwell. Olanna gets her own apartment but she plans to stay at Odenigbo's house most of the time. Olanna decides to stay at the house and adjust while Odenigbo is away. She changes some things that disturb Ugwu, like switching the fake flowers at the table for real ones from the yard. She notices that Ugwu has the habit of saving everything, even things he could have no possible use for. She wonders what he thinks of her.

When Odenigbo returns Olanna feels suddenly joyous, and like the house is really hers now. They immediately have sex, and afterward Odenigbo's usual visitors arrive. He introduces Olanna to Miss Adebayo, who calls her "illogically pretty," and to Okeoma, and who calls her a "water mermaid." After dinner they argue about philosophy and the genocides of history, and Olanna feels like an outsider.

Weeks pass and Olanna starts to settle in. Odenigbo teases her that Okeoma and Dr. Patel are both falling in love with her, and Okeoma starts reciting poems about goddesses that look like her. Miss Adebayo, however, seems to think Olanna is unintellectual, too pretty, and "mimicking-the-oppressor" with her English accent. Olanna tries to contribute to their discussions and impress her, but finally she recognizes that Miss Adebayo will never like her no matter what. Olanna remains strongly in love with Odenigbo, but she rejects his offers of marriage, as she wants to preserve their exciting relationship.

*Kano is predominantly Hausa, and Mohammed is an example of the Hausa upper class in the North, as Olanna's Igbo family is from the South. Mohammed seems more liberal and accepting than many of the other Hausa in the book – perhaps because he has grown up so privileged.*



*We see more innocent examples of dislike between the Hausa and Igbo. Even though Mohammed and Olanna are friends (and were once in love), Mohammed's mother would have opposed their marriage because of tribal and religious prejudice. Olanna went to university in London, and so she fears becoming an outsider in her own country.*



*Olanna's move to Nsukka is already a statement of her independence, as her parents don't approve of Odenigbo and would prefer her to work with Chief Okonji or her father. The first two protagonists finally meet, and we see Olanna's side of her initial arrival at Odenigbo's house. Adichie often uses this device of moving backward and forward in time between her quasi-narrators, showing different perspectives on the same event.*



*We never get Odenigbo's point of view, and his way of life is already established when the novel begins. Ugwu and Olanna must both then adjust to it – Ugwu to its luxury, and Olanna to its radicalism. Odenigbo and his friends casually debate about genocide now, but soon it will become a horrible reality.*



*Olanna has an insecurity (like with Mohammed earlier) that she is "like white people," as her life has basically followed a Eurocentric path. Now she is surrounded by intellectuals opposing colonial influence and exploitation, and Olanna feels almost like a traitor. Miss Adebayo is probably jealous of Olanna (it is implied that she had a romantic interest in Odenigbo), but this jealousy appears as condescension towards Olanna.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 3

The narrative now follows Richard Churchill, an expatriate Englishman in Nigeria. He is living with his girlfriend Susan, who takes him to parties where he stands there quietly and awkwardly. All the other English people make fun of the Nigerians and tell racist jokes about them. Richard has a real interest in ancient Igbo-Ukwu art, particularly **roped pots**, but the other English people all think he just wants to exploit the art for money. Richard wants to write a book about Nigeria.

Richard has also learned not to talk to other women too much at these parties, or else Susan flies into a jealous rage and breaks a glass when they get home. Richard notices that one time he talked to a Yoruba woman and Susan didn't act jealous at all, and he realizes that Susan doesn't consider Nigerian women "equal rivals."

Richard had been introduced to Susan by his Aunt Elizabeth. When he said he was going to Nigeria, Aunt Elizabeth put him in touch with her and she started showing him around and flirting with him. Susan described the three main tribes of Nigeria: the Hausa as dignified, the Igbo as "surly and money-loving," and the Yoruba as "first-rate lickspittles." Susan helped Richard find a car and an apartment, and she started taking him to parties and introducing him as a writer.

Susan then asked Richard to move in with her. Richard didn't want to agree, but he relented to her persuasion. Since then she has been treating his writing time as something sacred, even though he has hardly been writing at all. Richard is awkward and shy at all the parties Susan takes him too, and he starts practicing a self-deprecating opening line.

At one of Susan's parties Richard meets Kainene. At first he watches her and wonders why she is at the party, but then she is introduced as Chief Ozbobia's daughter, who has just gotten her master's degree in London. Richard is immediately struck by her presence, and he lies to keep Susan from pulling him away from her. Kainene notices this, and she and Richard make small talk. Kainene is sardonic and pessimistic, and she describes herself and her twin sister Olanna as "meat" to be offered up to suitable bachelors.

*Richard is the most important and sympathetic white character of the book, but through him Adichie will subvert the usual Eurocentric trope of the "white savior," as he is basically ineffectual. After seeing the rich world of the Nigerians, Adichie now shows how most British people still view them as savages and inferior to white people.*



*In Richard's point of view he never mentions any kind of romantic feeling for Susan, but she is clearly possessively in love with him. Susan is a chilling sort of character, and shows how the racist ideas of most English people of the time were seen as normal but have tragic repercussions.*



*Adichie juxtaposes a "normal" flirtation and relationship with Susan's racist stereotypes about the Nigerians. These are the three largest tribes of Nigeria – the Hausa of the North, who are mostly Muslim (and favored by the British, as they were easiest to rule from afar), the Yoruba in the Southwest, and the Igbo in the Southeast. The Igbo developed the strongest middle-class and originally lived in small republican societies.*



*Richard seems so sympathetic because he lacks the sense of superiority that most of the white people in Nigeria have. He is awkward and shy with everyone, and doesn't have Susan's inclination to feel more "civilized" than the Nigerians.*



*Kainene is objectified just like Olanna, but Kainene has a mystique and self-confidence that allows her to speak her mind even when it is seen as "rude." Like Olanna with Odenigbo, the shy Richard seems drawn to Kainene because of her assertiveness. Adichie slowly reveals details of her characters' pasts, and we see that both Olanna and Kainene recently got masters' degrees in London.*



Susan finally pulls Richard away, and she describes Chief Ozobia as uneducated and *nouveau riche* (newly rich and flashy). Richard is suddenly irritated by Susan, and he watches Kainene, her parents, and Olanna across the room. He and Kainene lock eyes once but Richard looks away.

*Susan's criticism of Chief Ozobia is partly justified, but she never even considers the humanity of the family. Richard is rather naïve, but this helps him avoid the racism of his peers.*



A few days later Richard calls the operator and finds Kainene's number. He asks her for a drink and she invites him to a hotel owned by her father. They meet at the balcony of a private suite and discuss their childhoods. Richard's parents died when he was nine, and he was raised by his nanny Molly. He always felt out of place and often ran away from home.

*Richard's shyness and low self-esteem seems to come from his childhood, as he never had a real sense of identity and belonging. Because of this, he doesn't have that English sense of superiority, of feeling like he belongs to a more "civilized" culture.*



Richard was deeply stirred by seeing an Igbo-Ukwu **roped pot** in a magazine once, which inspired him to want to come to Africa, but he decides not to tell Kainene this yet. He tells her that he has always been a "loner," and he came to Nigeria to write. Kainene says he is an exception, as handsome people usually aren't loners. Richard blushes and Kainene calls him a "modern-day explorer of the Dark Continent."

*The inhabitants of Igbo-Ukwu were the ancestors of the modern Igbo, and they developed a complex system of metal-working in the ninth century without any outside influences. This art was discovered by a Nigerian in 1939, and then excavated by Europeans in 1959-60.*



Richard and Kainene meet for lunch for several days after that, and Richard feels a deep connection with her. One day Kainene kisses him. They undress each other, but Richard can't get aroused. Kainene only shrugs, and they agree to meet next week. At their next meeting Kainene describes the new Nigerian upper class as "illiterates" who only discuss cars.

*Kainene criticizes her parents just like Susan did, but Kainene is actually in a position of understanding. Richard feels a romantic connection and sense of belonging with Kainene, but his inability to be aroused by her implies that he either still sees an "otherness" in her or that he lacks confidence in himself.*



A few days later they try to have sex again, but this time Richard immediately climaxes. Richard apologizes, and Kainene invites him to dinner with her family that night. Richard agrees. Chief Ozobia asks Richard if he has any business connections in Nigeria, and when Richard says he doesn't, Chief Ozobia ignores him for the rest of the night. Richard is charmed by Olanna, but she lacks "Kainene's melancholy mystique." He longs to know more about Kainene but fears he never will.

*The critical Kainene rarely shows emotion, but her actions show that she also feels a connection with Richard. Chief Ozobia is one of the upper-class Nigerians who try to be like the British and exploit everything for money. We never get Kainene's point of view, though she is one of the central characters, so she always remains more mysterious than Olanna.*



Richard worries about how to break up with Susan. He thinks of his relationship with Susan as a "reassuring stability," while with Kainene he is alternately ecstatic and totally insecure. Richard keeps putting off telling Susan about Kainene, and he remembers one day as a child when his nanny Molly called him to dinner, and instead of coming to eat, Richard hid under a hedge until she found him. This short experience made him feel as if he was in total control of his life for a moment.

*Much of the culture and politics explored in the novel involves a sense of identity and agency. Richard is a white British man, so he is born with lots of agency, but he still grew up shy and insecure, and he remembers this small moment of childhood as a fleeting time of control and independence. This kind of experience will be important for other characters as well.*





Finally Richard breaks up with Susan, saying that their “needs are different.” Susan first accuses him of sleeping with other English women, but then she admits that she pressured him into moving in with her. She apologizes and says he should go off to see more of Nigeria, as he originally wanted to. Richard doesn't mention Kainene. He packs his things and leaves Susan's house, feeling overjoyed.

*The first romantic “betrayal” of the novel is Richard cheating on Susan with Kainene, although Richard clearly had very few romantic feelings for Susan in the first place. Susan remains a distant and unsympathetic character, but Adichie shows that she too has some deep insecurities.*



The next day Richard again fails to have sex with Kainene, and he thinks about finding some African herbs to help him. They are both going to leave Lagos – Richard will go to Nsukka to write, and Kainene will go to her house in Port Harcourt. She agrees that Richard should visit her there. She tells Richard that she asked Olanna to introduce him to her “revolutionary lecturer lover.” Kainene mocks Odenigbo and the foolishness of his socialist ideas.

*Richard's quest for “African manhood herbs” is a comic reflection of Ugwu's search for the herb to soften Odenigbo's heart, and shows how naïve Richard is. From Ugwu and Olanna's point of view Odenigbo is an admirable, brilliant man, but in Kainene's eyes he suddenly seems overblown and foolish.*



Richard tells Kainene that he has left Susan. She is silent for a while, then says that Richard will need a houseboy in Nsukka, and then she suddenly hugs him. Richard feels like a wall has crumbled between them with the hug.

*This hug is the first outburst of emotion we have seen from Kainene. She remains an intriguing, complex character throughout the book.*



A week later Richard leaves for Nsukka, and he stops at Igbo-Ukwu, the place where the **roped pots** were excavated. A young man named Emeka Anozie leads him to the patriarch, Pa Anozie, and translates for him. Pa Anozie describes how his brother found the pots twenty years ago, but many years after that some white men came and began an extensive dig.

*The actual man who found the Igbo-Ukwu artifacts was named Isiah Anozie. The roped pots are made of bronze, with bronze “rope” knotted around the pot itself in intricate patterns. They will come to act as a symbol for Richard's relationship with Kainene and Nigeria.*



During the excavation the men found many things, including the **roped pots** and a burial chamber. Richard marvels at the complexity of the Igbo-Ukwu art and civilization even as early as the ninth century. Emeka expects Richard to take photos like all the other white people, but Richard doesn't even have a camera. Richard drives off, wondering what he is doing with his life and what he will write about.

*At this point in the novel the roped pots symbolize Richard's uniqueness among his English companions, as he loves African art genuinely and has no desire to exploit it. But they are still exotic objects, and Richard can't help marveling at their “otherness”—he can't help but objectify them.*



Richard reaches the university and finds his new home. He is comforted by how sparse and soulless it looks inside. He goes to visit Olanna and Odenigbo and then gets his houseboy, who is a middle-aged man named Harrison. Harrison boasts about being able to cook English food, and insists on cooking it even though Richard wants Nigerian food. Harrison keeps making beets because they are rarely used in Nigerian cuisine, and finally Richard has to ask him to stop.

*Harrison is almost a comedic character, but at the same time there is a tragedy in the fact that he clearly holds English culture as superior to his own culture. The British Empire oppressed and exploited Nigeria, but many Nigerians still accept the idea (like what Odenigbo warned Ugwu would be taught in school) that white is superior.*



Odenigbo's gardener Jomo also takes care of Richard's yard, and one day Richard asks him about "herbs for men." Jomo says he knows what he means, but they don't work on white men. Richard walks away disappointed, but he reminds himself that "he [is], after all, the master." Harrison is disappointed that Richard was talking to Jomo, as Harrison and Jomo don't like each other.

Richard starts spending time with Odenigbo and Olanna, and sitting quietly while they and their friends argue about politics. Richard admires Odenigbo's confidence, which makes him attractive even though he isn't especially handsome. He keeps admiring Olanna's beauty as well, and gets slightly jealous of Odenigbo.

Richard visits Kainene in Port Harcourt and she shows him into her spacious house and around the grounds. She seems disappointed that he likes Odenigbo and Olanna, but doesn't say why. They walk through a grove of orange trees and Richard is inexplicably reminded of his childhood in England. He remembers a poem his father used to recite about "blue remembered hills."

Richard is amazed at how busy Kainene is running her family business. She wants to do better than her father did. One day she introduces Richard to Madu Madu, a major in the army and a childhood friend of Kainene's. Madu is huge and confident, and Richard feels immediately threatened by him. Richard feels that Madu is being condescending, criticizing British people and acting as if he was the host even though they are in Kainene's house.

Madu invites his friend over, Major Ekechi Udodi, who is very drunk. Udodi criticizes Kainene for "following white men" and disgracing herself. Madu apologizes for him and takes him away. Richard is still irritated and keeps asking Kainene questions about Madu. He is jealous, but doesn't want Kainene to know, as he feels their relationship is fragile. When he is with her he finally feels like he belongs somewhere.

The narrative now shifts to a description of a book called "The World Was Silent When We Died." An unnamed "he" writes its prologue about a woman carrying the severed head of her little girl in a calabash (a gourd used as a container). "He" also mentions other instances of genocides where women carried body parts of their dead children. The book cover is a map of Nigeria, with a circle around the area that became Biafra for three years.

*Richard is sympathetic and shy, but he still has the privilege of easily slipping into the English mindset of himself as "master." Harrison and Jomo's feud is played for comedy, but the two men also show the very different worldviews of Nigeria's lower classes.*



*The two shyer characters – Olanna and Richard – are most drawn to the two most confident characters – Odenigbo and Kainene. There is romantic love and sibling love in both these relationships, but also that constant admiration.*



*Richard seems to find a sense of identity and belonging in Nigeria and with Kainene, which is different from his English compatriots. His deep connection with Kainene manifests itself in a kind of nostalgia for childhood, as perhaps the last time he felt such a sense of "home."*



*We get few details about Kainene's business, but she has clearly taken agency and is acting entirely on her own, with great success. Madu is sort of the anti-Richard, and Richard is constantly threatened by him. Part of Kainene's mystery is why she chooses Richard over Madu. Unlike Olanna, she prefers the shy man to the confident one.*



*Richard now explicitly recognizes his connection with Kainene as creating a sense of home and belonging. Most of these side characters who briefly appear (like Udodi) will return under more tragic circumstances. Kainene is criticized just like Richard would be for crossing racial boundaries in her relationship.*



*These sections will punctuate certain chapters and give a larger historical perspective to the events of the novel. This poignant, gruesome scene is juxtaposed with the peace and hopefulness of Richard and Kainene's blossoming romance and life together. Richard is the "writer" character, so we assume that he is the book's author, but Adichie carefully leaves the author unnamed.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 4

The narrative returns to Ugwu. Ugwu clears up after Odenigbo and his guests have lunch, and he sucks on the leftover chicken bones. Then he does his homework for school. He remembers his teacher telling Odenigbo that he will probably skip a grade, as he has “such an innate intelligence.” Ugwu lusts after Olanna to himself, and is now glad that she lives with them. Odenigbo’s mother is about to come to visit.

Ugwu has been amused by Richard lately, as Richard has been asking him questions about his village and wants to go see the *ori-okpa* festival there. Ugwu starts to cook dinner but then the doorbell rings. It is Ugwu’s Aunt, who says that his mother is very sick and he must come home. Aunt waits until Odenigbo comes home, and then tells him that she must take Ugwu.

Odenigbo scoffs at Aunt’s description of Ugwu’s mother’s illness, and he offers to drive both Aunt and Ugwu to the village, pick up Ugwu’s mother, and take her to Dr. Patel. As they drive in Opi, Odenigbo complains about the corruption in the Nigerian government. When they reach the village, Ugwu’s father comes out and bows to Odenigbo, thanking him profusely. The village children gather around Odenigbo’s car and touch it in awe.

Odenigbo follows Ugwu into his hut to see his mother. Ugwu is suddenly reluctant to have Odenigbo touch his mother, as Odenigbo knows nothing about her, but Odenigbo helps her to his car. They return to Odenigbo’s house and Olanna greets them. Ugwu makes pepper soup for dinner while Dr. Patel treats his mother.

After a while Olanna comes into the kitchen and tells Ugwu that his mother had an infection, but she should be fine now. The next day his mother feels better, and she is grateful to the doctor but complains about the smell of toothpaste in everyone’s mouth. She is impressed when Ugwu shows her around the grounds and the house, and Ugwu wishes his whole village were there to live with him in the comfort of the house. Ugwu’s mother thanks Odenigbo but then quickly sets off to return home.

*Despite his poor, superstitious upbringing, Ugwu is one of the most naturally intelligent characters of the book. His growth from an uneducated, lustful boy to a hardened, intelligent man is one of the novel’s main arcs. Ugwu has now extended his loyalty to Olanna as well as Odenigbo, though he still sexualizes her.*



*Richard still acts like the white people Mohammed mocked, “gawking at everyday things.” Whenever Ugwu’s village life touches his life with Odenigbo, Adichie is able to juxtapose these drastically different worlds.*



*What is a life-threatening disaster or a long journey for the people of Opi is just a quick car ride and a doctor’s visit for the people of Nsukka. Odenigbo’s constant cultural commentary allows Adichie to keep the political unrest in Nigeria present amidst her individual dramas.*



*Ugwu’s idolization of Odenigbo suddenly slips when Odenigbo approaches his mother and Ugwu’s two worlds collide. Odenigbo doesn’t seem so all-knowing and brilliant in the world of Opi.*



*What was a life-threatening “fire in her chest” in Opi is just an infection in Nsukka. Ugwu’s mother doesn’t share Ugwu’s idolization of Odenigbo’s modernity – she is grateful for his help, but happy to return to her own sphere. Now that his two lives have brushed against each other, Ugwu sees how hard life is in Opi and he wishes he could share some of Odenigbo’s luxuries.*



On the day Odenigbo's mother will arrive Ugwu is cooking peppery rice. Jomo compliments the smell and then complains about Harrison. Ugwu always listens sympathetically to both Jomo and Harrison's rants about each other. Then Odenigbo's mother arrives, and Ugwu greets her. She has brought a young woman named Amala with her. Odenigbo's mother immediately marches into the kitchen and commandeers Ugwu's cooking, which starts to irritate Ugwu.

*Odenigbo's mother is also a "village woman" like Ugwu's mother. Odenigbo's past is never explained, but he clearly now lives in a whole different sphere from his mother and the setting of his childhood. Amala is a silent helper to Odenigbo's mother, someone poor and lower class even within Abba (where Odenigbo is from).*



Olanna comes home and greets Odenigbo's mother, who immediately says "I hear you did not suck your mother's breasts" and accuses Olanna of being a witch. She starts yelling to the neighbors that there is a witch in her son's house. Olanna stands there in shock and then leaves to go back to her apartment. When she is gone Odenigbo's mother acts satisfied, and she says Olanna is over-educated and comes from a bad family.

*Odenigbo's mother (whom the characters refer to as "Mama") shares Odenigbo's confident, domineering character, but she lacks his progressive ideas – condemning Olanna's "witchcraft" just like Odenigbo condemns colonial oppression.*



Ugwu is very irritated but he decides to just agree with Odenigbo's mother to make her stop talking. He is frightened when she says she is going to consult a *dibia* (a kind of medicine man) though, and he worries for Olanna's safety. Ugwu then leaves and goes to find Odenigbo. He tells Odenigbo what happened, and Odenigbo decides to go home first instead of finding Olanna.

*Ugwu is still very superstitious, and we see again how he doesn't think Odenigbo understands everything – especially within the world of magic and ritual, the world Odenigbo's mother belongs to. There is a significance to Odenigbo choosing his mother over Olanna, even in the order of his visits.*



## PART 1, CHAPTER 5

The narrative now follows Olanna. Odenigbo shows up at her house and tries to dismiss the incident, saying that his mother is "just a village woman" trying to deal with the modern world. Olanna is still very upset, though she isn't sure why. Odenigbo declares that he will stay at Olanna's tonight, but she decides to say no to this. He is shocked, but she feels suddenly like she wants to be free of him, and she tells Odenigbo to leave. He storms out.

*Another important arc to the novel is the less-confident characters (Olanna and Richard) finding their voices and becoming independent. Unfortunately this usually comes about through betrayal and conflict – just like the real "independence" of Nigeria will involve Civil War and horrible violence.*



Olanna realizes that they have never fought before, and she wonders if Odenigbo really values her opinions or has just been humoring her. She eats some rice and then calls Kainene. They chat and finally Olanna asks Kainene why they don't really talk anymore. Kainene is silent in response, and finally Olanna changes the subject and hangs up.

*Olanna is trying to assert her independence and right to be offended, but she still can't help leaning on others in her distress. The initial distance between the sisters seems to involve Kainene being both jealous of and disappointed in Olanna.*



Olanna wishes she was more confident and didn't need someone to lean on, but she tries to call Mohammed anyway even though she knows he isn't home. Olanna is suddenly struck with the realization that she wants to have Odenigbo's child. They had never discussed children before. Odenigbo then shows up and apologizes, and Olanna tells him to stay with her.

When Odenigbo's mother leaves, Olanna moves back into his house. Ugwu is concerned, as he saw a black cat near the house, and he warns Olanna and Odenigbo that "Mama" might have tried to curse Olanna. Olanna reassures him that "nothing can divide" her and Odenigbo, but she wonders to herself if this is true.

One day Richard knocks on the door when Odenigbo is out. Olanna answers and tries to engage him in conversation, but he is awkward and shy. The next morning Odenigbo tells Olanna that they should have a child together. Olanna feels that this is a kind of miraculous coincidence of love, as she hadn't told Odenigbo about her new desire for a child. She agrees, and they stay in that morning to have sex. Olanna starts to worry that something is wrong with her body though, and that she won't be able to conceive.

## PART 1, CHAPTER 6

The narrative now follows Richard, who is eating spicy pepper soup at Odenigbo's house. The other guests marvel at his ability to eat it, as most white people can't handle the spice. Richard has brought some English food that Harrison made. After dinner they move to the living room and discuss High Life music and Odenigbo's love of classical Western music. They talk about Balewa, the prime minister, and Odenigbo calls him a puppet of Britain.

While Odenigbo argues with Professor Ezeka, Okeoma asks Richard about his novel. Richard is embarrassed that he has hardly been writing, but he says he wants to put the **roped pots** and Igbo-Ukwu art in his book somehow. He describes how marvelous this ancient art was, and Okeoma says Richard sounds surprised that "these people" were "capable of such things." Richard suddenly feels ashamed and angry, and he leaves soon afterward.

*Adichie's characters are wonderfully complex in their inner contradictions and spontaneous, often unreasonable decisions that still always fit with their personalities. This is Olanna's first assertion of independence during her relationship with Odenigbo, but she remains loyal and faithful.*



*Ugwu is already becoming responsible and almost paternal in his protectiveness of Olanna and Odenigbo's relationship and happiness. They represent stability for Ugwu, but we get to see Olanna's point of view, where the relationship is still fragile.*



*We know from Richard's sections that he finds Olanna very attractive, and Olanna is used to this kind of attention from men but she finds the shy Richard sympathetic. After their first argument, this coincidence of Olanna's and Odenigbo's desires returns the hope and excitement to their relationship. There is deeper love here as well as sexual desire and intellectual admiration.*



*Richard's love of pepper soup is similar to his love of the roped pots, and becomes a small sign of his natural sympathy with Nigerian culture. High Life music is a distinct West African music, combining traditional African rhythms with Western instruments. Odenigbo's love of classical music is similar to his use of "my good man" – an inadvertent liking for something Western.*



*Richard has been assuming that he is unique and has escaped his heritage as a member of the colonial culture. But love for Nigerian art and a Nigerian woman is not enough to bridge the divide caused by years of oppression and exploitation. He cannot give up his privilege, even if he wanted to.*





Richard goes home feeling dispirited and irritable. He crumples up all the pages of his manuscript and throws them away. Richard sleeps poorly, and the next morning he thinks about his interaction with Okeoma and the distrust in Okeoma's eyes. Richard reassures himself that he is not "one of those Englishmen who did not give the African the benefit of an equal intelligence," but he worries that there will always be an irreconcilable distrust between Africans and Europeans.

Richard goes to Port Harcourt to see Kainene, and on his second day there she asks him what's bothering him. He tells her about Okeoma, and about his first love for the **roped pots** he saw in a magazine long ago. Kainene tells him that it is "possible to love something and still condescend to it." Richard responds that he doesn't know what he's doing with his life, and if he can even write.

Kainene cancels their dinner plans with Major Madu so they can stay in. She tells Richard about how once she spat in her father's water glass for no reason. Richard wants to reply with an equal confession, but he says he "didn't have the confidence to do horrible things." Instead he tells her about how his parents didn't seem to love him very much because they loved each other too much. He refrains from telling Kainene that he thinks he loves her too much.

There is another description of the book *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The author is still unnamed, but he writes about how the British created Nigeria and arranged it so that the Northern Hausa would have the most control of the government. The British preferred the Hausa, as they had a strict hierarchy and were easy to rule indirectly, while the Igbo in the Southeast had many republican communities. The British sent Christian missionaries to the South, but kept them out of the Muslim North. In 1914 North and South were united and Nigeria was created.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 7

The narrative follows Ugwu now, and a few years have passed. Ugwu is visiting his family at their village and talking to his sister Anulika. She is engaged to a man named Onyeka, and Ugwu is suddenly repulsed by the idea of his sister as sexually mature. Ugwu prepares to leave and says goodbye to his family. Anulika walks with him to the main road, and on the way they meet Nnesinachi.

*Part of Richard's story arc is his struggle to find meaning in life through writing, and his attempts to find an identity alongside a Nigerian woman when he is a member of the oppressive British culture. It's usually a bad sign when someone has to assure themselves that they aren't being racist.*



*Kainene's statement could also describe her relationship with Richard. The symbol of the roped pots now grows more complex – Richard genuinely loves them like he genuinely loves Kainene, but there is still an element of condescension to this love.*



*Richard was mostly raised without parents, but even before their deaths they were apparently too wrapped up in each other to properly care for him. Richard is starting to recognize that his love for Kainene is not just something romantic and sexual, but it also includes his sense of belonging and identity.*



*Part of the novel's political aspect involves tracing the roots of the Biafran War and the Igbo massacres back to colonialism. The British were trying to rule Nigeria from afar, so they purposefully caused conflicts between the ethnic groups there so that those groups would not unite against their oppressor. After Nigeria gained independence from Britain, though, only these tensions were left.*



*Part One showed the optimism but also the simmering tensions that filled Nigeria after it gained independence, and Part Two now shows the explosion of these tensions. Ugwu is still viewing women as objects, seeing his sister as he did Olanna, something to be kept under glass.*



Ugwu hasn't seen Nnesinachi in four years, but he recognizes her immediately. She hugs him and then flirts with him. After he leaves Anulika comments on her behavior, and Ugwu asks if Anulika has slept with Onyeka. Anulika confirms it. Recently Ugwu has been having an emotionless sexual relationship with Dr. Okeke's housegirl Chinyere. Ugwu bids Anulika farewell while complaining about the village food, and she says that he has forgotten where he came from and become a "Big Man."

Ugwu returns to Nsukka. Odenigbo and Olanna are there, and they have a baby they call Baby. Ugwu tells them that Anulika will be married soon, and he helps Olanna feed Baby. Olanna tells Ugwu that her cousin Arize, who is pregnant, will come to Nsukka to have her baby. Odenigbo is listening to the radio in the other room, and he suddenly hushes them.

A voice comes on the radio: it is Major Nzeogwu of the army, saying that there has been a coup and the government is overthrown. The Major promises to respect everyone's rights, rid the nation of corruption, and to make people proud to call themselves Nigerians. After the announcement Baby calls for "Mummy Ola" and Ugwu tickles her.

There is more talking on the radio, and the deputy president says "the government is handing over to the military." The prime minister and the premiers of the North and West are all missing. There are many guests in Odenigbo's house, and most of them are overjoyed at the coup. They make fun of the politicians who were killed, which included Chief Okonji the finance minister.

The BBC is calling it an "Igbo coup," as it is mostly Northerners who were killed, but Professor Ezeka says that it was mostly Northerners in government, which was the fault of the English. Odenigbo praises Major Nzeogwu for having a "vision," even though another (American) guest accuses the Major of being a communist. Meanwhile Ugwu remembers a quarrel from months before, some vague turmoil that resulted in Richard not coming around anymore.

Olanna is the only one not excited about the deaths of the politicians, and Ugwu thinks about how "politicians" are like a lower form of life. That night Chinyere knocks on his window and he lets her in. As they have sex he pretends she is Nnesinachi, and he wonders if she is imagining that he is someone else as well. When he sees her during the day, she doesn't even smile.

*Ugwu is now very close to achieving his "ideal" of Nnesinachi, but she will soon disappear again. His experience with romantic love solely revolves around sexual lust at this point. In the years between Part One and Part Two Ugwu has gone from marveling at meat in the refrigerator to having refined and picky tastes.*



*Adichie means us to assume that Baby is the child Olanna and Odenigbo were trying to conceive years earlier. Ugwu was already feeling protective and responsible for Olanna and Odenigbo, and now he takes care of Baby too.*



*In this scene Adichie juxtaposes the news of revolution and bloodshed (which will eventually lead to war) with Baby's innocent antics. The hope and optimism of the early sixties is about to be destroyed.*



*This is the novel's first political "betrayal" within the Nigerian government. As Britain had left mostly Northern politicians in charge, it was mostly Northerners killed in the coup. Chief Okonji was the man who tried to seduce Olanna at the dinner party, and an example of the many corrupt politicians being violently overthrown.*



*The coup actually involved mostly Northern soldiers, but it was immediately portrayed as an "Igbo coup" because many of its plotters were Igbo. This anti-Igbo sentiment was exacerbated by Britain (as in the BBC) who wanted to keep tensions high to maintain their influence in Nigeria.*



*Olanna is saddened by Okonji's death, even though she disliked him in person. One of the most chilling things about the novel is how quickly violence can become normalized – civilians and children cheer for bloodshed and find it easy to dehumanize the "other side."*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Olanna goes to Kano after the turmoil of the coup calms down, though everyone is still talking about it. Olanna joins the pregnant Arize at her house. Olanna worries about Baby playing with the dirty village children, but she is ashamed that she feels this way. Arize says she wants her baby to be smart and educated like Olanna. Arize brings up Kainene but Olanna changes the subject. It becomes clear that the twin sisters are not speaking to each other at all.

Outside some people are laughing at a song that has a part about a bleating goat. They are saying that the Sardauna (the spiritual leader of the Hausa and the premier of the North) bleated like that before he was killed. All the women and children laugh too, except for Olanna. Auntie Ifeka assures her that the Sardauna was an evil man who deserved to die, but Olanna is still disturbed.

Olanna goes to her parents' house in Lagos, which is empty. Her parents left the country to avoid any political turmoil, though they called it a "holiday." She goes into town with Arize and they shop for baby clothes. Olanna sees that people are reading Odenigbo's article in the newspaper, which discusses the need for a unitary government.

A crowd of people are gathered around a man, slapping him and asking if he is Igbo, and Arize and Olanna hurry past, speaking Yoruba loudly. Baby starts to cry. Arize says that she has heard of this happening elsewhere, people harassing Igbo people and calling the coup an Igbo coup. Olanna is distressed, but Arize assures her that things will calm down soon.

*Olanna's snobbishness and protectiveness regarding Baby will grow more lax as living conditions decline. This past quarrel is often mentioned but never explained in Part Two, though we now know that it involves Olanna, Richard, and Kainene. The split between the twin sisters prefigures Nigeria's split.*



*Just as it was easy for the British to dehumanize the Nigerians and exploit them, so do the Nigerians dehumanize their political and ethnic rivals and allow themselves to condone murder. Olanna has stepped outside of the sphere of local politics and so she can see that things aren't always in black and white.*



*Olanna's parents avoid all the violence through the privilege of their money, and the fact that they have no loyalty to their compatriots. Adichie contrasts the optimism of shopping for baby clothes with the looming danger of political turmoil and violence.*



*The first coup failed, but the leader who took control immediately afterward (Ironsi) was Igbo, so Northerners felt that this was all part of the Igbo plot. Ironsi did indeed decree a unitary government rather than a federal one, basically giving all power to one central government instead of dividing it up by region as Nigeria had before.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Richard and Kainene go to a lavish party with many "Big Men of the new regime" and Kainene's parents. Kainene's mother comes up to Richard and drunkenly tells him that she and her husband might leave for London for a while until the political state calms down. Richard is also going to London soon to attend his cousin's wedding. Kainene's mother leaves and then Richard goes to find Kainene, who is on a balcony with Madu.

Richard speaks to Madu in Igbo (which he now speaks well), but Madu always answers in English. Madu has been promoted to Colonel. He and Kainene discuss business and Richard says he thinks there will be another government coup. Madu says this is inconceivable, and he changes the subject.

*Chief Ozobia and his wife seem to have a loyalty only to wealth, so they immediately try to ingratiate themselves with Ironsi's crowd – ignoring the fact that their friend Chief Okonji was just murdered. Richard's visit to London will mean that he is away when the violence first begins.*



*Richard tries to immerse himself ever deeper in Nigerian culture, but Madu reminds him that he will always be an outsider. The characters often display the human ability to deny reality when reality means bad news.*



Two weeks later Richard and Kainene are in Nsukka, and Richard is reading a letter from his cousin, who discusses Richard “going native” and the old title for his book, “The Basket of Hands.” Ijekide, one of Kainene’s servants, interrupts Richard to say that there has been another coup. Richard’s first thought is that he was right and Madu was wrong.

Richard turns on the BBC, and the radio says that Northern officers have taken over and Igbo officers are being killed in Kaduna. Kainene is distraught, as Madu is in Kaduna. Days pass and Kainene continues to worry about Madu, while Richard feels conflicted. One day Kainene hears that Udodi Ekechi (Madu’s drunk friend who criticized Kainene) was tortured and crucified. She has heard that no Igbo officers escaped, but she has also heard a rumor that Madu escaped.

Two weeks later Madu shows up at Kainene’s house, looking starved. Kainene is overcome with joy. Madu says he was saved by his friend Ibrahim, who warned him that the coup was coming and hid him in his cousin’s chicken coop for two days. Madu then found his way South. He describes the many dead Igbo soldiers. Even among civilians, anyone whose feet looked clean (from wearing army boots) was shot.

Madu looks feverish, and he says Northern and Igbo soldiers can never be at peace after this. He cannot believe that General Gowon has been installed as head of state, as he is young and has little experience. Madu says the problem was the “ethnic balance policy” of the army, which promoted unqualified Northerners. Madu had protested this policy, but his British commander had ignored him. Madu looks accusingly at Richard as he speaks.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 10

The narrative now follows Ugwu, and a few weeks have passed since the second coup. Odenigbo and his guests no longer laugh and argue, but instead they discuss troubled reports from the North. Ugwu is worried because Olanna is still in Kano. Odenigbo listens to the radio say that five hundred Igbo civilians have been killed in a town, and he says it is “rubbish.”

Meanwhile Baby laughs and tells Ugwu that she saw baby chickens in her dreams, and she asks about “Mummy Ola.” Then there is a knock on the door, and Ugwu hides Baby away. Some men enter, looking shocked, and they say that Igbo people are being massacred everywhere in the North. They say that the slaughter began in Kano, and Ugwu panics.

*A famous example of European exploitation of Africa was in the Congo, where the Belgian colonialists cut off disobedient workers’ hands and caused the deaths of millions of Africans. To most British people Richard’s relationship with Kainene is seen as a kind of distraction or experiment.*



*This second coup was directed against Ironsi and the perceived anti-Northern racism of his government. This coup, combined with the growing anti-Igbo sentiments, then spiraled out of control and led to the massacres. The horrible deaths of casually dislikable characters like Ekechi and Okonji comes as a sudden shock.*



*As in most wars, many civilians don’t believe the other side is evil, and Madu’s Muslim Hausa friend clearly helped him survive at the risk of his own safety. This second coup is another “betrayal” and split within Nigeria itself, and the beginning of a time of “casual cruelty.”*



*Gowon was seen as a compromise for the new regime (an attempt to pacify both Igbo and Hausa), as he was a Northerner but a Christian. It is the British colonial system that stirred up all this ethnic hatred, and Britain and America continue to try to hold Nigeria together in order to keep their oil interests safe.*



*Just like Madu, even the educated and worldly Odenigbo is willing to deny reality when it is too horrible. Kano was the center of Hausa culture and also where the civilian massacres began. The Igbo (like Olanna’s family) were the minority there.*



*Again Baby’s innocence is contrasted with the horrors of reality. This is the beginning of what would be known as the Anti-Igbo Pogrom of 1966. The massacres of civilians by civilians is the worst kind of “betrayal,” as previously-peaceful neighbors turn on each other.*



The radio keeps talking, telling horrifying stories of a full church being set on fire and a pregnant woman being cut open. The radio says that “the lucky ones” are returning to the Southeast by train, so people should bring whatever food they have to spare to the railway stations. Odenigbo sends Ugwu to the station with some tea and bread.

Ugwu arrives at the railway station and sees people covered in dirt and blood. He hands out the bread and tea to wounded people, including a man missing his right eye. One man says that it was soldiers who saved him from the angry mob. Ugwu does not see Olanna among the crowds, and finally he runs away from the horrifying place.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 11

The narrative switches to Olanna days before. She is relaxing at Mohammed’s estate when he enters and says she must leave immediately. Olanna has heard about rioting but she thinks it is nothing dangerous, and she wants to go back her aunt and uncle’s house. Mohammed says that their village is no longer safe, and he has heard there are Igbo bodies lying out in the road. Olanna sees the gravity of the situation and she begs Mohammed to take her to her aunt’s house.

Mohammed dresses Olanna up like a Muslim woman and drives her to Sabon Gari. They reach the village but everything is burned and destroyed. Olanna gets out of the car and sees the cut-up bodies of her Uncle Mbaezi and Auntie Ifeka. She doesn’t see Arize but knows she must be dead too. Abdulmalik, Mbaezi’s old friend, approaches with a machete and says that he and his companions finished the whole family, as per “Allah’s will.” Mohammed hurries Olanna away, saying that “Allah will never forgive this.”

Later Olanna sits on the floor of a train, surrounded by people. Something gets in her eye and burns, and she feels urine spreading across the floor. A woman near her is holding a calabash, and inside is the head of the her little daughter. The woman says that it took a long time to braid the girl’s thick hair.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 12

The story now follows Richard, who is just touching down in Kano after his visit to London. He is reading a note he found from Kainene, which seems to profess her love for him. Richard smiles and cherishes this rare outburst of emotion from her. Richard walks out of the plane and decides he will propose to Kainene when he reaches Port Harcourt.

*Thousands of people were killed in these massacres, and Adichie draws out the individual tragedies that can be lost in the mind-numbing casualty counts. Such acts are the start of genocide, the systematic destruction of a particular ethnic group.*



*The Northern soldiers were probably Hausa, but they were the ones protecting civilians from other civilians. The massacres fed on a mob mentality and ethnic hatred stirred up by the government coups and British colonial policy.*



*Mohammed is an upper-class Hausa man, but he never even considers joining in the massacres of the Igbo. Olanna has been relatively well-protected from ethnic tension in the bubble of Nsukka and her own wealth, but now she suddenly sees the reality of the situation.*



*Adichie shows the horror of the personal betrayals that took place in these massacres with Abdulmalik, who had been friends with Mbaezi and Ifeka. The last time Olanna saw Abdulmalik he had invited her to his house for dinner, but now he would probably kill her on sight. The conflict between Igbo and Hausa is partly a religious one, but Adichie also shows the Muslim Mohammed condemning the massacres.*



*This is one of the most poignant and searing images of the book, and we now see the source of the prologue for The World Was Silent When We Died. Adichie uses small personal tragedies like this to bring home the horrors of violence and war.*



*Adichie again juxtaposes scenes of horror with scenes of love and optimism. Kainene has another rare outburst like the hug she gave Richard when he left Susan. By setting such scenes next to each other, Adichie shows that love is just as important as war.*





Richard talks to the customs officer, who is from the Southeast. Richard talks about his work in Nigeria and describes Kainene as his fiancée. He talks to the man in Igbo, and the man introduces himself as Nnaemeka. Nnaemeka starts to ramble about his family until a voice calls the passengers to their next flight. Richard bids him farewell.

Suddenly soldiers burst into the airport and start yelling for the Igbo “infidels” to identify themselves. One tells Nnaemeka to say “Allahu Akbar,” but Nnaemeka won’t, as he knows his Igbo accent will give him away. Richard sees the terror in his eyes, and then the soldier shoots Nnaemeka. The soldiers go on to shoot everyone speaking Igbo, and then to shoot all the bottles of liquor in the bar. They pull people out of the plane about to leave and shoot them too. Richard vomits and then gets on his next flight.

Richard comes to his old girlfriend Susan’s house in Lagos. She is totally calm and makes small talk with Richard, who is traumatized. Susan knows about the massacres going on, but she isn’t concerned about them. She says the Igbo had it coming to them, as they were acting “very Jewish” and controlling all the markets. She comments on how the Nigerians can’t control their hatred of each other, as they are uncivilized.

Richard goes into the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror, feeling ashamed. He feels that he should be transfigured by seeing such horrors, and he feels guilty about worrying only about Kainene while Nnaemeka was being killed. Richard washes his face and starts to cry.

There is another section about *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The author of the book writes about the political forces that led to this Igbo massacre. When Nigeria was gaining independence, the North wanted to secede from the South, but Britain wanted to preserve the country as a whole because of its oil reserves in the Southeast. It rigged the government so the North would rule, and the South was so eager for independence that they agreed. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, and the author describes it as “a collection of fragments in a fragile clasp.”

*Richard is feeling especially buoyant after reading Kainene’s note, and he is already imagining their peaceful, happy life together. Nnaemeka then serves to solidify Richard’s feeling of “belonging” in Nigeria.*



*After the last scene, this is almost surreal in its horror. Nnaemeka had been a pleasant distraction for Richard’s lovestruck optimism, but now he is suddenly watching the man die. Richard has learned Igbo and loves an Igbo woman, but he still has both the privilege and outsider-status of being a white Englishman. He is allowed to get on his flight without being hassled.*



*Susan has dehumanized all Africans just like many Igbo and Hausa have dehumanized each other, and so she can view the massacre from a detached, unsympathetic point of view. Susan is horribly hypocritical in calling the Hausa uncivilized for their hatred while in the same breath criticizing the Igbo as “Jewish” – the Holocaust was only two decades old.*



*Now that he has been struck by horrible reality, Richard starts to see how he hasn’t really escaped his English worldview – Kainene has become a real person to him, but the suffering of other Nigerians still seems unreal.*



*The immediate facts of the massacres make them seem like the product of natural religious and ethnic tensions, but the reality is that these tensions were almost non-existent before England mashed together the disparate societies that became “Nigeria.” Nigeria gained its independence years before, but at its very foundations it was always destined for inner strife.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 13

Olanna survives the long ordeal of traveling and she collapses outside Odenigbo's door, both her legs and her bladder giving out. Baby finds her and then Odenigbo carries her inside and bathes her. Olanna tells him about what she saw, and that night she has her first "Dark Swoop," a feeling like a blanket smothering her. The next day she finds that she cannot get out of bed. Dr. Patel says her ailment is psychological, and he starts giving her pills.

Olanna's parents and Kainene come to visit her, and Kainene cries for the first time since they were children. Olanna is moved that Kainene came, though she knows it doesn't mean Kainene has forgiven her for their unnamed past quarrel. Weeks pass, and visitors come to talk to Olanna about the "evils of those Muslim Hausa" and the British academics who encouraged the massacres in Zaria.

One day Odenigbo is in the living room with some guests, and Olanna has to use the bathroom. Odenigbo and his companions are talking about the rumors that the Southeast will secede and become a new country. The Nigerian government still hasn't addressed the massacres of the Igbo, so the country is sharply divided. Olanna decides not to interrupt the conversation and she suddenly finds she can walk. She goes to the bathroom and then gets back in bed.

Olanna listens to Odenigbo talk about Aburi, the Ghanaian town where Gowon and Colonel Ojukwu (now seen as the leader of the Igbo) had made a peace agreement. After the guests leave, Olanna tells Odenigbo that she walked, and he is deeply moved. He wants to go tell Dr. Patel, but she pulls him to her. They start to have sex, but then Olanna thinks about her dead, pregnant cousin Arize and she starts to cry.

Later Ugwu brings Olanna some food, and Odenigbo brings her a petition to sign – the university staff at Nsukka are demanding "secession as a means of security." That same evening the secession is announced on the radio. Ojukwu speaks in his comforting voice and says that Eastern Nigeria is now its own nation, which will be called the Republic of Biafra.

*Olanna is traumatized, and her psychological reaction shows itself in physical ways. She still has the luxury of a safe place to go and access to a doctor, which many of the massacres' victims don't have.*



*We know that the sisters weren't speaking to each other, but the enormity of the events now taking place in Nigeria seems to have made their quarrel seem less important. The massacres only sharpen the divide between Igbo and Hausa, with both sides demonizing the other – all encouraged by England.*



*It is something as mundane as having to use the bathroom that breaks the spell Olanna's trauma held over her legs—even as the world spirals into chaos and death, mundane life itself goes on. The Nigerian government hasn't condemned the massacres of the Igbo, so the Igbo can't even feel safe within the laws of their own country.*



*The Aburi Accord was seen as the last chance to prevent secession. Gowon couldn't guarantee Ojukwu's safety anywhere in Nigeria, so they had to have their negotiation in Ghana. Olanna and Odenigbo's happy romance has now been corrupted by the violent political situation.*



*The creation of Biafra is seen as a sign of new hope and optimism for the Igbo after their recent suffering. Their hope is that Biafra will become a place where they can feel secure and have a fresh start. But at the same time this hope is unrealistic, as Nigeria (and Britain) could never let all the oil in the Southeast slip out of their control.*



Odenigbo says “this is our beginning,” and he starts to dance around the room with Baby. Olanna is shocked but happy. Soon afterward there is a rally in Freedom Square, and students and teachers sing and laugh together. Olanna feels suddenly overjoyed, like she has a real identity as a Biafran. People are giving away food for free, and some students bury a coffin with “Nigeria” written on it.

Odenigbo gives a speech and waves the **Biafran flag**, which is red, black, and green, with half of a yellow sun in the center. Odenigbo declares that Biafra will “lead Black Africa,” and everyone cheers. Olanna is happy that the same joy is running through everyone’s veins, making them all feel invincible.

*The mob mentality led to horrors like the massacres, but it is a similar mass hysteria that feeds the joy and patriotism in Biafra. The split between Biafra and Nigeria echoes the split between the two sisters, and fits with the theme of “betrayal,” though it is totally justified.*



*Biafra seems like the summation of Odenigbo’s revolutionary dreams, something he can help influence to become an African country free from colonial oppression. The Biafran flag with its rising sun is here a symbol of great hope.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 14

Richard goes to Obosi and finds Nnaemeka’s family. He tells them what happened at the airport, and they say they have already had a funeral for Nnaemeka. They expect Richard to have brought gifts, as would have been traditional, but he hasn’t. He realizes he has been “caught up in himself,” thinking that his mere appearance would make a difference to the grieving family.

Richard still feels ashamed that he has remained sane and normal after what he saw at the airport. His Aunt Elizabeth sends him English articles about the Nigerian massacres, with phrases like “ancient tribal hatreds” in them. In response Richard starts writing an article, and he explains that there was no “age-old hatred” between the Igbo and Hausa people, but rather that Hausa’s distrust of the Igbo was stirred up by Britain decades before as part of its “divide-and-rule” policy.

Richard is nervous about what Kainene thinks of his article, as she has been acting distant again, but she says it makes her feel proud. He sends his article to the *Herald*, but they reject it and want more gory details about the massacres. Richard is frightened that he might just be a “voyeur” to Nigeria’s trouble, as the massacres are still external to him. He finds himself unable to write about the airport scene.

When the secession is announced Richard realizes he is trembling. He feels that he has an identity as a Biafran in a way that he could never as a Nigerian, because he was here for the birth of Biafra. He intends to ask Kainene to marry him, but he cannot say it aloud.

*Richard is unique among his English compatriots, but he often gets caught up in his own uniqueness and expects any amount of sympathy he shows towards Africans to be automatically praiseworthy.*



*This condenses much of the political argument of this part of the novel. It is easy for the British media to continue to dehumanize Africans and point to this violence as a sign of their “savagery,” when in reality Britain is the root cause of the violence. The tribes had lived alongside each other for centuries without ever having a massacre like this.*



*Richard is correct that he is still an outsider and has the privilege of escaping Nigeria’s problems if he wants, but he shows his humanity and goodness in genuinely trying to empathize with Kainene and the other Igbo. The British media is only interested in selling stories, not disrupting the status quo.*



*Richard shares in the naïve optimism of the secession, believing that he is a “true Biafran” because he was there at the beginning – even though he is totally safe from the dangers to the Igbo.*



People start preparing for the possibility of war – Nigeria fighting to take back Biafra – but no one really believes it will happen. Richard is sure that Nigeria will leave the Igbo alone after the massacres, and even be glad to be rid of them. There is a meeting at the university about “In Case of War” and Richard sees Olanna there. They talk awkwardly, and Richard says he has changed his book title to “In the Time of **Roped Pots**.”

Suddenly everyone starts excitedly saying that Colonel Ojukwu is coming. Ojukwu eventually appears on the university lawn and gives an inspirational speech, while the crowd chants “Power! Power!” Ojukwu warns of the possibility of war, and says that such a war may be long and drawn out. The crowd affirms that they are ready to fight. Ojukwu lights a cigarette and throws it onto the lawn, saying “Even the grass will fight for Biafra.”

Back at home, Richard describes Ojukwu to Kainene, and he tells her that he saw Olanna at the conference. Kainene responds by saying “war is coming.” Port Harcourt seems thrown into a frenzy, as people indulge in last-minute pleasures before the hardships of war begin.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 15

The story returns to Ugwu, who is with Odenigbo delivering food for refugees. The man at the office says that people have stopped giving food, and that “it will be a disaster if war comes.” Odenigbo snaps at him that there will be no war. Ugwu is saddened that Odenigbo is always short-tempered lately. Later that day he hears Odenigbo arguing loudly with Miss Adebayo, accusing her of having no sympathy for the Igbo plight because she is Yoruba. Miss Adebayo storms out.

Ugwu then hears Okeoma reciting one of his poems, “If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise.” Olanna angrily tells Odenigbo that he must apologize to Miss Adebayo, and he finally relents. Olanna and Odenigbo leave, and then Chinyere stops by to say goodbye to Ugwu, as her master is evacuating. They have hardly ever spoken before, but they tell each other to “go well.” Ugwu is distraught by all the changes happening so quickly.

*At the original creation of Nigeria the Muslim North had wanted to secede from the Christian South, but Britain held the country together because of the oil in the South and the autocracy in the North. Nigeria might have indeed approved of the secession were it not for oil and foreign interests.*



*The naïve optimism of most of the Biafrans focuses on the figure of Ojukwu, as the country becomes fanatically loyal to him. His boastful claim that “even the grass will fight for Biafra” (which is taken from an actual historical quote of his) is tragically prophetic, since famine and starvation will play such a large role in the war.*



*Kainene is as usual the most clear-headed character, and the only one who doesn't seem immediately infatuated with Biafra and Ojukwu. People had recently been denying the possibility of war, but now they are counting on it.*



*The peaceful scenes at Odenigbo's have now come to an end. Odenigbo is still filled with blinding loyalty to Biafra, so he continues to deny the reality that Biafra is unprepared for war. Even friends like Odenigbo and Miss Adebayo are driven apart by the ethnic tension caused by the massacres, secession, and looming war.*



*Okeoma's poem is an eloquent comment on the desperate hope the Igbo have in Biafra. The half of a yellow sun is not actually predicting a glorious future for Biafra, but in the hearts of its fervently optimistic people it seems to be. Ugwu's relationship with Chinyere has never moved beyond the sexual.*



Many people have been leaving the university, hoping to avoid war, but the men are not allowed to leave so as not to start a panic. Ugwu's Auntie arrives and says that Anulika will be married soon. She wants to do it before the war starts. Ugwu looks forward to going home for this, as he plans to finally sleep with Nnesinachi. That night the radio says that Nigeria will begin a "police action to bring back the rebels of Biafra."

One day Olanna and Ugwu are cooking, and Olanna talks about how there have been "reprisal killings" of Northern soldiers in Biafra. Ugwu says that the Biafrans are still better than the Hausa, but Olanna says everyone is capable of the same things. Suddenly they hear distant booms, and realize that the Nigerians are advancing. A car pulls up and a man shouts that everyone in Nsukka should evacuate immediately.

Olanna, Odenigbo, and Ugwu hurriedly gather up their precious possessions and leave with Baby. Biafran soldiers at the town gates wave them through, and Ugwu wishes he was one of the soldiers. They look proud and brave in their uniforms, with **half a yellow sun** on their sleeves. The road is crowded, and Ugwu laments that he has again failed to have sex with Nnesinachi. The family finally arrives in Abba.

## PART 2, CHAPTER 16

Richard is surprised at the announcement of "police action," but Kainene says that Nigeria wants all the oil in the Southeast. She is confident that the war will be quick, though, and that Biafra will be victorious. Richard tries to go to Nsukka to get his things, but he isn't allowed past the blocked road. He argues with the soldier there, and Richard declares that he is a Biafran, and he calls Kainene his wife, without success. Richard finally relents and turns around.

Susan calls Richard to make sure he is safe. He is touched by her concern, but then she starts to insult Africans and Richard hangs up on her. Richard worries about Harrison, who is still in Nsukka, and about his manuscript *In the Time of Roped Pots*. Richard is struck by a memory of his first manuscript, *The Basket of Hands*, which Kainene burned under a tree.

Kainene criticizes Ojukwu and the handling of the army – soldiers have been getting free food and taxi rides while other people starve – but Richard defends Ojukwu and "the cause." Kainene says that Madu told her that the army has no real weapons, that Ojukwu has been boasting and exaggerating about the power of Biafra with little to back it up.

*This "police action" is the first real step towards civil war. Part of the forced optimism and denial of reality that plagues Biafra is this reinforcement that "there is no cause for alarm." Even when a town is about to fall, people are prevented from escaping in time because it might cause a panic and loss of hope.*



*This is the same cycle of dehumanization that led to the Igbo massacres in the first place, and which only serves to further the hatred between groups that had previously lived together peacefully. After denying the possibility of defeat for so long, suddenly Nsukka crumbles.*



*The Biafran flag and the half of a yellow sun is still a symbol of great hope for the Igbo, even as Olanna's family evacuates their home. Ugwu now idealizes the soldiers, but their images will become tarnished as the war progresses.*



*Kainene seems to have the clearest vision of any character, but she too is filled with confidence in Biafra's victory. Richard is again projecting his hopes for the future, imagining his ideal life as a true Biafran with Kainene as his wife.*



*We get more details about the past quarrel and its nature starts to take shape. The roped pots reoccur as a symbol for Richard's relationship with Nigeria and Kainene. This is another manuscript that will be lost forever – another incarnation of Richard's feelings that he must discard.*



*Kainene is confident in Biafran victory, but she is also willing to see the truth about Ojukwu. He is an inspirational speaker, but also boastful and growing more corrupt. Richard feels a close personal connection with Biafra's success, as it has become key to his identity and happiness.*





## PART 2, CHAPTER 17

Olanna is at Odenigbo's house in Abba. Odenigbo's mother now acts civilly toward Olanna and has started showing affection for Baby, which Olanna can't help resenting. At first Olanna had been bitter about the things she had to leave behind, but then she joined the other refugees in focusing totally on the "win-the-war effort." She tries to imagine the Biafrans driving back the "vandals" in Nsukka.

The family will move again the next week, to Umuahia where Odenigbo will work for the "Manpower Directorate." Olanna wonders how Baby will handle the move, and hopes that she will have "the right kind of children to play with" in Umuahia. Odenigbo comes home and says Abba may be evacuated soon, but he laughs off these rumors. He asks Olanna to marry him again, as the stakes of their relationship are now higher, and Olanna agrees.

The next morning Olanna's mother drives up. She says that the war is not going well, and that she and her husband are planning to go to London. She says they have made passports for Olanna and Kainene, and she hopes they will come. Olanna respectfully declines the offer, saying that the war will be over soon and she will return to Nsukka.

Olanna's mother gives Olanna a letter from Mohammed, which she already checked to see if it had anything "dangerous" in it, as Mohammed is now the enemy. She thanks God that Olanna didn't marry him. Olanna reads the sparse letter and says nothing. Her mother repeats her offer and then drives off.

Later that morning all of Abba gathers for a mandatory meeting, where the *dibia* (medicine man) gives an inspirational speech. He says that Abba has never been defeated, and never will be. Olanna is inspired, and she realizes she likes these "mass movements" of hope and defiance.

After the meeting Olanna tries to sympathize with Odenigbo about Mohammed, but Odenigbo gets angry and says Mohammed is complicit in all of the Hausa's crimes. Olanna is shocked, and to prove his point Odenigbo describes the horror of the rape and massacre of Olanna's family in Kano. Olanna leaves without a word, and she doesn't speak to Odenigbo for days after that. She gets angry at the entitlement she hears in his apologies. Olanna is summoned by a family member and she goes off to her grandfather's compound without Odenigbo.

*From now on the Biafran characters will generally refer to the Nigerians as "the vandals," an example of how strong the divide of hatred has grown between these groups that once lived peacefully together. Olanna slowly loses all her privilege and wealth as the war brings everyone in besieged Biafra down to the same level.*



*The intellectual, high-minded Odenigbo is given a war job compiling lists of names and addresses. Olanna still has her snobbish protectiveness about Baby's upbringing. What is supposed to be the pinnacle of Odenigbo and Olanna's love – their marriage – now comes as a necessity because of the war.*



*Olanna's parents are escaping for good now, having fully renounced all loyalty to Biafra and choosing to live safely among the colonizers. Olanna (and Kainene, though this isn't shown) shows again that her character and loyalty to her fellow Igbo is stronger than her parents'.*



*A tragic thing about civil war and manufactured ethnic hatred is that Mohammed has become an "enemy" to Olanna's parents without actually doing anything. Earlier Olanna's mother had regretted Olanna choosing Odenigbo over Mohammed.*



*This is a smaller scale of Colonel Ojukwu's many inspirational speeches, but it has the same effect – to unite its listeners in hope and courage, and to deny worrisome reality.*



*Olanna and Kainene are the characters best able to distance themselves from the propaganda and dogma of the conflict. Even Odenigbo succumbs to strict ethnic divides, and disrespectfully uses Arize's death to prove a point. There are more repercussions here from the unnamed past quarrel, like Odenigbo feeling that he is entitled to Olanna's forgiveness.*



Olanna is called before a gathering of her family to describe what she saw in Kano. Most of them are expecting the bad news, but Auntie Ifeka's sister angrily accuses Olanna of lying. Afterward Olanna walks back to her car in the rain, thinking about how she has just made four deaths into a reality for a whole village.

*Olanna is summoned to confirm the deaths of Auntie Ifeka, Uncle Mbaezi, and Arize. We see more of the human tendency to deny bad news when characters confront the horrible tragedies that occur during the war.*



## PART 2, CHAPTER 18

Soon afterward refugees start arriving in Abba, and Odenigbo decides to move the family to Umuahia ahead of schedule. Ugwu wonders why Odenigbo and Olanna are being so distant with each other. As they are about to leave, Odenigbo's cousin arrives with Odenigbo's mother. "Mama" has refused to leave Abba with the others. She calls everyone a coward for running away, and will not budge. Odenigbo begs her, but finally he gets in the car and drives away.

*Mama has already showed her stubbornness and resistance to reality when she tried to accuse Olanna of being a witch. Now she is still clinging to her limited view of the world even as the brutal larger world comes to threaten her life. She is giving up on Biafra in the opposite way of Olanna's parents, but still giving up.*



Odenigbo promises that the house in Umuahia will be "perfectly normal," but it seems like a dirty shack to Ugwu. Olanna says they should be grateful, as most refugees have far less. She tells Ugwu that she and Odenigbo are going to get married with a quiet ceremony and have the reception at the house, and Ugwu is horrified, as he had imagined their wedding to be a lavish, beautiful occasion.

*Ugwu, who once marveled at houses not made of mud, has now become the pickiest member of the household. He wants only the best for Olanna and Odenigbo, and feels even more responsible for their happiness now that their living situation is so fragile.*



Life does return to a semblance of normality, and Odenigbo starts having guests over to laugh and argue. Among these guests are Special Julius, an army contractor, and Professor Ekwenugo, who talks about the *ogbunigwe*, the special land mines he is developing with the army. Everyone claps and sings when he announces the launch of the first Biafran rocket.

*The "Ogbunigwe" or "bucket bombs" were Biafra's most famous war innovation, handmade mines that they used to kill many Nigerians. The tragedy is that the optimistic, inventive young nations (of both Nigeria and Biafra) were using all their ingenuity building weapons.*



Ugwu hears reports of the glorious Biafran army defeating the enemy, and he longs to be a soldier. The Biafrans soon capture the midwest and march toward Lagos, and it seems that they are victorious. Odenigbo and his guests sing, drink, and curse Britain and Russia for supplying arms to Nigeria.

*Britain and Russia (then the Soviet Union) were enemies at the time, but they both supported Nigeria against Biafra. Britain wanted to preserve its oil interests in the country (through Shell-BP) and the USSR wanted to extend its political influence in Africa.*



Ugwu goes outside and sees some little boys in the Biafran Boys Brigade pretending to be army officers. Ugwu then sees a young woman named Eberechi, and he admires her "perfectly rounded buttocks." He has heard that Eberechi's parents offered her to a visiting army officer.

*Ugwu immediately sexualizes Eberechi as usual, but she will eventually become the first girl to cause him to experience deeper feelings of love. The Biafran patriotism is so extensive that it shows itself even in the children playing.*



Olanna and Odenigbo get married with a small ceremony, with only a few friends attending. At the reception afterward the poet Okeoma is there, but now he is dressed as a Biafran soldier. Ugwu watches Odenigbo and Olanna dancing, and he feels responsible for their happiness, as if they belong to him. Ugwu feels that their marriage is a symbol of the stability of his life with them.

Just before they are about to cut the wedding cake, Nigerian war planes fly overhead. Everyone screams and hides, and the planes fly by, spraying bullets and dropping bombs. Someone tells Olanna to remove her white dress, as it makes her a target, and Okeoma throws his army uniform over her. After a seemingly endless amount of time the planes finally move on.

Everyone emerges from their hiding place and Dr. Nwala, Okeoma's friend, helps Olanna up. People pick through the rubble, some of them searching for lost loved ones. Later Odenigbo says that the Biafrans have lost all their captured territory, and that Nigeria has now openly declared war. Odenigbo decides to build a bunker. Olanna eats wedding cake and panics at the sound of distant thunder.

There is another section from *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The author describes the Nigerian economy after it gained independence. It had many resources and lots of optimism, but the Nigerian leaders were too ambitious and made extravagant promises, and took out foreign loans. The economic reasons for the massacres of 1966 were complex, but the result of those massacres was that the Nigerian Igbo united as fervent, patriotic Biafrans.

## PART 3, CHAPTER 19

The narrative returns to where it left off in Part One. Ugwu is talking with Harrison and trying to butter him up to ask about getting tear gas. Ugwu heard about tear gas as something police use to make people pass out. He wants some to use on Nnesinachi when he goes home to take Richard to the *ori-okpa* festival. Ugwu soon realizes that Harrison doesn't know what tear gas is, so he goes to ask Jomo.

Jomo laughs at Ugwu when he hears what the tear gas is for. Jomo says to just wait until the time is right and the girl likes him. Ugwu keeps this in mind, and the next day he returns to Opi with Richard. He is heartbroken to hear that Nnesinachi left for the North the week before. Ugwu is irritable and depressed for the rest of the visit, while Richard happily takes notes and photographs the *ori-okpa* festival.

*A different kind of tragedy of war is that poets like Okeoma must give up their talents to become soldiers. The casualties are then not only lost lives, but lost art. Ugwu confronts his feelings of responsibility and is comforted by the order of his life with Odenigbo and Olanna.*



*Ugwu's sense of order is then horribly disrupted by the first air raid. This is one of Adichie's most surprising and poignant scenes, as she transforms a time of peace and happiness into total chaos and violence, in which the wedding white of purity of joy is transformed into a target for bombs and bullets.*



*This is the official beginning of the Nigerian Civil War, which is also called the Biafran War. The scene of Olanna nervously eating wedding cake in the midst of the air raid's wreckage is a poignant condensation of the novel's themes – love as affected by war.*



*This section jumps back in time to again examine the causes of the war and the massacres. The final conclusion – that the Biafrans were desperately patriotic because of their past sufferings – will carry over into the future, as the Biafrans will do anything but surrender or disparage Biafra in any way.*



*It's a relief to leave the escalating violence of the late sixties and return to the relative peace of a few years before. There is a sinister foreshadowing about the fact that Ugwu is childishly planning a rape, though.*



*This is a masquerade festival that involves eating "okpa," a soy cake. Adichie frames the novel so that we see Nigeria split apart and then jump back in time to see the twin sisters split apart. Ugwu is again frustrated in his desire for Nnesinachi.*



Ugwu and Richard drive back to Nsukka, and Ugwu is surprised to find Odenigbo's mother and Amala at Odenigbo's house. Even Odenigbo didn't know they were coming. "Mama" sends Ugwu away, saying she will cook for her son, and she disparages Olanna, who is in London. Ugwu listens to Odenigbo arguing in the other room, criticizing Britain. Ugwu doesn't understand why white people are always taking things from black people for no reason at all.

Ugwu watches Mama (Odenigbo's mother) put a packet of spices into Odenigbo's soup, and he grows suspicious, worrying that she is trying a curse again. That night Ugwu sneaks some of the palm wine that Mama brought, and he gets very drunk and passes out. The next morning he sees Mama rubbing something on Amala's back, and again he worries about magic. He is apprehensive because Mama seems so cheerful.

The next evening Ugwu finds a mass of flies in the sink, which he knows is the sign of something bad. He tries to tell Odenigbo, who seems unperturbed. That night Ugwu keeps waking up, and he starts to clean to keep himself from nightmares. In the early morning he sees Amala leaving Odenigbo's bedroom. Ugwu is sure that this was the result of Mama's "medicine," and he worries what will happen if Olanna finds out.

## PART 3, CHAPTER 20

Meanwhile Olanna's mother complains to Olanna that her father is cheating on her, and he has bought his mistress a house in Lagos where her friends live. Olanna promises to talk to her father about this. She goes into his room and realizes what a stranger he is to her now. Olanna strictly demands that he respect her mother, and he agrees.

Olanna wakes up the next morning to find her mother raging at a servant for stealing some rice. Olanna calms the situation and then calls Odenigbo to complain about her mother. Olanna notices that Odenigbo sounds strange, and he says that his mother is there at the house. Olanna tries to joke with him about her "witchcraft," but he doesn't laugh.

That night Olanna's mother thanks her for talking to her father, and Olanna is strangely proud to have spoken forcefully like Kainene would have done. Olanna's mother then changes the subject to try and set Olanna up with an engineer.

*Ugwu's innocent wonder about white people and black people is heartbreakingly simple and direct, and highlights the tragic reality of the world – there is no good reason that one race should oppress, exploit, and kill another race, but it happens all the time.*



*Ugwu is already feeling responsible for Olanna's happiness, and he worries that Mama is trying to disrupt her relationship with Odenigbo through magic or trickery. We see this part through Ugwu's eyes, and he is confirmed in his beliefs – Mama's "magic" works.*



*This is the first great romantic betrayal between the protagonists, and the catalyst for the fighting that will follow. The small moment of Amala leaving Odenigbo's bedroom is like a mini-version of the first coup in the Nigerian government.*



*Again Adichie juxtaposes scenes to emphasize them – Odenigbo's first infidelity against Olanna is contrasted with Chief Ozobia's cheating, which is only a problem because he bought his mistress a house, because he made the affair so obvious.*



*Because we have already seen Ugwu's perspective on these same events, we know that Odenigbo is being unfaithful, so Olanna is disappointed when she looks for a voice of loyalty and reason in Odenigbo.*



*Olanna again admires Kainene for her confidence and straightforwardness. Olanna's mother wasn't romantically upset by her husband's cheating, but only angry about its impact on her own social position.*



Olanna returns to Nsukka and Ugwu greets her. Odenigbo's mother is still there, but is about to leave. Olanna notices something different in the atmosphere, and then notes that when Odenigbo hands Amala the car keys they consciously avoid touching each other. Olanna sends Ugwu out to the yard and then talks to Odenigbo, and she immediately notices that something is not right. She accuses him of sleeping with Amala, and he cannot deny it. Olanna almost falls over in her sudden distress, and then she immediately leaves. From her car she watches a kite (a bird of prey) swoop down and carry off a chick.

Days pass, and Olanna sinks into a haze of depression in her apartment. Odenigbo comes by to explain and apologize, but Olanna soon kicks him out. She goes to Kano to try and clear her thoughts. She tells her cousin Arize about the situation, and Arize is enraged on her behalf.

A few days later Auntie Ifeka tells Olanna to go back to Nsukka and assert her independence. Ifeka says that she has told her husband that if he ever cheats on her, she will cut off his penis. At this, Olanna's image of their marriage collapses. Ifeka tells Olanna that she must "never behave as if your life belongs to a man."

Olanna follows her aunt's advice and goes back to Nsukka. On the flight home the man next to her flirts with her, but then he disparages the Igbo as trying to control everything in Nigeria. She tells him she is Igbo, and he looks ashamed. Olanna is inspired by his mistake though, and she feels the freedom of having no real identity.

Olanna returns to Odenigbo's house and packs all her things up. Ugwu tries to portray Odenigbo sympathetically, but Olanna feels that Ugwu has betrayed her as well by not telling her about Amala. Odenigbo comes to Olanna's apartment and apologizes again, but Olanna is disappointed by how normal he looks, and how he acts as if he is entitled to her forgiveness.

*Odenigbo seems to have been avoiding making a decision about what he should do if Olanna found out about Amala. This scene is contrasted with Olanna's mother finding out that her husband was cheating on her. The kite swooping on the chick reflects Olanna's feelings of the moment – betrayal killing previous happiness and innocence.*



*Olanna had hardly ever stayed in her own apartment in Nsukka before this, but now it becomes a refuge in her depression. Olanna at least has gained enough confidence and assertiveness to keep kicking Odenigbo out.*



*Auntie Ifeka gives advice that Kainene might give – to be independent and assertive in one's identity. Olanna's sense of happiness and order in Kano already starts to crumble with her aunt's declaration.*



*The sentiment against the Igbo in Nigeria is similar to anti-Semitism in the West – the feeling that the Igbo are greedy for money and controlling the government and industry. Just as with Susan's racism, Adichie again shows dangerous prejudice alongside "normal" flirtation.*



*We have seen their second big fight – about Odenigbo disrespecting Arize – and now we see the source of Olanna's anger that Odenigbo feels entitled to her forgiveness. This is the same confidence and stubbornness that attracted her, but now in a more negative incarnation.*





Olanna takes up new hobbies and makes friends with her neighbor, a black American woman named Edna Whaler. Edna tells her how the “civilized white folk” dressed up to lynch a black man in Alabama. After a while they discuss men, and Edna suggests that Olanna should talk to a priest about Odenigbo. Olanna takes her advice, but is disappointed when the priest suggests attending church as a solution. As she is leaving, the priest tells her that she should forgive Odenigbo, but for her own sake, not his, as her misery is doing her no good.

The next morning Odenigbo comes to Olanna’s apartment looking distressed, and he says that Amala is pregnant. Olanna starts to laugh hysterically, and then she lets Odenigbo in. Odenigbo says that this was all part of his mother’s plan, as now she won’t let Amala have an abortion. Olanna won’t let Odenigbo play the victim in this, and she asks him to leave. She feels especially bad because the child she wanted is now inside of someone else.

Edna visits Olanna, who tearfully tells her what happened. Edna angrily tells Olanna to pull herself together, as Odenigbo probably isn’t spending his days crying. Olanna tells Edna that she shouldn’t project her own romantic woes onto her, and Edna leaves, disgusted. Olanna wants to apologize, but decides to wait a few days. She goes off to buy some wine and get drunk.

At the liquor store Olanna sees Richard. She invites him to come over and share some wine and talk with her, and he reluctantly agrees. They talk about Richard’s writing and get steadily drunk. Olanna notes that Richard is nothing like Odenigbo at all, and she touches his face. Soon they start to kiss, and when they have sex Olanna feels a kind of grace, like she has finally been freed.

## PART 3, CHAPTER 21

Winston Churchill dies, and Richard is relieved to have an excuse to avoid Kainene for another weekend, as he decides to go to Lagos for a memorial service. Richard remembers enjoying his night with Olanna, but he left without a word the next day. He had fantasized about Olanna from afar, but now his fantasy is gone, and he is deathly afraid of losing Kainene. He is determined that Kainene not find out.

*Through Edna's character Adichie ties in white racism in America with the situation in Africa. Adichie is writing this novel in English knowing that it will be read by mostly Western audiences, so links like Edna (and Richard) help associate the world of Nigeria within the Western reader's worldview. The priest's advice is similar to Auntie Ifeka's in a way – to assert one's independence by choosing happiness.*



*Olanna is now beginning to consider taking Odenigbo back, but she is being assertive now and not letting him put all the blame on his mother. Amala's pregnancy is a blow to Olanna's self-esteem, though, as the woman Odenigbo betrayed her with now carries the child that Olanna failed to have.*



*Olanna gets more advice to assert herself and choose happiness, but what she wants is pity and commiseration. She isn't originally planning the betrayal that becomes her act of liberating independence – it starts as a trip to buy wine and wallow in self-pity.*



*This is the terrible betrayal of Kainene that leads to the sisters' split. For Olanna (at first) it is not about Kainene at all, but about Olanna asserting her independence and being selfish for once. The problem is that she chose to undertake her liberating act in a way that caused her sister great pain. In way these proliferating betrayals of love and their angry results come to echo the proliferating betrayals that lead to and result in the Biafran War.*



*Richard was basically a tool for Olanna's assertion of independence, and he allowed himself to give in to his vague longing for Olanna as "off-limits." We have seen how Kainene makes up his whole world and identity though, so Richard will now do anything to avoid losing her.*



At the memorial service Susan sits next to Richard, and they both weep. Their admiration for Winston Churchill was the only real thing they had in common. They go to lunch afterward and Susan starts to ramble, but Richard is lost in thoughts of Kainene. Susan says she has heard about his “lady love,” and she tells him that she will keep busy (sleeping with other expatriate’s husbands) while she waits for him to finish his “dusky affair.”

*Susan reacts to Richard's relationship with Kainene as he had expected she would – treating Kainene as an exotic distraction from “real” women. There seems to be a society of casual betrayal among the English expatriates, where their affairs are indeed distractions while they are away from home.*



There is another section from *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The author writes about how starvation became a weapon of war for Nigeria. It was starvation that ultimately broke Biafra, and also what made it famous as an international disaster zone.

*These sections keep the connection strong between the personal and the political, even as Adichie brings us back to a time of political peace and personal upheaval.*



## PART 3, CHAPTER 22

Ugwu gets diarrhea because he is so stressed about Odenigbo and Olanna’s relationship. Mama returns with Amala, and she gloats about her coming grandson. Finally Mama leaves, and Odenigbo makes her take Amala with her. Mama promises to return the next week and fetch her.

*Ugwu's protective feelings for Odenigbo and Olanna are adorable. Mama seems to have no concern for Odenigbo's actual happiness, but only for upholding tradition and her own social standing.*



The next day Ugwu finds Amala in the garden, eating all the hot peppers. She is crying, and she says eating peppers can remove pregnancy. Ugwu doesn’t believe her, but he hopes it is true. He wonders why she went along with Mama’s plan if she doesn’t want the baby.

*Amala is like Richard, a tool for betrayal, but unlike Richard Amala has no voice, power, or agency of her own. She is a tragic figure because no one shows her kindness or even treats her like a human.*



A few days later Olanna visits, and she gets angry when Odenigbo again tries to put all the blame on his mother. Ugwu is so anxious about their argument that he gets sick again, and when he returns from the bathroom Olanna is in the yard. Ugwu tells her that Mama used “bad medicine” on Odenigbo, and he tells her about the flies and Mama rubbing something on Amala’s back. Olanna says “rubbish,” but then she goes back into the house.

*Olanna has now been asserting her own independence, so she wants Odenigbo to be confident and accept the blame for his infidelity. Ugwu's side of the story also seeks to lay the blame on Mama, but it seems to soften Olanna's heart.*



Ugwu goes inside and eavesdrops. He hears shouting, but then he hears Odenigbo and Olanna having sex. Afterwards Olanna leaves. Ugwu asks Odenigbo if she will return soon, but Odenigbo doesn’t answer.

*Adichie doesn't show this tumultuous first reunion from Olanna's point of view, but we must assume that she finally “chooses happiness.”*



## PART 3, CHAPTER 23

Olanna goes to Richard's house. They talk nervously and both decide to keep what happened a secret from Kainene. Soon afterward Olanna tells Odenigbo, though, after he asks her to move back in with him and tries to blame his mother again. Odenigbo is incredulous, and he doesn't speak to Olanna when she leaves. Back at her apartment she wishes she had said more, or explained that she regrets betraying Kainene but doesn't regret the act itself, as "the selfishness had liberated her."

The next morning Edna comes to her door crying, and says that a black church was bombed in her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. Edna finally cries herself to sleep, and Olanna thinks about how "a single act could reverberate over time and space and leave stains that could never be washed off." She decides to not choose misery, and resolves to move back in with Odenigbo.

On their first night back together Olanna and Odenigbo eat in silence, and then discuss politics. Olanna is somewhat glad that Odenigbo's confidence has been shaken, as now he will have to work too to keep the relationship together. Odenigbo says that he saw Richard and told him to stop coming to his house. Olanna says he should blame her, not Richard, and then she and Odenigbo have sex.

Olanna gets up and calls Kainene to make sure Richard hasn't confessed. Kainene is her usual sardonic self, making fun of Odenigbo, and Olanna is relieved. She decides it is probably best that Richard won't be visiting anymore.

Amala has a baby girl, and Olanna and Odenigbo go to Abba. They visit the hospital and Mama looks dour. Amala won't look at them, and the nurse says that Amala refuses to touch the baby. Olanna holds the baby and wonders about Amala. She cannot tell if Amala hates Odenigbo, as Amala has no voice – there was no option of whether or not she could resist Odenigbo, whether or not she was sent by Mama to his room.

Olanna and Odenigbo drive home, and Odenigbo says that Mama doesn't want the baby, as she wanted a boy. Olanna suddenly declares that she wants the baby. Odenigbo is surprised, and Olanna's mother thinks it is a bad idea when she calls her, but Olanna is resolved. She calls Kainene, who at first is sarcastic, but then says she thinks it is very brave. Olanna feels that Kainene's approval is a good omen.

*Olanna has now had time to consider her night with Richard, but she still feels justified in the act itself. She is being selfish, but she knows that she is being selfish – it is the kind of assertion and self-confidence she needs after experiencing such a betrayal. Odenigbo's sureness about Olanna's total loyalty has now been shaken as well—they are on more equal footing.*



*The 1963 bombing in Birmingham left four young girls dead and was a crucial turning point for the Civil Rights Movement in America. America seems a world away from Nigeria in the novel, but acts like this never go away, just like the Igbo massacres to come.*



*The loyalty of Olanna and Odenigbo's relationship will now take work and sacrifice from both sides, instead of relying only on passion and confidence. We now see the source of the reason why Richard has stopped coming to Odenigbo's.*



*The sense of betrayal becomes more marked now that Olanna actually talks to Kainene and isn't only thinking about her own romantic relationship. The sister-relationship is arguably the most important of the book.*



*Olanna finally considers Amala now as well – now that she is back with Odenigbo, Olanna can see how her and Odenigbo's actions have affected others in negative ways. The child is a girl, and so less valuable in Mama's eyes. The baby is therefore born totally unloved and unwanted.*



*Olanna makes another spontaneous big decision, just like deciding that she wanted to get pregnant. Olanna taking Amala's child seems like another assertion of her independence, making a good situation out of a betrayal. It is also an act of selfless love.*



Olanna brings the baby home, and tells Odenigbo about Ugwu's belief in Mama's medicine. Odenigbo says it is no more irrational than Christianity. Olanna affirms that she does believe in a good God, and Odenigbo declares that he believes in love. Olanna laughs at this. She says she wants the baby's name to be Chiamaka, "God is beautiful," which Kainene suggested.

*Olanna is suddenly feeling more sure of herself now that she has Kainene's support and her own improved self-esteem, so she can assert ideas to Odenigbo even knowing that he will mock them. We now have the real story of "Baby's" origins, and her real name.*



Olanna tries to call Kainene a few times that evening, and finally she picks up. Kainene immediately says "you fucked Richard." Kainene sounds calm but hoarse, and she says Olanna is the "good one" and didn't have to do something like this. Olanna apologizes and says it was unforgivable, and Kainene agrees and hangs up.

*This is the crucial split between the sisters, which prefigures the split between Nigeria and Biafra. Kainene is clearly deeply wounded, but she also speaks rationally – if Olanna wanted to assert her independence by sleeping with someone else, she should have picked someone other than Richard.*



## PART 3, CHAPTER 24

Richard is enraged at Harrison, who couldn't keep his mouth shut. In the process of boasting about his own cooking, he told Kainene that Odenigbo yelled at Richard, and Richard isn't allowed at Odenigbo's anymore. Kainene asks about this, and Richard decided to tell the truth. Kainene immediately stops eating and calls Richard's actions "unoriginal."

*Kainene reacts to betrayal in a totally different way from the more emotional, dramatic Olanna, but she is no less deeply hurt. Kainene draws even further behind her protective shell, and criticizes Richard with the writer's worst insult – "unoriginal."*



Later that night Kainene tells Richard that she spoke to Olanna. She says it would have been forgivable with anyone else, but not with her sister. She tells Richard to sleep in the guest room, and he worries that she will immediately leave him for Madu.

*Richard loves Kainene greatly and has wrapped up his identity in her, but he is also very possessive, and there is still an element of racist condescension in this possessiveness.*



The next morning Richard wants to talk, but Kainene says they will talk when she is ready. Later in the day Olanna and Odenigbo arrive, and Olanna tearfully apologizes. Kainene says "it is stupid to expect me to forgive this," and she sends them away. Richard remembers how Odenigbo had showed up at his house and yelled at him, demanding that he stay away.

*Richard contrasts Kainene and Odenigbo in how they deal with their betrayals – Kainene remains terrifyingly calm, while Odenigbo is blustery and aggressive.*



Kainene then tells Richard that she took his manuscript and burned it that morning. Richard is upset at the loss of "The Basket of Hands," which was nearing completion, but he is also joyful, as he recognizes that this act means Kainene will not leave him. He wonders if he should be a writer after all, as love is more important to him than his work.

*Richard now accepts that his life with Kainene is more important to him than his identity as a writer. This is the first manuscript Richard has lost, which will be followed by "In the Time of Roped Pots."*



In *The World Was Silent When We Died*, the author writes about how other nations ignored the suffering of the Biafrans. The United States and Canada decided to stay out of the conflict, while Britain and the Soviet Union provided arms to Nigeria. Many other Black African countries also supported Nigeria, as they feared secessions of their own. Only China and France approved of Biafra, but they offered little real support.

*Contrasting this book with the loss of Richard's manuscript starts to make the reader question the author of "The World Was Silent When We Died." This section relates directly to the title, as it shows just how many countries refused to help Biafra because of their own economic interests.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 25

The story returns to where it left off at Part Two. Since the air raid, Olanna now fears thunder and is very jumpy. She and Odenigbo trade all their money for Biafran currency, and Odenigbo promises that they will get their life back soon when Biafra is free. He doesn't seem to realize how little money they have left. Odenigbo does mindless work at the Manpower Directorate, but he comes home inspired about Biafra's greatness.

*Odenigbo is merely compiling lists of names and addresses (no longer teaching mathematics and debating philosophy) but he is still overflowing with loyalty and patriotism and believes that Biafra cannot fail. Olanna has been deeply by shaken by the air raid, and her faith in Biafra slips as well.*



Olanna makes Ugwu guard Baby all the time, as she heard a story about soldiers kidnapping children to work all day. Olanna makes Baby practice running to the bunker, and she has nightmares about air raids. Later Baby gets sick, and Olanna is almost relieved, as it seems to her that misfortunes should only come one at a time.

*The rumor about children being forced into labor is the beginning of the Biafrans losing the moral high ground. They are justified in secession and in defending themselves, but there is then a point when they are causing more injustice than they are relieving in their efforts to remain free—echoing, to an extent, the way that Olanna's liberating act of sleeping with Richard was also selfish and destructive.*



Olanna takes Baby to the crowded hospital, and she gets in first because she speaks English. Dr. Nwala is there, and he says that they are low on medicine and have run out of antibiotics. He writes her a prescription, and says she should find someone who can trade her for some. Olanna asks her friend Mrs. Muokelu, who says she can find someone. Mrs. Muokelu says she had a vision of ancient warriors defeating the vandals. Olanna likes her because her fearlessness reminds her of Kainene. Olanna shows her a picture of Kainene, but Mrs. Muokelu says the twins don't look alike.

*Dr. Nwala was the poet Okeoma's friend who helped Olanna after the air raid. Biafra's unpreparedness for war doesn't just mean a lack of weapons for its soldiers – it means a lack of food and medicine as well, which will lead to many more deaths than the fighting will. Olanna and Kainene have been separated for a long time now, but Olanna still admires her sister and looks for traces of her in others.*



Baby eventually gets some antibiotics, but she stops wanting to eat. Olanna uses most of her money buying candy and treats, but Baby won't eat anything and Olanna fears she will die soon. Mrs. Muokelu brings her some dried egg yolk, which Ugwu and Olanna think looks repulsive, but Baby eats all of it.

*We start to see just how far the living situation has declined in Biafra – even the once-wealthy Olanna cannot even afford dried egg yolk for her sick child.*





Olanna goes to the relief center, which used to be a girl's secondary school. She waits with the crowds to get free food. When the gates open there is a stampede, and Olanna gets in the egg yolk line but it is gone by the time she reaches the end. The supervisor recognizes Olanna, and it turns out he was a member of the family she met at the airport years before, when she comforted the old woman who thought the plane wouldn't stop.

The supervisor, whose name is Okoromadu, sneaks Olanna some dried egg yolk as she is leaving. The next time Olanna goes to the relief center there is no food at all. Mrs. Muokelu says that it might just be the soldiers keeping the food for themselves. The next time the gates open, Okoromadu slips Olanna a tin of corned beef. Olanna is overjoyed.

A shell-shocked soldier sees Olanna get the can, and he starts to follow her home. Four more ex-soldiers join him, and one of them takes the corned beef. Olanna considers fighting them, but then recognizes that the meat "had never been hers." She starts to cry.

A couple of weeks later Mrs. Muokelu teaches Olanna how to make soap. That night Special Julius brings some palm wine and says that the British army has come to fight for the Nigerians. Then the air raid alarm goes off, and the family rushes into the bunker.

Many people are in the bunker panicking, but when the air raid ends they sing a victorious song about Biafra. That evening the alarm goes off again, and Olanna doesn't see Odenigbo in the bunker. Olanna rushes out into the open and sees Odenigbo bent over a wounded man. She is suddenly struck by the fragility of his mortality, and she hugs him.

The next day Olanna feels paranoid, and she wants the family to spend the whole day in the bunker. Ugwu tells her that Baby has lice, and Olanna angrily says it is from playing with "those dirty neighbors." Olanna picks at her hair and Baby starts to cry. The Biafran national anthem comes on the radio, and then Olanna tells Ugwu to take Baby outside.

Olanna goes out to talk to Mrs. Muokelu, who tells her that Special Julius sells forged army exemption passes and sleeps with young girls looking for money. Olanna jumps at the sound of a door closing, while Mrs. Muokelu praises the greatness of the Biafran soldiers and the *ogbunigwe* bombs. She says that the Nigerians have refused to let the Red Cross bring food to Biafra, but God will help Biafra win anyway.

*One of the most common tragedies of this war is that schools are always commandeered to become relief centers or refugee camps. The government can't even keep its citizens safe, much less educated, so the future for even a victorious Biafra looks bleak.*



*The characters who appeared innocently and casually in Part 1 now return in much more critical situations. Mrs. Muokelu is devoted to Biafra, but even she can see the corruption among many of the soldiers.*



*Aside from all the starvation and disease, there is also a growing epidemic of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among the soldiers who experience the horrors of war.*



*Britain is indeed supporting Nigeria with arms and money, a fact that the Biafrans seem to be trying to deny or downplay. In their devotion to Biafra they make themselves blind.*



*There is a seemingly contradictory mix of panic and patriotic confidence in these scenes. Everyone recognizes how bad the situation is in Biafra and how fragile their own lives are, but at the same time they are confident that Biafra will win the war.*



*Olanna is still clinging to her old over-protectiveness about Baby, but she starts to panic because she now has no real way to protect Baby at all anymore. Everyone has been brought down to the same level—at the mercy of the war.*



*The corrupt side of Special Julius shows the corruption in the army itself. Mrs. Muokelu condemns the army contractor while in the same breath professing the righteousness and greatness of the Biafran army. Nigeria's blockade against relief food is the greatest atrocity of the war.*



The air raid siren goes off again, and when they come out of the bunker everyone sees that the school has been bombed. Olanna wanders through the wreckage, and notices that a piece of shrapnel has dug a beautiful-looking hole in the ground.

In the early morning there is another air raid, but this time the siren doesn't go off. Olanna rushes to the bunker. She has an out-of-body experience, and realizes that if she and all her family dies, life will still go on in the world. This feeling pushes her from fear to anger, and she decides to make her existence matter. When the raid is over she comes out of the bunker and immediately starts making soap.

Olanna no longer runs and panics at loud noises, and she starts teaching her students about the **Biafran flag** – the red is for the blood of the massacred Igbo, the black is to mourn them, the green is for coming prosperity, and the half of a yellow sun is for a hopeful future. She shows them pictures of Ojukwu and Gowon.

One of her students tells Olanna that she wants to kill all the vandals, and Olanna is shaken by this. Odenigbo tells her that this is just patriotism. Odenigbo brings home some food from the Red Cross, and Olanna says they should have a dinner party. Then she and Odenigbo joyfully have sex.

## PART 4, CHAPTER 26

Ugwu hates the relief food, and he misses his old kitchen in Nsukka. Olanna is grateful for everything she gets, but Ugwu complains about the bland flour and salty fish. Olanna has forbidden him to go out during the day, as boys are being forced into conscription everywhere.

Odenigbo and Olanna have guests in the living room, and they discuss how “saboteurs” cost Biafra its territories in the West. Special Julius says the “vandals” have looted everything there and raped the women, and Ugwu shudders at the thought of Anulika or Nnesinachi beneath a “dirty sun-blackened Hausa soldier.” He doesn't know what has happened to his family.

*The bombing of the school shows that the Nigerians are not just interested in defeating the Biafran army, but also in killing as many Biafran citizens as possible.*



*Olanna comes to a time of crisis and pushes past it into independence and self-esteem, just like she did with Odenigbo's betrayal. She is being purified by hardship, and her character keeps growing stronger.*



*Adichie now fully explains the symbolism of the Biafran flag. It has its own symbolic meaning, as Olanna teaches, but it also represents Olanna's newfound confidence and optimism, her hope in both Biafra and in her own strength.*



*Just as when she slept with Richard, Olanna's actions of independence have unintended side effects. The war has become so central to Biafra's identity that all patriotism also contains hatred for the “vandals.”*



*Ugwu is again the pickiest member of the household. He is upset by the disruption of his ordered life – Odenigbo and Olanna are now no better off than he is, but this shift in social status causes Ugwu anxiety instead of comfort.*



*Ugwu knows about forced conscription now – soldiers kidnapping men and making them join the army under the threat of death – but he still considers the Biafran army to be great and heroic. A kind of racist hatred has now infected the Biafran mindset. Ugwu's thoughts are a cruel foreshadowing.*



One day Olanna says that the school where she has been teaching has been turned into a refugee camp. Olanna says she will start holding classes in her yard, and she asks if Ugwu will teach a class too. Ugwu asks if she thinks the vandals are in Opi, but she sharply assures him that it is too small of a village, so the Nigerians would ignore it.

One day a black Mercedes-Benz drives up to the house and Professor Ezeka (the old dinner-party guest from Nsukka) gets out. He is now the Director for Mobilization. Neither Odenigbo nor Olanna are home, so Ezeka leaves a note and goes. Eberechi, the neighbor girl whom Ugwu has been admiring, asks him about Ezeka and seems impressed that a “Big Man” was visiting Ugwu’s house.

Ugwu is nervous talking to Eberechi, and he agrees to work on the school roof with her later. Olanna returns and is amused by the pretentious note Ezeka left her. Ugwu goes off to work on the roof, and he greets Eberechi there. They talk easily, and Ugwu is excited by her company and friendliness. They work together disguising the school roof with palm fronds so it won’t be a target for air raids. Ugwu looks at all the refugees now living in the school, and is repulsed by their horrible living conditions.

One of the refugees declares that his town fell because of saboteurs, and he says that anyone who can’t speak Igbo should not be trusted. Some young boys play at war nearby, while a shell-shocked soldier with one arm wanders about. Eberechi says that her brother is in the army. Then she and Ugwu part ways.

Days later Ugwu sets up benches for the class he is supposed to teach. Olanna tells him he will teach mathematics, civics, and to speak perfect English and Igbo. One woman brings her child to the “school” and is insulted that a houseboy is teaching, so she takes her daughter away. Other women bring gifts for Olanna. Mrs. Muokelu is teaching a class too, though Ugwu starts to suspect that she knows very little.

Two weeks later Mrs. Muokelu decides to cross enemy lines to trade, as she has lots of people to feed and there are no real markets on the Biafran side. Many people have been doing this. Ugwu takes over her class while she is away. Sometimes Eberechi watches him teach, and Ugwu starts slipping her some of the food that Odenigbo brings home. Ugwu now feels totally comfortable with her, and Eberechi tells him how her parents offered her as a “gift” to a visiting army officer.

*Olanna’s new confidence continues to show itself as she sets up a makeshift “school.” The school she was teaching at was one of the last to be bombed or turned into a refugee camp, so she was even luckier than most.*



*Professor Ezeka was a fastidious, pretentious guest at Odenigbo’s old gatherings. This is now another character to return in a different capacity during the war. The corruption and randomness of wartime politics causes some people to prosper and others to suffer.*



*Ugwu finally starts having a relationship with a girl that is something other than sexual, and he is surprised by how easy it can be when he treats Eberechi like a real person. Odenigbo, Olanna, and Ugwu are all technically refugees, but they still have the privilege of some money and of having powerful friends, so they can escape the camps.*



*The fear of “saboteurs” becomes a paranoia and hatred of non-Igbo Biafrans. The Igbo start to fall into the same mistakes that the Hausa did, responding to injustice with more injustice.*



*Olanna is determined to make a difference, and to make Biafran patriotism about education instead of ethnic hatred. The woman who rejects Ugwu as a teacher is clearly still clinging to a social hierarchy that has collapsed in the war.*



*Mrs. Muokelu casually crosses enemy lines to trade, which shows that Biafra no longer even has enough food for people with money, and also foreshadows Kianene’s later plight. Ugwu starts to feel real, sincere feelings for Eberechi that are more love than lust. Yet women are still traded by their families to make connections or secure wealth.*



Ugwu is angry that this happened, and he imagines having sex with Eberechi, and how he will be different and more respectful than the army officer. He tries to remember some sexual positions he found in a book Odenigbo had in Nsukka. Ugwu then gets sad that there are so few books in their current home.

One morning the radio announces that Tanzania has recognized Biafra as a real country, and everyone is overjoyed. Odenigbo says that other countries want to do so as well, but “America is the stumbling block” stopping them. Ugwu finds Eberechi and tells her the good news, and she pinches his neck, as is her habit lately. He looks at her and not only lusts after her but also realizes he loves her. Ugwu tries to tell her that he loves her, but he can’t.

Then an army truck drives up and a soldier asks for Eberechi. He says that Major Nwogu is calling for her, and Eberechi excitedly goes to get ready. The soldier accuses Ugwu of idleness, but Ugwu says he is a teacher and is sponsored by the Director of Mobilization. The soldier mocks him but leaves him alone, and then takes Eberechi away.

Ugwu is heartbroken and depressed, and when Eberechi comes to see him that night his jealousy causes him physical pain. Eberechi talks about Major Nwogu, and she says she told him Ugwu was her brother, so he won’t be conscripted. Ugwu can hardly talk to her, and he leaves.

Ugwu starts ignoring Eberechi, and he gets angry when she asks him what’s wrong. Eventually they stop talking altogether. Ugwu decides to tell Olanna what happened with Eberechi, but when he goes inside to do it Olanna is in shock – Odenigbo’s mother has been shot in Abba. Even though he had disliked her, Ugwu still starts to cry and he wonders if his own mother is alive.

Odenigbo comes home and goes into his room with Olanna. Ugwu cooks Baby’s food, and then Olanna comes out and yells at him for using the kerosene stove, even though she had earlier asked him to. She then sits down and says that Odenigbo won’t speak to her. Ugwu wants to comfort her, but can’t bring himself to touch her. Ugwu offers his sympathies to Odenigbo, who acts brisk and distracted.

*Ugwu still has his teenage lust, but he now wants to be respectful and loving. This is a tragic contrast to his future actions as a soldier.*



*The only nations that ended up recognizing Biafra were Tanzania, Gabon, Haiti, Côte d’Ivoire, and Zambia. Other countries (like France) provided some arms and food, but didn’t give the official recognition that Biafra so desperately needed. There is again an echo here, as the failure of nations to recognize Biafra is reminiscent of Ugwu’s inability to state his love and Richard’s earlier inability to propose to Kainene.*



*The combined idolization and corruption of the Biafran soldiers has sinister consequences, as they can basically act with impunity and people will forgive them because they are fighting for “the cause.”*



*Eberechi’s seeming betrayal is never really clarified, but it comes at the worst possible time for Ugwu – just as he was about to tell her that he loved her.*



*Even living in constant fear and danger, most of the characters still experience deep grief for each loss of the war. This is another way that Adichie reminds us that every casualty in a war or genocide is a tragedy, and even abrasive characters like Mama cause great grief in their passing.*



*Ugwu has felt protective and paternal about Odenigbo and Olanna, and the crisis of war has made him into practically a member of their family, but Ugwu has still never physically touched or discussed personal matters with his “masters.” They are all on the same level now, but Ugwu is still comforted by the idea that they are somehow above him.*



The next day Odenigbo leaves early to try and find his mother's body, even though it is in occupied territory. Olanna begs him not to go, but he rushes off. Meanwhile a group of people walk by with machetes, saying they are going to "root out the infiltrators." Night falls and Odenigbo still hasn't come back, and Olanna starts to despair.

*Odenigbo clearly had a lot of confused feelings about his mother, as he seemed to dislike and scorn her when she was alive, but now he is made unreasonable with guilty grief when she dies. In their paranoia and starvation the Biafrans are now acting just like their enemies.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 27

Richard is at home when Harrison appears at his door, covered in blood. Richard panics and offers to take him to the hospital, but Harrison reveals that the red liquid is beet juice – only wounded men are allowed to leave with the women and children. Richard asks about his manuscript "In the Time of Roped Pots," and Harrison says he buried it in a box in the garden.

*Harrison's old love of beets has paid off, and Adichie mixes a little comedy in with the tragedy. All men are being conscripted into the army, and soldiers also don't want people evacuating in case it causes a panic.*



Harrison hopes he can stay with Richard and Kainene, and Richard agrees, as only one of Kainene's stewards is left, a man named Ikejide. People on the Nigerian radio say that Port Harcourt will fall soon, which would mean that Biafra itself would lose.

*Harrison was also a somewhat dislikable character, but in the crisis he too becomes a loyal member of Kainene and Richard's household. Port Harcourt is Biafran's main commercial port, and crucial to its survival as a source of money, food, and materials.*



Richard was surprised when a few weeks earlier Madu had asked him to write for the Propaganda Directorate. Richard is excited to be an "insider," but he is confused because he feels Madu hates him. He calls Madu and accuses him of only asking him because he is white. Madu says of course this is the case, but foreigners will take his writing more seriously because he is white.

*This is Richard at his pettiest and most possessive, still thinking about his personal jealousy of Madu and his insecurity about being white while trying to be a Biafran.*



Madu says that the Biafran cause doesn't really belong to Richard, as he could easily be evacuated by the British government if he wanted to. So if he really wants to help, he should use his whiteness to aid Biafra and write articles about the atrocities going on. Richard agrees to do it.

*Madu here offers a good thesis statement for many of Adichie's themes – the world is being silent as Biafrans die, and Richard still has white British privilege, so if he actually wants to make a difference then he should use his privilege to fight racism, corruption, and indifference.*



Richard's first article is about the fall of Onitsha, where the Nigerian soldiers defecated on the altar of the Catholic church and then killed two hundred civilians. Madu is pleased with article, and Richard is glad he is doing this. He imagines himself as a young Winston Churchill. Weeks have passed since then, and Richard has written many articles. He has even met Ojukwu, who thanked him for his good work.

*Richard now starts to find some meaning and identity through writing again, not just through his relationship with Kainene. He has been pretty ineffective before this, but now he is actually making some kind of difference instead of just being personally not-racist.*





Richard calls Madu to ask about Port Harcourt, but Madu assures him that Port Harcourt will not fall. Richard feels especially attached to the town, as it is the place where he and Kainene have been happy together.

Kainene comes home and laughs at Harrison's beet story. She says she got a letter from her mother in London, which contained some cleverly disguised money. Richard asks Kainene about Port Harcourt, and though she assures him it won't fall she sounds wary, and she and Richard have started building a new house in Orlu as a backup.

Richard doesn't want to leave Port Harcourt, but he is sent to Uli to write an article about Nigerian planes shooting at vehicles on major roads. Richard reaches the small, secret Biafran airstrip and interviews the man in charge there. Then a white man emerges from the nearby building, and Richard recognizes him as Count Von Rosen, an elderly Swedish aristocrat who has been fighting for Biafra with his own small plane.

Count Von Rosen greets Richard and offers him some cheese. He says he has heard about Kainene, and Richard shows him a picture of her and then of the **roped pot**, saying "I fell in love with Igbo-Ukwu art and then fell in love with her." Richard asks the Count why he is fighting for Biafra, and as a response the Count says that he had also fought in Ethiopia and brought food to the Warsaw ghetto.

Count Von Rosen leaves to go on a mission, and Richard compares him to the German mercenary also fighting for the Biafrans. The German acted as though "here finally were black people he could like." On his way back to Port Harcourt, Richard hears gunfire and gets worried.

Richard and Kainene go to visit their new house being built in Orlu, and on their way out an air raid siren goes off. They take cover, but it is a false alarm. A trader with a nearby booth gets robbed while she is hiding. Richard and Kainene keep going, and they are stopped at a checkpoint to be searched. Kainene asks about a nearby man being turned back, and the civil defender says that they are turning back anyone with furniture, so as not to cause a panic.

*Richard seems even more patriotic and devoted to Biafra than most of the Biafrans, as he has built up his concept of home upon his identity as a self-titled Biafran.*



*With all of Nigeria's advantages the war should have been over soon, but instead it drags on and causes hundreds of thousands of extra deaths. Port Harcourt will indeed fall to Nigeria, but it won't mean an end to the war – only more refugees.*



*Carl Gustaf von Rosen was a real historical figure, a Swedish pilot who used innovative methods to help destroy Nigerian planes and bring relief to starving Biafrans. He is one of the few sympathetic mercenaries fighting for the Biafrans.*



*The roped pot is again associated with Kainene in Richard's mind, and continues to symbolize his love but also the "otherness" that his love objectifies. Count von Rosen was killed a few years later on a mission to deliver food to refugees in Ethiopia.*



*The Nigerians had British soldiers and arms support from Britain and Russia, so the Biafrans also hired some European mercenaries to fight for them.*



*Richard and Kainene have still been relatively protected from the war, as this is their first air raid alarm. Again we see the willful denial of reality, as Biafran soldiers don't allow people to evacuate a city about to be invaded lest it should cause a (totally reasonable) panic.*



As they drive on Kainene criticizes the Biafran propaganda, which whips up paranoia about saboteurs and bombs being hidden in household items. Richard defends Ojukwu, but Kainene says Ojukwu has invented all the saboteurs so as to get rid of his enemies or take their wives. She says that when Biafra is established, Ojukwu will have to be deposed.

*Kainene is still confident in Biafra's victory, but she seems to be the only character who can clearly see the flaws in the Biafran government and army. The paranoia about betrayal is causing just as much injustice within Biafra as the Igbo were trying to escape in Nigeria.*



Richard and Kainene return to Port Harcourt, and Madu calls. He says people have been attacking British people because the British supplied warships to Nigeria, so Richard should be careful. Madu says that Richard should write about the French ambassador's quote praising the heroic Biafrans.

*Richard is not in real danger as long as he stays inside, but now he gets a little taste of the racialized hatred and oppression that the Africans constantly experience.*



Richard asks Madu about Port Harcourt, and Madu says there have been some non-Igbo saboteurs. Richard thinks about how blasphemous it would be to betray Biafra, and he remembers talking to some non-Igbo Biafrans who thought that the Igbo would dominate them when the country was established. Richard tried to explain that "a country born from the ashes of injustice would limit its practice of injustice," but they didn't believe him.

*Richard buys into the paranoia about saboteurs and fear of non-Igbo minorities. In theory his declaration is correct, but Biafra is already fighting injustice with more injustice – the oppressed Igbo are now retaliating by oppressing non-Igbo minorities.*



Richard stays inside for a few days, and when he tries to leave Port Harcourt there is an armed soldier preventing people leaving, nervously saying "there is no cause for alarm!" Later that day Richard hears shelling nearby, and he and Kainene decide to evacuate. Richard cannot find the notes for his latest article about the *ogbunigwe*, and he has to leave them behind.

*The phrase "there is no cause for alarm" is repeated throughout the novel, particularly by soldiers trying to prevent a panic and loss of hope (but in actuality making the evacuation situation worse). Richard keeps losing manuscripts.*



Harrison and Ikejide drag their suitcases outside as an air raid begins in Port Harcourt. Richard and Kainene hide under an orange tree and Harrison falls flat on the ground, but Ikejide starts running. A piece of shrapnel suddenly cuts off Ikejide's head, while the other three watch in horror. When the planes leave they get in the car and drive to Orlu.

*This is the moment that really brings the horror of war home to Kainene. As with Olanna's memory of the woman on the train, it too involves a beheading. Ikejide had never been an important character, but he was always in the background of Kainene's life.*



They reach their house but the carpentry work still isn't finished. Kainene finds a new carpenter, but the man wants to be paid in food. He says money has no value in "this Biafra." Kainene tells Richard about Olanna's experience with the woman carrying her daughter's head, and Kainene says she wants to go see Olanna. At night she tries to dream about Ikejide, but she cannot.

*People like the carpenter are starting to get disillusioned with the state of Biafra now, as they can't eat money and words of hope. Just like Richard, Kainene now feels guilty for not being more affected by the horrors she has witnessed.*



Kainene becomes the food supplier for the refugee camp in Orlu, and she seems to gain energy from her constant busyness. She meets many new selfless, fervently patriotic people. One day a non-Igbo doctor arrives to treat the sick, and one of her patients spits at her and calls her a “saboteur.” Kainene slaps the patient and says that “we are all Biafrans.”

*Kainene immediately starts making a difference and turns her business skills to the war effort. The ethnic hatred of non-Igbo in Biafra has grown so great that someone would even condemn the doctor about to save their life.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 28

Olanna remembers Odenigbo returning after midnight, covered in mud, on the day he tried to bury his mother. Since that day he has started going to the bar and drinking every day. He no longer talks optimistically about Biafra, but instead laments all the papers and work he left behind in Nsukka. Olanna tries to figure out how he is processing his grief for his mother, but she feels like an outsider.

*Odenigbo's spirit seems broken by his mother's death, and he becomes a changed man. This slow slip into depression, detachment, and alcoholism threatens Olanna's love even more than Odenigbo's betrayal did.*



Okeoma arrives to pay condolences to Odenigbo, and Odenigbo is more open with him than he has been with Olanna. Okeoma and Odenigbo drink whiskey, and Okeoma complains about his commander, a white mercenary who rapes women and is always demanding more money. They eat lunch and Olanna asks Okeoma if he has been writing. Okeoma shakes his head, and says he is a soldier now.

*It seems small compared to the many horrific deaths, but another tragedy is that Okeoma stops writing and becomes another faceless, condemned soldier. Apparently most of the white mercenaries are not as sympathetic as Count von Rosen, and they use their skill in combat to oppress even the people employing them.*



Olanna asks for a poem, but Okeoma wants to talk about the war instead. After lunch he drinks until he passes out. When he wakes up he relents and recites a poem about “The mermaid / Who will never be mine.” Olanna realizes the poem is about her, and she sits with Okeoma until he falls asleep again.

*Okeoma's poem is a wistful reminder of the past, and the days when Odenigbo would tease Olanna that his guests (including Okeoma) were in love with her. Okeoma too has turned to alcohol to drive away depression or PTSD.*



That evening Professor Achara arrives and says that Odenigbo and Olanna must leave in two weeks, as their landlord has found someone who will pay double or triple the rent. Achara apologizes and promises to help them find a new place.

*Achara was the friend who first found Odenigbo and Olanna their place in Umuahia. Every aspect of life starts to crumble under the weight of war and starvation.*



Odenigbo, Olanna, Ugwu, and Baby move into a single room, which is still lucky considering the refugee-filled town. Olanna remembers pitying her family in Kano for all living in one room, and she starts to cry. One of her new neighbors, Mama Oji, says she heard that Odenigbo is a doctor and asks him to help her asthmatic child, and Olanna has to clarify that he is a “doctor of books.” Mama Oji warns Olanna that everyone in the building is willing to steal. There is no electricity in the building.

*Olanna has truly lost all her privileges now, and both her and Odenigbo's masters' degrees are useless when survival is the primary concern. Long ago Olanna had thought that her family in Kano (Ifeka, Mbaezi, and Arize) were sincere and loving but poor, and she had pitied them for all living in one room, but she is now in the same situation.*



Baby makes a new friend named Adanna. Olanna is glad that she is adjusting to all the moving, but she worries that Baby will pick up Adanna's "bush Umuahia accent or some disease." Every evening Mama Oji yells at her husband for deserting the army and pretending to be wounded in battle.

Olanna is surprised to hear someone playing piano one day, and Mama Oji says that it is Alice, who never leaves her room or talks to anyone. Most of the people are suspicious of her and think she is a saboteur. After the song is over Alice comes out and Olanna introduces herself. Alice is small and childlike, and she avoids making conversation with Olanna as she heads to the bathroom.

Olanna grows interested in Alice and tries to befriend her, but Alice rarely leaves her room and doesn't answer when Olanna knocks. One day Olanna sees her at the market. Alice complains that there is no salt, and Olanna is surprised, as this has been the case for a long time since the war.

On her way home Olanna sees a boy being conscripted by soldiers, and then she gets angry at Ugwu for being outside. Olanna goes to their room and finds Odenigbo crying about his mother. Olanna holds him, and he says he has been considering joining the army. Olanna says that he might as well commit suicide. Odenigbo decides to work on building a bunker instead.

Odenigbo gets some other men to help him dig. The other men joke and talk, but Odenigbo stays silent. Olanna hopes that his weeping session will loosen some of the "knots" within him, but he is distant that night. The next day there is good news of a Biafran victory in Abagana, and Odenigbo only says "Excellent" while all the neighbors dance and sing. Alice also stays inside, and Mama Oji says Alice thinks she is better than everyone else.

A few hours later Professor Ezeka's driver arrives with supplies for Olanna and Odenigbo. Ugwu is overjoyed at all the food, but Olanna immediately puts some salt aside for Alice. She gives it to her and Alice thanks her. The next day they are both sitting outside while the neighbor Pastor Ambrose prays loudly. Alice says that God is fighting for the Nigerians, because they are winning, but Olanna sharply declares that God fights for the just side – the Biafrans. Alice says that Ambrose is pretending to be a pastor to avoid being conscripted.

*Olanna still hasn't let go of her futile over-protectiveness of Baby, and her concern about Baby's accent is ridiculous considering the situation, though it shows the tenacity of prejudice and social status.*



*The paranoia about saboteurs is running so deep that anyone acting out of the ordinary immediately comes under suspicion. The sections with Alice remain mysterious, and her piano playing in the midst of starvation is almost surreal.*



*Alice must have some secret source of food, as she hasn't been out to notice the shortages in the market lately.*



*Everyone's spirits start to wear down under the hardships of the war. The danger of forced conscription is now constant for Ugwu, and is a bad sign for the Biafran cause. Odenigbo has a similar crisis regarding his own usefulness that Olanna and Richard had.*



*The change of Odenigbo's personality (and of his relationship with Olanna) is another one of the unforeseen tragedies of the war. The "Abagana Ambush" was one of Biafra's greatest military victories, where they used the ogbunigwe mines to destroy many Nigerian armored cars and halt their advance.*



*Olanna continues to try and befriend Alice, or at least solve some of the mystery surrounding her. Pastor Ambrose shows how much superstition and false information has grown up around the war. Olanna recognizes all the hardships and corruption in Biafra, but she still loyally clings to the justice of "the cause."*



Alice tells Olanna that she had fallen in love with a married army colonel and followed him for years. She had his baby, but he left her just before the war started. Alice says she admires Olanna for handling so much responsibility so well. Alice says the piano is the only thing she brought from her home in Enugu, as her colonel lover guiltily sent her a van for it. She complains about how bad he was at sex too.

*Alice's mysterious past is finally cleared up a little. It is perhaps her guilty ex-lover who has also been providing her with food. Olanna now feels a bond with Alice, and so sets herself up for a betrayal.*



That day Odenigbo comes home with a gun. He looks tired and sad, and rejects Olanna's suggestion to try and be transferred elsewhere. Olanna is suddenly repulsed by their squalid, depressing room. That night she and Odenigbo sleep with their backs to each other.

*Passion and sexuality was one of the constants of Olanna and Odenigbo's love, and now even that has been taken away by their situation and Odenigbo's depression.*



The next day Pastor Ambrose is praying loudly again, and Mama Oji yells at him to join the army. She says that Baby's friend Adanna has kwashiorkor, a disease from starvation and malnutrition. Olanna goes to see her and says the child needs milk or crayfish, but her mother (Mama Adanna) has nothing to give her. Olanna secretly gives Mama Adanna some dried milk and sardines from their new supplies.

*Kwashiorkor is a kind of malnutrition caused by not getting enough protein. The symptoms usually include a swollen stomach and loss of hair. Now that the starvation in Biafra has gotten even worse, kwashiorkor will become a huge epidemic, especially among children.*



Olanna goes to see Professor Ezekaka. Mrs. Ezekaka greets her joyfully, though they had barely met before, and Olanna notices all the luxuries they have in their house. Mrs. Ezekaka offers Olanna cake and alcohol, and Olanna resents her happiness. She asks Professor Ezekaka to transfer Odenigbo somewhere else, and Ezekaka says he will try.

*Olanna has just seen a child starving to death, so the pleasant life the Ezekakas lead seems especially unfair. The suffering of Biafrans is mostly caused by foreign antagonists and famine, but corruption within the Biafran government doesn't help.*



Before she leaves, Mrs. Ezekaka shows Olanna the bunker they sometimes have to go in, and complains about it. It is sturdy, clean, and furnished. Olanna leaves, and when she returns home Baby is crying because Mama Adanna ate her dog, whom Baby loved.

*Adichie juxtaposes these images to show the wealth gap between the average Biafran – who is forced to eat her dog to save her starving daughter – and the well-off government official.*



One afternoon Kainene appears. Olanna embraces her uncertainly, feeling self-conscious about her squalid room. The two sisters sit quietly for a while, and then Kainene talks about her job running the refugee camp in Orlu. Kainene asks Olanna about teaching, and about her wedding, which was interrupted by the air raid. Kainene brings her the money from their mother and two dresses she bought for Baby.

*The sisters experience a long-awaited reunion as they both approach each other cautiously. The distant Kainene is the one who reaches out. In the face of such horrors as have swept Biafra, sisterly loyalty and love overcomes Kainene's feelings of betrayal and anger.*



Kainene says she should stop calling the child "Baby," but call her Chiamaka instead, and Olanna laughs with sudden joy. Kainene tells Olanna about Ikejide being beheaded. She invites Olanna to visit her at the refugee camp, and then leaves. Olanna feels "as if she had swallowed a sparkling sliver of light."

*A tragic but powerful part of the sisters' reunion is the trauma they have both experienced, particularly their encounters with decapitation. Their cautious reunion foreshadows that of Nigeria and Biafra.*





A few days later Olanna goes to Orlu, and Harrison greets her. Kainene is there, and she hugs Olanna. Kainene says that Richard left early, probably to avoid seeing Olanna. Kainene asks Olanna if she ever dreams about the child's head in the calabash, and then she says "There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable." Olanna feels a leap of joy at this.

*As usual, Kainene makes no grand emotional displays, but she basically says that in the light of what she has seen, Olanna's sins seem trivial. Everyone is now in constant danger, so the sisters should stand together against the horrors of the world.*



Kainene takes Olanna to the refugee camp she runs, and shows her around. Inside the smell is nauseating, but Olanna makes herself go in. Many of the refugee children have swollen bellies, a sign of kwashiorkor. Kainene gives some of them protein tablets, and gives some to Olanna for Baby. Olanna asks how many of the refugees die each day, but Kainene won't answer. Kainene takes Olanna's hand as they leave the camp.

*Kainene's refugee camp is even worse than the one in Umuahia, and Adichie now shows the full extent of Biafran suffering. All the political posturing, colonial oppression, and global indifference ultimately leads to starving, dying children. Tragedy continues to bring the sisters together.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 29

Ugwu is bored one afternoon and he ignores Olanna's warnings and sets out on the road. He rounds a corner near a church and sees a group of men being forcefully conscripted into the army. One of the soldiers sees him and shouts, and Ugwu tries to take refuge in the church, but the priest won't let him in. The soldier threatens to shoot Ugwu if he runs, so he joins the group of men with their hands on their heads.

*This section begins the climax of the book. The patriotism of the Biafrans (caused by their past sufferings during the massacres) is so strong that they can see their soldiers threatening to shoot civilians and still believe in the justice of their cause.*



Ugwu's hands are tied and he is made to walk down the road. He sees Mrs. Muokelu, and a few moments later Olanna appears. Olanna talks to the commander, and then a soldier cuts Ugwu free. He is dizzy with relief, but senses Olanna's fury. She takes him home and says he is so stupid he doesn't deserve his good luck. She used all her money to bribe the soldier.

*Ugwu escapes this time, but it is basically inevitable that he will be conscripted eventually, as the soldiers are expending as much energy rounding up civilians to fill out the Biafran army as they are fighting Nigerians. The Biafran "cause" has turned to exploiting the citizens that Biafra was founded to protect.*



Olanna acts chilly towards Ugwu for a few days, until one morning Baby is crying because Olanna won't buy her a roasted lizard a hawker is selling. Olanna and Ugwu share a smile at the absurdity of the situation, and after that things are normal again.

*Ugwu is still technically the "houseboy," but he is also a real part of the family, one that Olanna would do anything to save. They find some laughter amidst the hunger.*



While Olanna is away visiting Kainene, Ugwu overhears Odenigbo talking and laughing with Alice. The next day Odenigbo and Alice sit together on the veranda. Later Ugwu worries that Alice is in the room with Odenigbo, so he knocks to interrupt. Odenigbo is alone, but he says that Professor Ekwenu (who had been working on weapons with the government) is dead and "blown up."

*Ugwu is still very protective of Olanna and Odenigbo's relationship, and he tries to stop what he sees as Odenigbo having an affair with Alice. Professor Ekwenu was a figure representing the hope and ingenuity of Biafra, so his death is especially disheartening.*



Ugwu thinks about the words “blown up” and then resolves to talk to Eberечи. He goes to her house and they make up. She promises to come visit him later. Ugwu goes home, and Odenigbo comes home late and drunk. He says “my good man” and then throws up on the floor. He tells Ugwu not to mention this to Olanna.

Eberечи starts to come around more, and one day Ugwu finally kisses her. She kisses him back and lets him take off her underwear for a moment. Ugwu wants to tell her that he loves her, but again he can’t. Eberечи says she has to go, and Ugwu escorts her halfway home. On his way back he is caught by some armed soldiers. He runs but then falls when he hears a gunshot.

The soldiers throw Ugwu into a van with a teenager and a man in his sixties. The elderly man eventually shames the soldiers into letting him go. The soldier who seems to be in charge is a thirteen-year-old boy called “High-Tech.” The teenager conscripted with Ugwu starts to weep, and Ugwu realizes the extent of his situation – he is about to be sent to the front lines with no real training.

High-Tech explains what their work will be – they are a battalion of field engineers who fight with the *ogbunigwe*. High-Tech does reconnaissance (which he calls “rayconzar”) to find out the location of the enemy, and then they set up their “operation.” Ugwu corrects High-Tech’s pronunciation of “reconnaissance,” which seems to win his respect.

When they reach the training camp – a former primary school – Ugwu’s head is roughly shaved and he is put through a “training” of beating and mockery. None of the other soldiers have boots, uniforms, or **half of a yellow sun** on their sleeves. Ugwu starts to grow terrified of the “casual cruelty of this new world.”

Ugwu is told that the next operation will be soon, and he is both scared and excited. Professor Ekwenu had made the *ogbunigwe* sound glamorous, but the mines just look like dull metal canisters to Ugwu. Ugwu wishes he could tell Eberечи about his experiences, and about his brutal commander who is the only one with a uniform.

*Just like Kainene did with Olanna, Ugwu seems to decide that his anger against Eberечи is trivial in comparison to the suffering and death they are all experiencing daily. Odenigbo is truly hitting rock bottom.*



*This is one of the book’s greatest tragedies – Ugwu is experiencing real romantic love for the first time, but before he can declare and experience it he is conscripted, and thrown into a world of cruelty that will corrupt his soul.*



*We now see just how desperate the Biafrans are in the war. Not only are they forcefully conscripting civilians, but they are even kidnapping children and the elderly to fight and die on the front lines.*



*The violence and fear the soldiers experience, combined with their lack of any accountability, makes them take on new identities and commit deeds that they never would have done at home. Thus a child with a name and family becomes “High-Tech.”*



*This is one of the most powerful statements of the book. The hopeful Biafran cause, represented by the yellow sun – peace and security for the Igbo – has been lost, and the noble Biafran soldiers are now just violent bullies.*



*Ugwu’s ideals are destroyed one by one, but he still can’t help clinging to his old desire to be a soldier for Biafra. The *ogbunigwe* are indeed just homemade bombs that throw scrap metal, and though they are destructive, they aren’t anything noble.*



One day Ugwu finds the book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave: Written by Himself* wedged behind a blackboard. Ugwu reads it in two days and then starts over again. High-Tech likes to sit with him while he reads, and on one day when the soldiers get no food High-Tech brings Ugwu some sardines.

*Frederick Douglass's book is a powerful narrative of experiencing racist brutality and the quest to preserve one's identity and freedom. It is an important link between Ugwu's plight and the plight of oppressed people everywhere.*



High-Tech tells Ugwu that the Nigerians and Biafrans stopped fighting to celebrate Easter, and the two sides even got together to play cards and drink. High-Tech gives Ugwu a better haircut, and Ugwu thinks about people who shave off their hair as a "memorial to death." Ugwu lies awake that night and imagines running home to Odenigbo and Olanna, but there is also a part of him that wants to fight, so he stays.

*This tragically shows that many Nigerians and Biafrans don't even see themselves as enemies, but only fight because they are told to. This is similar to examples of Northern and Southern soldiers in the American Civil War taking breaks from fighting and being friends off of the battlefield.*



Ugwu's first battle is at night, and he huddles in a wet trench. He buried his mine about thirty yards ahead and is now waiting for the "vandals" to approach. Ugwu hears gunfire and thinks about kissing Eberechi. He sees the silhouettes of men nearby, and he detonates his mine. He hits his target and the Nigerians are killed, and the Biafrans rush forward to strip their bodies of boots and guns.

*This is the "glorious" war Ugwu had been imagining. Fortunately he is good at the kind of operations his unit performs. When he is closest to death he thinks first of Eberechi, showing just how strong his feelings for her are.*



Ugwu's unit returns to camp and they all congratulate him, nicknaming him "Target Destroyer." For a few days he is happy, drinking and playing cards. His unit decides to go to a bar nearby. They stop a civilian car and commandeer it for "an operation," ignoring the pleas of the couple inside, who are searching for their son. The man driving says that this is wrong of the soldiers, and a soldier slaps him until Ugwu steps in.

*Ugwu now has his own new identity, "Target Destroyer," which gives him a kind of freedom to commit terrible acts that "Ugwu" would not. We see just how corrupt the soldiers can be, abusing their power and bullying the civilians who are starving on their behalf.*



The soldiers get in the car and drive to the bar. The bar girl says that they have no beer, so they drink the local gin. Ugwu is annoyed by his loud, boastful fellow soldiers. High-Tech starts to roll a cigarette and Ugwu sees that his rolling paper is a piece of the Frederick Douglass book. Ugwu slaps High-Tech, and the other soldiers pull him away. Ugwu thinks that "he was not living his life; his life was living him," and he starts to get very drunk.

*Ugwu seems to have descended into hell, and his only link to his humanity is the Frederick Douglass book. Ugwu is still very young but the war has made him world-weary and depressed, and he starts to lose all hope and faith in Biafra, or even his own humanity. He turns to alcohol like so many others during this war.*



Ugwu goes out to urinate and pretends he is back in the yard in Nsukka. He hears shouting from the bar and goes back in, thinking that the soldiers and the war "tire him." Ugwu sees High-Tech raping the bar girl as other soldiers hold her down and cheer. Someone says that "Target Destroyer" should go next. Ugwu tries to decline, but the soldiers start to tease him. He shrugs and takes off his pants. He doesn't look at the bar girl until he is finished. She is staring at him "with a calm hate."

*This is perhaps the novel's greatest tragedy. Under peer pressure, Ugwu gives up his humanity and joins the horror that has crushed his soul. This is a new kind of tragedy – not only being a victim of great injustice and suffering, but actually becoming so numbed that you contribute to that suffering. Ugwu falls from his first real experience of love to the ultimate corruption of love: rape.*



The war continues, and Ugwu has more “operations” in the trenches. Sometimes his fear overcomes him, and he can only remember the gruesome details of battle when he is back at camp. He reads his book over and over. One day the commander drives up with a goat. The soldiers kill it and cook it, but then the commander takes all of it for himself. The next day the radio says that Umuahia, Biafra’s capital, has fallen.

The soldiers feel that the war is lost, but they are cheered by a rumor that Ojukwu will be visiting. A convoy of cars and officers drive past, and the soldiers all salute. Ugwu has no interest in Ojukwu or in any of the corrupt, arrogant commanders. There is only one captain he admires, a man named Ohaeto. At the next battle Ugwu is next to Ohaeto in the trench, and is he determined to impress him. Ugwu is about to detonate his mine when he is struck by shrapnel and everything goes black.

## PART 4, CHAPTER 30

Richard is traveling with two American journalists, both named Charles. One is a redhead and one is “plump.” They have been traveling a long time, and the Americans smell bad. Richard dislikes the redhead, who asks about the war’s one dead white man – an Italian oil worker – and ignores the thousands of dead Africans. Richard has learned that a rule of Western journalism is that “one hundred dead black people equal one dead black person.”

The Americans ask about the women in Nigeria, and Richard defensively mentions Kainene. They reach the refugee camp and the Americans are horrified to see a group of children roasting two rats. The redhead mutters racist comments and says he wants to see the “real Biafrans,” who will want to talk about the cause instead of just food. He demands that Richard take him to another refugee camp.

The redhead interviews a woman and marvels at her patriotism, saying “the Biafran propaganda machine is great.” Richard says that there is no propaganda – the resistance is strong because the Nigerians kill civilians. The redhead mocks Richard for saying “we” when he describes the Biafrans, but the “plump one” tries to befriend Richard and seems embarrassed by his colleague.

*The rest of Ugwu’s war experience seems like a blur after this low point of his life. He has basically dehumanized himself now, and so keeps fighting without really experiencing emotion. We see more examples of corruption among those with power in Biafra.*



*Ugwu has basically become numb, and is probably experiencing PTSD. He has lost all of his faith and loyalty to Biafra, the war, and Ojukwu, though the other soldiers still seem optimistic. Adichie makes it seem like Ugwu has died, and she waits a long time before revealing the truth.*



*Adichie expands the lens of her story through these foreign journalists, showing how the world (particularly Americans) viewed the Biafran conflict. Richard’s “rule of Western journalism” is unfortunately still very relevant.*



*The Americans, particularly the redhead, already have a narrative of the war in mind, and they are just trying to find facts to fit their predisposed worldview. Richard is eager to distance himself from these other white men and show that he is a “real” Biafran.*



*Richard is perhaps being naïve in claiming to be a Biafran, but he certainly has greater experience and sympathy with the Biafrans than the redhead does. There is definitely Biafran propaganda, but there is also desperation and the unifying force of the Igbo massacres.*



Richard takes the Americans to lunch and then to the airstrip. A plane flies by and fires at them as they wait for their plane, but the airport manager acts like it is nothing to worry about. They watch a plane flying in relief, and the “plump one” comments on how mean the pilots are to the men unloading the planes, as the pilots are being paid thousands for their work.

*These are the pilots flying in relief to the Biafrans. They are justifiably tense because the Nigerians fire even at relief planes, but the pilots also dehumanize the Biafrans and seem to ignore their plight.*



Richard gets angry at the redhead about America, which is doing nothing while Biafrans are dying. The redhead retorts that people are dying everywhere – his own brother’s body was just returned from Vietnam. After the two Americans get on their plane and leave, Richard comes up with the title for his book: “The World Was Silent When We Died.” It will be an angry condemnation of how the world ignored Biafra.

*With the mention of Vietnam, Adichie zooms out to remind us of another conflict resulting in thousands of deaths, supported by a colonial power (America) with economic interests in the region. It now seems likely that Richard is the author of the “The World Was Silent When We Died” sections.*



Richard goes home and tells Kainene his title. She is wary of the word “we,” and he counters that the Nigerian bombs do not care about British passports. Kainene has been happier and laughing more lately, and she and Olanna are close again. She wasn’t even angry or resentful when Richard and Olanna finally saw each other again.

*Kainene rightfully questions Richard’s identification with the Biafrans. He is in as much danger as they are from bombs, but he still has the privilege of leaving if he wants to, and he was not in danger during the Igbo pogrom. The sisters’ relationship, the most important of the book, is the one that best survives the war.*



There is a section from *The World Was Silent When We Died*. The author’s epilogue is a poem, modeled after one of Okeoma’s. The poem is about children with kwashiorkor, and rich Westerners looking at pictures of them and then returning to their happy lives.

*Adichie now gets more pointed in her direct critiques of the reader. By showing such intimate and personal suffering and story arcs, Adichie reminds us that indifference to others’ pain can be an enormous evil in the world.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 31

Olanna becomes desperate with worry about Ugwu, and is always fearing to see his body somewhere. She gets an old package from Mohammed containing soap, underwear, and chocolate. Mohammed writes about his polo game, which infuriates Olanna. Olanna hears shouting outside and sees some militia members pushing two women along, calling them saboteurs.

*Olanna had defended Mohammed in the past, and she still doesn’t consider him a “vandal” or an evil man, but his distance from her suffering makes her resent him. At the same time, the Igbo persecution of suspected “saboteurs” starts to resemble the persecution of the Igbo.*



Mama Oji, who is with Olanna, says that Olanna should be careful of Alice. Olanna assures her that Alice isn’t a saboteur, and Mama Oji tells Olanna that Alice sits with Odenigbo when Olanna is away. Olanna is surprised at this, but she still trusts Odenigbo.

*Odenigbo’s possible affair with Alice is never really clarified. He seemed to have learned his lesson after Amala, and Alice was becoming Olanna’s friend, but this second betrayal seems almost small compared to the war.*





Olanna goes to see Alice, and finds that her former admiration for her has turned to jealousy and dislike. Olanna then sees Mrs. Muokelu, who vaguely warns her to find petrol for her car, as Umuahia may fall. Mrs. Muokelo cannot say this straightforwardly, as it could be grounds to accuse her of being a saboteur. Olanna is shaken by the fact that the fervently patriotic Mrs. Muokelo has lost her faith in Biafra.

There is no petrol at the station, and Olanna tells Odenigbo that they need to find some on the black market. He changes the subject, and is clearly drunk. Olanna remembers how he used to drink some in Nsukka – there the alcohol had sharpened his mind and given him confidence, but here it makes him silent and depressed.

Olanna uses the rest of the money her mother sent her and buys some petrol from a man in an outhouse. When she gets home there is an army jeep outside, and Kainene tells her that Ugwu has died. Olanna can only say “no” and shake her head. Kainene says that Madu told her that Ugwu’s body wasn’t found, but there were very few survivors in Ugwu’s unit and he wasn’t among them.

Olanna immediately goes to the bar, pours Odenigbo’s drink onto the floor, and tells him that Ugwu has died. She yells and runs away when the bar owner comes to hug her. The next few days pass in a blur. Odenigbo stays home and takes care of Baby, and Olanna sleeps on a mat outside. She doesn’t cry, except for when she tells Eberechi about Ugwu, and Eberechi screams and calls her a liar.

The people in the building sing for Ugwu in the yard, and Alice brings out her piano. Olanna is repulsed by Odenigbo’s presence, and feels that his drinking is somehow complicit in Ugwu’s death. The couple speaks to each other only about necessities. Olanna finds that she still cannot accept the reality of Ugwu’s death, and she still believes him to be alive but wounded somewhere.

One day a man comes to see Alice. He says that he is from her hometown, and he tells how the “vandals” captured it weeks before. They made everyone come out and say “One Nigeria,” claiming that they would give them rice if they did this. Instead the vandals shot them all, even the children. There is no one left in Alice’s family now.

*Even the patriotic Mrs. Muokelu could be accused of being a “saboteur” just for expressing doubt in Biafran victory. If anyone claims to know that a town will fall, then they can be accused of having a hand in the fall itself, and so the denial of reality perpetuates itself on pain of death.*



*Olanna and Odenigbo seemed stronger than ever at the start of the war, but the months in between have done horrible damage to their relationship. Odenigbo hardly even appears as a character anymore, as he is mostly away getting drunk at a bar. His illusions have been smashed.*



*We haven’t seen many shows of affection between Olanna and Ugwu, but it is clear that she sees him as a member of her immediate family. The lack of real evidence of Ugwu’s death does make it more questionable to the reader.*



*We have not seen many characters’ perspectives on Ugwu, but now Adichie shows just how important he was to everyone. Olanna can’t even take care of Baby, so crippling is her grief. Eberechi also feels the tragedy of her love with Ugwu being cut off at its very beginning.*



*Olanna is actually right about Ugwu, but this is also another example of the human tendency to deny reality when it is too horrible. In some ways Ugwu was like a son to Olanna and Odenigbo, holding them together, and now that he is gone they drift further apart.*



*This terrible story shows just how painful any kind of reunion between Nigeria and Biafra will be. Even unity, the supposed Nigerian goal, is used as a justification for genocide.*



Alice throws herself on the ground and rolls around in grief. She won't let anyone come near her, and she thrashes with such force that the stones in the road cut her. Odenigbo comes out and picks her up, and she starts to cry on his shoulder. Olanna thinks Odenigbo holds Alice like someone who has held her before.

*Alice becomes more human and sympathetic in her great suffering, though even in these moments of tragedy the personal jealousies or betrayals of love remain (regardless of whether Olanna's suspicions are correct or incorrect).*



Alice finally calms down, and the man who delivered the message says he will take her with him, as there are some people from the village in his compound. Odenigbo asks Olanna to go get the Alice's things, but Olanna refuses and goes into her room. She eventually falls asleep.

*Olanna seems to be living in a blur of grief now, and she lacks the clear, focused anger she felt after Odenigbo's betrayal with Amala. Now his possible infidelity is only a drop in an ocean of suffering.*



Olanna wakes up to the sound of shelling. She and Odenigbo hurry to the car, but it won't start. Everyone else in the building evacuates, and Olanna won't let anyone into their car. Odenigbo tells Olanna to start walking with Baby, but then the car finally starts. As they drive Olanna asks Odenigbo if he slept with Alice. He is silent, but then denies it. They are quiet for the rest of the drive.

*We never get more of an answer than this about Odenigbo and Alice, and we never see Alice again. It seems likely that Odenigbo did sleep with Alice, but Adichie also shows how much the situation has changed from the early sixties, to the point that infidelity seems not so bad compared to other evils.*



They reach Kainene's house in Orlu and unpack their things. They have dinner with Kainene and Richard. Richard offers Odenigbo some brandy – it is the first time they have spoken since Odenigbo told Richard to stop coming to his house – but Odenigbo declines and goes to bed. Olanna follows, but the couple barely speak to each other.

*Richard and Kainene's relationship now seems much more secure—and more important—than Odenigbo and Olanna's. The protagonists (minus Ugwu) are finally all together in one place.*



Olanna then comes back out and talks to Kainene. She tells her that Odenigbo “has become somebody else,” drinking all day and possibly sleeping with Alice. She says she can't stand to have him near her now. Kainene says that this is good, as Olanna's previous blind devotion was “very lazy.”

*Kainene has always been the stronger, more confident sister, and she praises Olanna for showing some confidence of her own. Olanna's “lazy” loyalty to Odenigbo is similar to many Biafrans' lazy loyalty to their country.*



In the morning Kainene and Olanna share some face cream and then go to the refugee camp. The children there are playing with pieces of shrapnel, and when Baby finds some Olanna angrily takes it away. Kainene asks her to give it back, saying that Olanna tries to protect Baby too much from life. She says that their own parents protected them too much from life.

*The sisters now grow closer than ever, and we see how good they are for each other. We have never really seen them together, but now they truly seem like twins who fulfill each other. Olanna finally gets called out on her over-protectiveness.*



Kainene then asks Olanna why she was always so eager to please their parents. Olanna says she supposes she felt sorry for them, and Kainene says that Olanna has always felt sorry for people who didn't need it. Olanna realizes that this is an old resentment for Kainene. In the past she would have talked to Odenigbo about it, but now he has found a new bar and hardly ever leaves it.

*Now that they are close again, Kainene seems to be airing her old resentments against Olanna, and we start to see why she was so distant for so long. Kainene clearly felt that Olanna pitied her for being less pretty and likable, and Kainene justifiably resented this.*



Olanna refuses to worry about Odenigbo, but she worries about Baby and the other children. Their starvation makes them start losing their memories, and their hair starts falling out. Kainene tries to start a garden, but the soil is too dry and nothing grows. The well dries up and the doctor stops visiting. A young girl gets pregnant but won't say who the father is.

Olanna and Kainene always walk home together, discussing Odenigbo and the war. Kainene affirms that Biafra will win, and Olanna believes it more when Kainene says it. Sometimes Richard joins the sisters as they sit outside, but Odenigbo never does. One evening Dr. Nwala arrives to say that Okeoma has been killed. Okeoma had said that he was writing new poems with Olanna as his muse, but no one has found any copies of them.

Olanna starts to scream and she grabs at Odenigbo. They enter their room and have grief-stricken sex. Afterward Odenigbo tells Olanna that she is "so strong," which is something he has never said before. Olanna feels a "sad and unsettling peace."

*The sufferings keep pouring onto Biafra, and they hit the children hardest of all. Even if Biafra were to win the war, they would have hardly any resources left to move on independently, and the next generation is now starved and malnourished.*



*Kainene sees things with clear eyes – particularly the corruption of the Biafran army and government – but she is still convinced that Biafra will be victorious. This belief is perhaps the only thing that makes the characters' suffering endurable. This is another tragedy of lost art and lost potential because of a meaningless war.*



*Sexuality takes many forms in the novel, and here it is an expression of mutual grief. Odenigbo's affirmation of Olanna's strength is out of character, but it seems to be a sign that they will be reunited.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 32

The narrative returns to Ugwu, who is badly wounded but alive. Some soldiers carry him to a hospital, and he is excruciatingly thirsty but no one brings him water. He feels himself bleeding, and has visions of Eberechi and of Death as a "complete knowingness." One night a priest comes, and Ugwu recognizes him as Father Damian, a priest who worked with Olanna in Nsukka. Father Damian promises to tell Odenigbo about Ugwu, and he gives him some milk and sugar.

A few days later Richard comes for Ugwu and takes him away in his car. Ugwu's wounds are exacerbated by the bumpy car, but finally they reach a hospital more equipped to deal with its patients. Richard rambles and Ugwu is comforted by the sound of his voice, as it reminds him of the old days in Nsukka. Richard says that Ugwu said the name "Eberechi" many times in his sleep, and he asks Ugwu about her.

Richard asks if Ugwu was afraid in the war. Ugwu answers that he found the Frederick Douglass book, and was "so sad and angry for the writer." Richard says he will use this in his own book, and Ugwu asks him about it. Richard tells him the title. Ugwu says "The World Was Silent When We Died" to himself, and he is haunted by the face of the bar girl.

*More characters return from the old peaceful days, for better or for worse. The hospitals are clearly stretched beyond capacity, as little can be done even for a wounded soldier – and even less attention is paid to civilians.*



*In his near-death experience Ugwu clings to the things most important to him – his love for Eberechi, and his happy memories with Olanna and Odenigbo in Nsukka.*



*Another thing still sacred to Ugwu in his numbness is the Frederick Douglass book. This is an especially poignant example of the power of art and writing in times of great despair. Now that he has some distance from war, Ugwu is horrified by the rape he committed.*



When Ugwu comes home Olanna and Odenigbo hug him, which they have never done before. Ugwu starts to cry and tells the story of his experiences, using “words like *enemy fire* and *Attack HQ* with a casual coldness.” Olanna tells him that Okeoma is dead, and that Adanna died of kwashiorkor. Ugwu has a wound in one of his buttocks, so he lies on his side for weeks. Olanna feeds him and keeps up his will to live.

Ugwu relives his battle experiences over and over, along with the face of the bar girl. Once he dreams of her, but her face is Eberechi’s. He wakes up and hates himself. Ugwu decides to give himself time to redeem himself, and to then go find Eberechi. If she is still waiting for him, it will be a sign that he has atoned for his sins.

As Ugwu heals he starts working at the refugee camp during the day and writing at night. First he writes letters, then a poem, and then he starts to write about his experiences. Ugwu laments that he will never be able to capture the essences of the boys hunting for lizards, or the bombs falling on hungry people, but he resolves to try. The more he writes, the fewer nightmares he has.

One day Kainene learns that Father Marcel, a priest working at the refugee camp, is the father of a young girl’s child, and he has been sleeping with many of the refugees before giving them food. Kainene throws him out, growing “magnificent in her rage.” Ugwu is ashamed and thinks that Kainene, Olanna, and Eberechi would all hate him if they knew what he had done.

At night Ugwu listens to Olanna and Kainene talk, creating “their own world” that Odenigbo and Richard can never enter, and he uses their words as inspiration for his writing. Harrison sometimes sits with Ugwu, and is respectful to him now that he has fought for Biafra. When they listen to the radio Ugwu walks away, as he cannot stomach the false optimism of the Biafran propaganda.

One day Ojukwu is about to give a speech, but Ugwu tells Harrison to turn the radio off – he would rather hear the birds. Harrison is offended and says that it will be a great speech, and Ugwu says “there is no such thing as greatness.” Ugwu watches four children playing War. Yesterday they had been five, but one had died of kwashiorkor. That child, whose name Ugwu cannot remember, had once been left out with his mother during an air raid, and Ugwu had run out and grabbed him. Ugwu gets up and goes to help dig a grave for the child.

*All the divides between “houseboy” and “master” have been broken down by now. This is a time of relief, but also a time to assess how truly horrible the situation is – this is a teenage boy numbly discussing his war experience and being told about children starving to death.*



*Ugwu’s past experiences with girls – his lust for Nnesinachi and desire for tear gas, his love for Eberechi and wish to respect her, and his imaginings of a monstrous Hausa soldier raping his loved ones – all come to a head as he is haunted by his great sin.*



*Ugwu was saved from total despair and numbness by the Frederick Douglass book, and now he turns again to art and writing to keep himself from giving up the will to live. His struggle to write about the suffering Biafrans becomes Adichie’s own struggle, and we see the enormity of the thing she is trying to portray.*



*Ugwu feels (rightfully) that he has betrayed his own former self and all the women in his life, but he becomes determined to bring some good out of the evil he has suffered and caused. Father Marcel is yet another example of the lows humanity can sink to in times of great need.*



*Ugwu starts to see things clearly, things which Adichie has shown all along but none of the characters have accepted – that the sisters’ most important relationship is with each other (not with their romantic partners) and that the Biafran propaganda is mostly lies at this point.*



*Ugwu’s numbness seems like a sign of PTSD, and at the very least he has been totally desensitized to Biafran propaganda and false hope. This is the bleak ending to possibly the book’s most important (and most powerful) chapter, where Ugwu and Biafra both hit rock bottom, but Ugwu struggles against his despair and self-loathing and tries to cling to humanity and love.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 33

Richard sits with Kainene, Olanna, and Odenigbo as they eat and laugh together. Richard has started to enjoy these evenings, as they remind him of Nsukka. Odenigbo is still brooding, but he talks more now. Odenigbo says that the white man has succeeded in his mission – to conquer Africa through racism.

Kainene says that she wants to cross over to a Nigerian-occupied market to trade for things. Odenigbo warns her that it is dangerous, but Kainene says that lots of people have been doing it. Olanna says she will go with her next time. Richard is surprised to hear of Kainene's plan, but he bows to the certainty in her voice.

The next morning Richard and Kainene wake up early to see a crowd kicking at a young soldier – **half of a yellow sun** still visible on his torn uniform – who had been stealing food. Kainene stops the crowd and sends the soldier away with a small bag of ground cassava. Kainene is clearly upset by this scene. She kisses Richard and then sets off to go trade.

Richard visits “Big Men” all day, but when he comes home Kainene is still gone. He talks to Olanna, who criticizes the Biafran plan to rely on “self-sufficiency and farming.” Richard plays with Baby for a while, but Kainene still doesn't return. Richard asks Ugwu about his writing, but Ugwu is shy about it.

Odenigbo asks Richard about Kainene and then turns on the radio. Ojukwu is announcing that he will go abroad in search of peace for Biafra. Night falls, and Richard and Odenigbo search the refugee camp for Kainene, but no one has seen her.

Two days pass, and Richard starts to slip into despair. Odenigbo says that Kainene is probably just held up on the other side, as delays happen all the time, and Olanna agrees, though she looks afraid. Olanna and Richard drive around and search for her. Richard shows people his picture of Kainene to try and jog their memory, but sometimes he accidentally takes out the picture of the **roped pot** instead. On the drive home Richard starts to cry. Olanna yells at him to stop, angrily saying that Kainene is just delayed on the other side for a few days.

*Among all the suffering and death the most important things in life still spring up briefly – romantic love, sibling love, love between friends, and the importance of cultural identity and intellectual growth.*



*We saw Mrs. Muokelu do this earlier without incident, but Kainene's plan seems to have some momentous foreshadowing to it. The brief moment of happiness and togetherness – when all five protagonists are united – is about to be broken again.*



*The Biafran flag is now a symbol of lost hope and crushed dreams, as the optimistic yellow sun is literally soiled and torn apart, and the “noble” Biafran soldier is reduced to stealing food from starving civilians. This is the last time we see Kainene.*



*Kainene's absence is already ominous, but it just seems like a usual inconvenience of wartime to the characters. Biafra's plan to rely on farming is tragically ridiculous considering the famine and starvation going on.*



*Some Biafrans are still optimistic about Ojukwu's journey, but many also see it as the leader running away from a lost war and abandoning his people.*



*Kainene, the most important protagonist to never be given a narrative voice, now disappears into a tragic mystery. Richard's confusion of Kainene with the roped pot completes the roped pot's symbolism – it represents Richard's love for Kainene, but this love is wrapped up in his desire to belong in Biafra, and the objectification and exciting “otherness” of both Nigerian art and Kainene herself.*





## PART 4, CHAPTER 34

Baby's hair keeps falling out even though Olanna brushes it gently. A week has passed since Kainene's disappearance. There are rumors that Ojukwu didn't leave in search of peace, but instead ran away. Olanna refuses to believe this. Ugwu comes in and Olanna tells him that she keeps thinking about the braided hair of the child's head in the calabash. Ugwu writes down her story. Olanna suddenly feels that his writing makes her story important, and she keeps talking.

Odenigbo and Richard return from searching for Kainene, but they have no success. A few days later Olanna goes to check the mortuary for her sister's body, though she knows that even if Kainene is dead she wouldn't be there. People are crowded outside the mortuary, crying to identify dead family members. Olanna gets in with a note from Madu. As she looks at all the dead women, she thinks of the line from Okeoma's poem: "If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise." She vomits.

Later that day a woman suddenly rushes into the family's yard carrying a green branch and saying that the war is over. Odenigbo turns on the radio. An unfamiliar voice defends the Biafran cause but says that there is no option left but to surrender, as the suffering of the Biafran civilians has grown too great. Olanna gets dizzy and cannot believe it. After a while she says that now she can go find Kainene.

A week passes before Olanna sees some Nigerian soldiers. They are smartly dressed and laughing, promising to give girls food if they marry them. The roads are still closed between Biafra and Nigeria, but Odenigbo wants to pack so they can go look for Kainene as soon as they open.

Olanna's cousin Odinchezo staggers into the compound on his way to another town. He says that the Hausa soldiers didn't give him trouble on the road, though they asked him to urinate on a picture of Ojukwu. Odinchezo says he has heard that the government will take over all Biafran bank accounts. Soon the markets are full of food again, and Olanna stares at it all in disbelief.

Richard leaves on the night that the roads open. Olanna and Odenigbo go the next morning, leaving a note for Kainene if she should return there. The family heads towards Nsukka, and they pass a few checkpoints without incident. Olanna marvels at all the Nigerian vehicles that the Biafrans destroyed. Olanna still cannot believe that Biafra lost, and she feels cheated. They finally reach their old house, which is still standing. Mama has been buried in the yard by Odenigbo's cousin.

*Despite Olanna's attempts to protect Baby from the world, the child is still dangerously close to starvation and kwashiorkor. We now start to suspect that the author of "The World Was Silent When We Died" isn't Richard at all. Olanna gains confidence by knowing that her story is important and will be heard.*



*Olanna still has a little privilege even as she goes to try and identify her sister's body. She knows that Kainene won't be in a Biafran mortuary, but she feels the need to take some kind of action in the face of such horror and uncertainty. Okeoma's inspirational poem now seems tragic considering his own fate and the fate of Biafra's yellow sun.*



*Olanna, like many Biafrans, has been clinging to hope even in the midst of a living hell, and so this surrender comes as a surprise to her. The war is finally over – starvation, famine, violence, and foreign antagonism have broken Biafra at last.*



*The contrast between the well-fed, well-dressed Nigerian troops and the starving Biafrans is especially heartbreaking. Now begins the painful reunion of the shattered country.*



*The Nigerian government doesn't exactly welcome the Biafrans back with open arms. Nigeria did indeed liquidate all Biafran bank accounts, no matter how wealthy the person was before, and they gave every Biafran 20 Nigerian pounds with which to start their lives over.*



*The themes of loyalty and betrayal again expand to the political, as the divided country attempts to reunite, and Olanna feels cheated by Biafra itself – having invested so much hope, suffering, and struggle in what was ultimately a lost cause. Richard starts to drift further away from reality and his friends as Kainene's loss tortures him.*



They keep driving into Nsukka and are stopped by a belligerent Nigerian officer. The officer makes Odenigbo and Ugwu get out of the car and carry wood, and he slaps Odenigbo for resisting. Then he makes Olanna get out and work too. Olanna warns a man leering at her not to touch her, but the officer says that his troops are well trained, unlike the Biafrans, and no one will touch her.

They watch the officer stop a man wearing glasses, remove him from his car, and flog him. Odenigbo had removed his glasses earlier, to avoid looking like an intellectual. The Nigerian assumes the man with glasses wrote propaganda for Ojukwu. The officer finally sends Odenigbo and Olanna on their way.

*The Nigerian soldiers can basically act with impunity and treat the "rebels" as badly as they want. The officer's jibe about his troops being well-trained is especially poignant because of the truth behind it – Nigerian soldiers did rape civilians, but so did the Biafrans (like Ugwu).*



*Far from being a peacefully united country, there is still rampant violence and ethnic hatred. The distrust of the Igbo will take a long time to go away, and even still exists in present-day Nigeria.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 35

Ugwu finds a pile of burned books in the yard of Odenigbo's old house. Olanna and Odenigbo stare at it, and Odenigbo realizes all his old research papers are in the pile too. He sits down on the ground and looks "so undignified, so unmasterly." They explore the house and find it stripped bare and cobwebbed. The bathtub is full of dried feces. Ugwu wants to clean, to scrub away all the filth, but he knows that the house will never be like it once was.

Ugwu goes home to Opi and is greeted by his father's second wife, and then the rest of the village. Anulika looks changed - she has grown uglier and won't look Ugwu in the eyes. Ugwu's father embraces him, but he says that Ugwu's mother died from her coughing. Ugwu falls to the ground and grieves.

Later Ugwu sits with Anulika, but she seems to have no wit or energy left. Ugwu wonders what happened to their old closeness, and they are both relieved when they part ways. Ugwu then sees Nnesinachi carrying a baby. She greets him and says that she lived with a Hausa soldier during the war. Nnesinachi tells Ugwu that while she and her soldier were away, a group of Nigerians gang-raped Anulika. Ugwu goes to the stream and sobs.

Ugwu returns to Nsukka but doesn't tell Olanna about Anulika. Olanna is still preoccupied with finding Kainene, and is convinced that she is still alive. Ugwu cleans the house and then goes to Freedom Square, where the Nigerians burned all the books in the university library. Ugwu hears that the Nigerians have sworn to kill five percent of Nsukka academics, and one night soldiers take a professor living nearby.

*Ugwu has referred to Odenigbo as "Master" throughout the entire book, despite the crumbling of all the barriers between them, and it is this final destruction of books and papers that finally makes the Master "unmasterly." Everything about the happy past has been corrupted and destroyed.*



*Ugwu's mother's death wasn't even caused by the war, but it still comes as another tragic loss heaped upon the wreckage of Ugwu's young soul.*



*Ugwu's ideal of Nnesinachi has casually slipped away. There is a horrible irony in Anulika's rape – it is almost a punishment for Ugwu's sin, but it is even more terrible that it isn't a punishment on Ugwu himself, but on his innocent sister. He doesn't see the bar girl again, but he does see the long-lasting effects of his actions on his own sister.*



*Ugwu grieves deeply but he continues to live, and he shows his willingness to survive by returning to his familiar "houseboy" activity – cleaning. The persecution and murder of the Igbo continues despite the war's end. The burning of books is always a sign of tyranny and injustice.*



Ugwu hears banging on the door and thinks that soldiers have come for Odenigbo, but it is Miss Adebayo. She starts to cry when she sees Odenigbo and hears about Okeoma. Ugwu dislikes her “Nigerianness,” and the fact that she didn’t even know about the sufferings of Biafra until she heard about it in London, but he still wishes for the evenings of long ago when she would argue with Odenigbo.

*Miss Adebayo is like Mohammed, a sympathetic character from the past who becomes unsympathetic by her very distance from the Biafran suffering. There is still oppression of the Igbo, but the Igbo also have a lingering distrust of the Hausa and Yoruba.*



One day Ugwu thinks Miss Adebayo is banging on the door, but then two soldiers burst in. They make everyone in the house lie flat on the ground. They eat some of Ugwu’s cooking, shred some of Odenigbo’s papers, and then leave. After they go Ugwu tries to give Baby a bath, but she wants to do it herself for the first time.

*The war is over, but the “casual cruelty” of the world continues. Baby has never really had any agency or character of her own, and her first act of independence in the new Nigeria is a small sign of hope, though it comes after she sees her parents being trodden upon and indicates a desire to clean herself, perhaps, of that experience.*



Ugwu comes back to the kitchen and finds Richard reading his notes. Richard says that Ugwu’s writing is “fantastic,” and Ugwu says it will be part of a big book about the life of Biafra. He says he wishes he still had the Frederick Douglass book with him. Richard says he will look for it. He is going to search for Kainene in Port Harcourt, Umuahia, and Lagos.

*After all the suffering, loss, and death there are few things to look forward to among the characters, but Ugwu seems to be driven onward by his writing. The old Richard would have been condescending or jealous of Ugwu’s writing, but by now he is totally devastated by Kainene’s loss and accepts that Ugwu is the rightful narrator of the Biafran story.*



Ugwu asks if Richard will ask about Eberechi when he is in Umuahia, and Richard says he will. Ugwu asks Richard if he is still writing his book, and Richard says he isn’t. He says “the war isn’t my story to tell, really.” Ugwu silently agrees, but says that he liked the title.

*With this revelation Adichie undercuts the trope of the “white savior” in Western literature – instead of Richard telling the story of Biafra to the world and making the biggest difference, it is Ugwu – the character who experienced the war most deeply and horribly, the character who started out as the poorest and least educated, and the character who most deserves to tell the story.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 36

Richard goes to his old house in Nsukka. Harrison couldn’t find the old manuscript he had buried, but Richard doesn’t even care. There is a Nigerian woman living in the house now, and she won’t even let Richard in to look for photographs of Kainene.

*Richard has lost yet another manuscript, but it is nothing compared to his loss of Kainene, and he has now accepted that Ugwu is the true narrator of the war. Nigerians seized almost all Igbo property and jobs, and didn’t return them after the war.*



Richard then goes to Kainene’s old house in Port Harcourt, only because Kainene’s mother asked him to. She had originally been very confident that Kainene would be found, but over time her faith has diminished. Madu is staying with Kainene’s parents, as he had been dismissed from the army.

*Madu is extremely lucky to still be alive. Kainene’s parents seem just as unsympathetic as Mohammed, as they only return to Nigeria now that their safety is assured.*



Richard then goes to Umuahia and finds Eberechi's address. The old woman who greets him looks unsurprised at his presence, which surprises Richard, as he is used to "his Igbo-speaking whiteness being noticed, being marveled at." She invites Richard inside and tells him that Eberechi was killed by shelling. Richard decides not to tell Ugwu this, but to let him keep his dream until he finds out the truth on his own.

*Richard still has traces of British racism even about his own Igbo-ness, as he assumes that he is special and unique. Without Kainene and in the anger and grief of her loss these problematic feelings start to resurface. Ugwu has lost another ideal and the only true love he experienced, but Richard lets him keep the small hope that he himself still holds about Kainene.*



Richard then goes to Lagos, where Kainene's parents greet him. After lunch Richard goes onto the veranda with Madu. Madu says the rumors are that a million people died, but he thinks it is more. Madu tries to talk to Richard about Kainene, and Richard asks if he loves her. Madu says of course he does. Richard asks Madu if he ever touched her, and Madu only laughs. Richard wants to demand to know if Madu laid his "filthy black hand on her," but instead he hits Madu in the face.

*Richard is totally sinking into despair, and as he loses control he also lets down his guard and slips easily into racist, dehumanizing insults towards Madu. Madu remains untouchable and confident as Richard feels himself collapsing, and he hates Madu for this. The number of casualties of the Biafran War is still unknown, but estimated between one and three million.*



Madu says "you idiot," and then punches Richard to the ground. Madu then helps him up and examines his nose. Richard suddenly realizes that he will never see Kainene again, and his life will be dark and shadowy from now on.

*Richard's story arc is almost the opposite of Ugwu's – he starts out as the most privileged character, but ends up in despair, totally ineffective and without hope. Richard still has the privilege of returning to England if he wants, but it is clear that his emotional life is totally broken.*



## PART 4, CHAPTER 37

Olanna experiences mood swings between great hope and crippling despair. She cannot even grieve for Kainene, because she still doesn't know where she is or whether she is alive or not. After the soldiers came and ate their rice, Olanna took all her Biafran pounds and burned them. Odenigbo accused her of "burning memory," but Olanna responded that her memory is inside her.

*The mystery surrounding Kainene is an especially heartbreaking and unique way to end the novel. The Biafran money is now practically useless. It only serves as a reminder of lost hope, and is even dangerous to possess, as Nigerian soldiers would think anyone holding the money were still rebellious.*



Weeks pass, and foreign academics send books to Odenigbo. Edna sends Olanna a package from Boston, where she lives now. Olanna's bank account in Lagos has been erased, and she feels naked without all her savings. She starts looking for signs about Kainene's fate in Baby's questions, and she even consults a *dibia* (medicine man).

*Life slowly starts to begin again, but there is very little to help the characters going forward. All Biafrans are left with hardly any money, and most have had their jobs and property seized by Nigerians.*



Odenigbo disparages the *dibia*, but Olanna says she will believe in anything if it brings back her sister. She is reminded of the old Igbo belief that people are reincarnated, and she declares that in her next life Kainene will be her sister. The book ends with the dedication of *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Ugwu, the author, dedicates it to “Master, my good man.”

*The book ends with these small notes of hope amidst the wreckage of so much suffering. Olanna (and Adichie) seems to say that even if things cannot be made right in this lifetime, there is still the possibility that we can learn from history and not repeat its mistakes. Ugwu now becomes a hopeful and empowering character, as he has grown past his poverty, suffering, and sin to write the narrative of the Biafran War. He is no longer the houseboy idolizing Odenigbo's English – Ugwu is now the “Master,” controlling his own identity and working for the good of his family and culture, using English phrases like “my good man” for his own purposes, subverting the colonizer's tools to strengthen Nigeria – just as Adichie herself does as a Nigerian writing in English, bringing awareness, humanity, and beauty to a past tragedy.*







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