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Representations of Women in Contemporary Anglophone War Fiction: The Portrayal of Female Characters as Victims of Conflict and/or Agents of Their Own Destinies

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Dissertação realizada no âmbito do Mestrado em Estudos Anglo-Americanos, orientada pelo
Professor Doutor Jorge Bastos da Silva

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto

Outubro de 2020

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Em memória da minha mãe.

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Declaração de honra

Declaro que a presente tese é de minha autoria e não foi utilizado previamente noutro curso ou unidade curricular, desta ou de outra instituição. As referências a outros autores (afirmações, ideias, pensamentos) respeitam escrupulosamente as regras da atribuição, e encontram-se devidamente indicadas no texto e nas referências bibliográficas, de acordo com as normas de referência. Tenho consciência de que a prática de plágio e auto-plágio constitui um ilícito académico.

Porto, 12 de Outubro de 2020

Luisa Bechara de Lamounier Barbosa

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Resumo

Ao longo da história, predominou no gênero de ficção de guerra o foco nas vivências masculinas. Algumas obras contemporâneas de ficção de guerra, no entanto, desafiam essa tendência e trazem as perspectivas e experiências das mulheres durante a guerra para o centro da discussão. Com isso em mente, o objetivo desta tese é discutir as experiências das protagonistas femininas em quatro obras anglófonas contemporâneas de ficção de guerra: *The Book Thief* (2005), de Markus Zusak, romance ambientado na Alemanha nazista e cuja protagonista é Liesel Meminger, uma menina de 9 anos; *Girl at War* (2015), de Sara Nović, um romance focado na experiência de Ana Jurić, de 10 anos, durante a Guerra Civil Iugoslava; *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, um romance que documenta a guerra civil nigeriana e representa seus efeitos no relacionamento das irmãs gêmeas Olanna e Kainene Ozobia; e *The Nightingale* (2015), de Kristin Hannah, um romance focado nas lutas das irmãs francesas Vianne Mauriac e Isabelle Rossignol na França ocupada pelos nazistas. Esta tese abordará o amadurecimento de Ana e Liesel e a busca das protagonistas pelo desenvolvimento de uma narrativa e identidade pessoais, e discutirá os vínculos, as trajetórias e as dificuldades vividas pelas irmãs Olanna e Kainene e Vianne e Isabelle. Além de lidar com temas recorrentes na literatura de guerra, como morte, destruição, trauma, perda e luta pela sobrevivência, os romances enfocam os desafios específicos de crescer durante a guerra e as dificuldades e particularidades de ser mulher na guerra, abordando temas como os papéis e expectativas de gênero, incluindo a maternidade na guerra; relações desiguais de poder e violência de gênero; e como as protagonistas negociam a perda de controle e autodeterminação na busca de agência e autonomia sobre seus próprios destinos.

Palavras-chave: guerra; literatura de guerra; gênero; violência de gênero; romance de formação

Abstract

Throughout history, war fiction as a genre has predominantly focused on the male soldier's experience of war. Some contemporary works of war fiction, however, have challenged this trend in order to bring women's perspectives and experiences to the centre of the discussion. With this in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to discuss the journeys and experiences of the female protagonists of four works of contemporary Anglophone war fiction: Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), a novel set in Nazi Germany and centred on the life of nine-year-old Liesel Meminger; Sara Nović's *Girl at War* (2015), a novel focused on the experience of ten-year-old Ana Jurić during the Yugoslavian Civil War; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), a novel documenting the Nigerian civil war and fictionalizing its effects on the relationship of twin sisters Olanna and Kainene Ozobia; and Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale* (2015), a novel focused on the struggles of French sisters Vianne Mauriac and Isabelle Rossignol living in Nazi-occupied France. This thesis will discuss the coming-of-age journeys of Ana and Liesel and their quest for the development of a personal narrative and identity, and discuss the relationships, trajectories and struggles of sisters Olanna and Kainene and Vianne and Isabelle. In addition to dealing with recurrent themes in war literature, such as death, destruction, trauma, loss, and struggle for survival, these novels focus on the specific challenges of growing up during war and the struggles and particularities of being a woman in times of war, tackling, to varying degrees, existing gender roles and expectations, including motherhood in war; unequal gendered relations of power and gender violence; and how protagonists negotiate the increasing loss of control and self-determination in search of agency and autonomy over their own destinies.

Keywords: war; war literature; gender; gender violence; coming-of-age novel

List of abbreviations

WWI – World War I

WWII – World War II

HYS – Half of a Yellow Sun

GW – Girl at War

TBT – The Book Thief

TN – The Nightingale

Introduction

Why are humans so drawn to tales of war? Why do we, consistently throughout history, pass on stories of war, generation to generation? How can we, years, sometimes decades and even centuries after events took place, continue to look to the past to find meaning in the present? And, when the bridge between those who experienced it and those who look back is severed by time, death or forgetting, why do people still rewrite and reimagine it? With each new literary work, what new information, perspective or experience is then made available to us in the present? The answer to these questions is not easy or straightforward, but with every generation there are those who try to answer them. My purpose here is not to attempt to answer them directly, although I will certainly need to refer to them, but these are some of the guiding questions which have inspired me to research war, and to look at stories which bring forth new or interesting elements. The body of research in the studies of war is vast and it would have been an impossible task to contemplate all the important contributions here. A selection was then necessary, and for the purposes of this thesis I will be looking at the works of some scholars which have influenced and guided me in my research. This journey began in the development of my undergraduate monograph, completed in 2015, at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Entitled “Metafiction in Kevin Powers’s *The Yellow Birds*”, the aim of that paper was to examine the novel *The Yellow Birds* as a metafictional narrative in which the development of the narrator’s consciousness was linked with the processing of his traumatic experience of war and the organisation of his experience into a personal narrative. In exploring the link between memory, trauma and representation, I was able to identify within the narrative the depiction of certain elements of trauma, including the stages of numbness, late onset of paralysis, depression, and eventual cathartic relief through the narration of an individual’s experience, as well as pinpoint the narrator’s evolving metafictional discussions and concerns on how to build that narrative.

To support my research, I based myself on the works of scholars such as Catherine Savage Brosman, Cathy Caruth, Nigel Hunt, Kate McLoughlin, Lyndsey Stonebridge, Steven G. Kellman, Patricia Waugh and Tim O’Brien, some of which will be revisited in the course of this thesis. Although it is not my intention to propose a lengthy discussion around metafiction here, the experience of researching and writing the monograph inevitably set some of the groundwork for this dissertation, not only in terms of theoretical background, but also in relation to my continued interest in the relationship between the processing of traumatic experience and

literature, either through reading or through the development of a personal narrative (written or spoken).

Bearing these aspects in mind, in this master's thesis I will be looking at four works of contemporary Anglophone war fiction which have made a significant contribution to its genre: Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), a novel centred on the life of 9-year-old Liesel Meminger, a girl living in WWII Nazi Germany; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), which targets the Nigerian civil war through the relationship of twin sisters Olanna and Kainene; Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale* (2015), a novel about French sisters Vianne and Isabelle living in Nazi Occupied France; and Sara Nović's *Girl at War* (2015), a novel focused on the experience of 10-year-old Ana Jurić through the Yugoslavian Civil War. As for the authors: Markus Zusak is an Australian writer, the son of German/Austrian parents; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is Igbo/Nigerian and has lived in the United States for over two decades; Kristin Hannah is American and Sara Nović is also American, of Croatian descent. This is but a brief introduction, and will not be extended much further, as my purpose here is not to overly focus on their backgrounds – however, some justification may be needed for my choice of bibliography in a Master's in Anglo-American studies. Although not all these novels have been written by American or British authors, they were all originally written and published in English and have all reached significant literary success and public acclaim in the English-speaking world. The fact that they have all been published in the last fifteen years also leaves a lot of new ground to be explored and studied. Another interesting aspect to these novels is that, although English is the dominant language, all of them do have important connections with other languages, which does not diminish their suitability but actually enriches it. In the case of *The Book Thief*, some terms are offered in German and then translated into English – the same in *Half of a Yellow Sun* with Igbo, *The Nightingale* with French, and *Girl at War* with Croatian and Serbian.

Whilst these novels are, essentially, works of war fiction and as such deal with familiar themes of death, destruction, struggle for survival, and the link between trauma, memory and identity, my focus is not to explore these themes independently, but to examine the way they function in the portrayal of the lead female characters and the journeys they all experience. Of particular interest to me are the lives of those who stay behind – mostly women and children. That is not to say that these novels do not contemplate male characters and their struggles (either as soldiers or civilians). The female characters in these novels are inevitably linked to their male counterparts – fathers, uncles, brothers, friends, husbands, and lovers – and the difficult experiences of men during times of conflict are of course portrayed in these narratives. Some of

the male characters in these novels are soldiers or Resistance fighters, but many of them are not. The novels also contemplate men who would be traditionally omitted from narratives of war, and that includes young boys and adult men not serving in the military (either due to age, physical limitations or because they perform another kind of duty, such as working for the government or being a war reporter). What is interesting is that the male characters do not occupy the central position in the novels, but rather, mostly remain in the sidelines, orbiting around the female protagonists. Even in the case of Ugwu and Richard in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, who are two of the narrators in the story alongside Olanna, although their narratives display their inner thoughts, struggles and experiences, their main focus within the novel is to shed light on their relationship with the female protagonists.

The main aspect which drew me to research these four novels in this thesis was precisely the position of centrality that women (and their relationship with other women) occupy in all of works. Female protagonists are not the norm in war narratives, which I will go into in greater depth later in this introduction, and as such they bring a plethora of themes which may not usually be found in war fiction. All of these novels discuss, to varying degrees, themes such as the negotiation of gender expectations, including marriage, femininity, motherhood, female bonds, sexual maturity and the coming of age of young girls in war; gender violence and danger in war, such as the increased risk of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and even rape; becoming the head of the household and the primary caregiver of children, tasked with ensuring their survival in increasingly difficult times; and, finally, the pursuit of personal autonomy and empowerment whilst negotiating loss of control and victimhood. Considering this, the aim of this thesis is to look at the main characters in *The Book Thief*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Nightingale* and *Girl at War*, and understand the ways in which these women persevere in times of war (and if they do at all), and to what extent they are able to take ownership of some control, of some autonomy, of agency over their own destinies. It is my contention that, while this power is limited, of course, (and I am in no way implying that women have complete control over their circumstances in war time, or even, peacetime) women are able to wield some control over their own lives through education, literature (writing and reading), meaningful employment, fighting for a cause they believe in, and through strengthening their bonds with other women. In order to successfully examine these novels, first I need to discuss some key concepts, including the existing body of research on war fiction, the unique perspective of women in war, the process of writing war fiction itself and its inevitable struggles, and the relationship between war, memory and culture. This I will do in the following sections of this introduction.

War Literature

In order to begin the discussion on war fiction and its role in society, first I must refer back to the questions posed in the beginning of this introduction, such as the reasons behind the human fascination for war stories, the need to represent it and how such stories influence our culture and behaviour. In her article “The Functions of War Literature” (1992), Catherine Savage Brosman may provide some answers to these questions, arguing that

[f]rom the days of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Hebrew chroniclers, epic poetry, drama, and historical accounts have repeatedly been inspired by, and often centered around, war... Similarly, in the large body of early European literature constituted by medieval sagas and epics, war is the central, indeed sometimes the only, theme. (85)

In her article, Brosman alludes not only to Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and later epic poems such as *Beowulf*, but also makes mention of early oral traditions which pre-date written works. To her, “no other literary rendering of human experience has exercised such an extensive influence on human behavior” (85) as war fiction, apart perhaps from romantic love narratives. In war fiction, Brosman includes not only classic literary works but also, from the twentieth century onwards, films and other works of popular culture. Although Brosman is certainly not the first to look into the reasons people write war narratives and the influences they have had on the human imagination and behaviour, she provides a comprehensive study on the subject and details how tales of war have been employed throughout history to, on the one hand, “shape a sense of national purpose and inspire a bellicose spirit” (86), and on the other, incite men to a personal challenge. To Brosman, war has often been portrayed in literature and, as such, in society, as a “proving ground” (88) for men, an experience of maturation and initiation through which boys would be tested and become men, and through which a nation would be united under one purpose and become stronger, igniting themes such as bravery, heroism and brotherhood between fellow soldiers. Many war narratives can be considered a coming-of-age story, or *Bildungsroman*, for young men to be inspired by, a narrative in which its heroes will experience hardship, witness horror, death, and extreme suffering, but who will ultimately achieve glory, recognition, valour, respect, and a sense of personal achievement. The worst crime possible was to be a coward, and to give in to fear – that would make one less than a man. Desertion was punishable by death, and failing to serve would bring shame on your family. What war stories did

was instilled in the minds of men that war was honourable and the ultimate judge of character – integrity, justice, virtue, and fairness were possible, but only if you were brave and did your part. There was some assurance that although they would be tested, they would ultimately come out victorious, because they were righteous. At the end of the conflict, they would return home, not as boys, but as men who served their country and did their duty – they would come home heroes.

From WWI onwards, however, these ideals would be shattered. Young soldiers, on either side of the conflict, who set out to fight for their countries, to fight for honour and glory, died instead nameless, anonymous deaths, having witnessed horrors beyond belief. For the most part, their families would be unable to retrieve their bodies for burial. These soldiers were cold, afraid, injured and in pain, and, above all, many died alone. This experience showed that there is little place for heroism and fame in modern, technological warfare, and that those traditional ideals did no longer hold true. Those who died without burial were then entombed collectively in the image of the “Unknown Soldier”, becoming a national symbol of duty and sacrifice. Despite the intentional glorification of these soldiers’ deaths on the part of the nation, many felt betrayed by these ideals and did not subscribe to them anymore. Much of the literature around the time, such as the works by British poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, rebutted notions of heroism and was critical and bitter towards grand celebrations. These accounts were not designed to promote war, but instead “to demystify war and the military, with its linguistic, behavioral, and other codes, and to support pacifism” (Brosman 89). The trend seen in contemporary war literature is to be critical and wary of romanticised and nationalistic war literature, focussing instead on the individual experience of war and denouncing it as a horrifying experience.

As much as it is necessary to delve into this existing background to war fiction in order to proceed with the discussion proposed in this thesis, one may notice how this war literature is predominantly centred on male ideals and experiences, and wonder how women fit in this tradition. Margaret R. Higonnet explores the role of women in war literature in her article “Cassandra’s Question: Do Women Write War Novels?” (1994). Higonnet writes of how a woman’s war novel is seen as a “contradiction” (144) and how “[t]here has always been a heroic male literature of war” (144). Drawing from Nancy Huston’s article “Tales of War and Tears of Women” (1982), she recalls the predominant idea in the twentieth century that “[t]he exploits of men in the formation and defense of a people or nation, though they may provoke the ‘tears of women’, do not justify their tales” (144). That is because, according to her, in WWI, war literature became associated with the “‘soldier-poet’ who recorded his ‘direct experience’ of a new and barbarous technology” (144). She cites scholar Samuel Hynes, who wrote in *A War Imagined*:

The First World War and English Culture (1990) regarding the First War that “[a] nation at war is a male nation... The artist is not separable from the soldier” (qtd. in Higonnet 145). The notion was, because women did not fight and as such had no first-hand experience of combat, they were automatically excluded from the genre. Even the ones who were in the Front doing essential work as nurses were not seen to have legitimacy in writing war stories, and some of their texts were “excluded from the canon of war literature” (144). Higonnet writes that

[o]ne of the problems in defining war fiction as a genre turns on the vague central term, *war*, itself a highly gendered concept. An identification of war with the trenches precludes literature about the home front, about the economic impact of war during hostilities and after the armistice, or about rape and prostitution as seen from the perspective of women. (145)

Civilian women and children have not always been contemplated in the war narrative genre, due perhaps to the idea that they are “home” and safe, and not on the “battlefield”, and as such do not actively participate in war or do not have the same traumatic experience of war as combatant men do. I am not implying that civilian women have the same experience as soldiers, or even that they suffer more, only that there is more than one way to be traumatised by warfare, and that even those deemed to be non-combatant have their own traumatic experiences. Similarly, the idea that women do not participate in war at all is mistaken. They do today, in all branches of the military in many countries across the world, and have done so in great numbers since WWII. In the foreword to Bernard A. Cook’s *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present* (2006), Judith Lawrence Bellafaire highlights the important roles women performed during WWII, roles which had been traditionally male, and how their work as mechanics, truck drivers, air tower control operators, farmers, factory workers and many more significantly influenced the outcome of the war. According to Stewart Ross in *Women’s War: At Home in World War Two* (2007), by 1943 the Auxiliary Territorial Service (the women’s branch of the British Army) had over 200,000 female volunteers. Many British and French women were also recruited as spies at the Special Operations Executive (SOE) – women like Princess Noor Khan, Odette Hallowes and Violette Szabo, as well as the women who were part of the intelligence team to decode German secret messages at Bletchley Park, such as Joan Clarke. Not to mention the scores of Resistance fighters who risked their lives to save Allied troops and counterattack in Occupied France. Many of them were tortured and died in prison camps. Their stories, although not forgotten, did not make their way into popular imagination as other events of the war have. To Bellafaire,

Much of history is shaped by warfare, and women's history is no exception. Across the centuries, noncombatant women have been victims of war, and their multitude of stories have left a sad and enduring legacy. Women's active participation in battle and direct contributions to defense, however, have traditionally been overlooked. (XXVII)

What many contemporary narratives of war will do, then, is challenge the concept of war as exclusively male and bring forth perspectives of people whose voices and experiences have not made it to the light, such as it is the case with *The Book Thief*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Nightingale* and *Girl at War*. Sarah Cole (2009), in her article "People in War" argues that

[t]o consider people in their relation to war is, almost inevitably, to think in categorical and binary terms – combatant and civilian, men and women, young and old, injured and healthy, prewar and postwar, enemy and friend. And yet, as the trajectory from classical to contemporary war protagonists so clearly shows, to consider people in their relation to war is, equally inevitably, to see those categories disintegrating and losing their force. (25)

Indeed, all of the novels that have been chosen for analysis here do, in varying forms and degrees, challenge these fixed oppositions and explore the ambivalence in these terms, which I will explore in each novel individually throughout the course of this thesis. In contrast with the idea that war is a male experience, which excludes women's suffering, we see that at least since WWII, home is not synonymous with safety, and that millions of ordinary women had their own experience of the war. Luiz Gustavo Leitão Vieira writes, in "A Escrita da Guerra: areté, nóstos e kléos na análise de narrativas de guerra" (2013) that in WWII the scale of improvements in technological warfare brought forth "the advent of so-called total war and the end of the so-called front, [where] anyone could be affected by the horrors of war" (5, translation by Tom Burns). Similarly, Adam Piette (2009), in his article "War Zones", shows how the distinction between civilian and military was less clear after WWI, and how the dangers which were originally limited to soldiers encompassed civilian populations as well:

The terminal noise of death's effects at the war zone has not remained a soldier's dark privilege, however. The distinction between military and civilian zones which the front lines of the First World War preserved has fallen away as war technology has trained its terrible eye on civilian populations. The genocidal wars of the twentieth century, the blitzes and area bombing campaigns of the Second World War, the Holocaust, the deliberate terrorist shelling of civilians in war zone

cities, the Cold-War targeting of entire populations by nuclear weapons systems have expanded the potential war zone to include the whole world and all its civilians. (45)

Since WWII, then, civilian populations were, perhaps for the first time in history, equally at risk of bombardment, death and destruction, a trend which has been maintained in many twentieth century wars. Although estimates vary widely, according to the New Orleans National WWII Museum, in WWII alone the estimated civilian death toll is approximately 45 million people, as opposed to around 15 million who died in battle. As well as risk of violence, civilians are also at elevated risk of poverty, hunger, and disease due to food rationing and lack of resources. In addition to that, women are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Sabine Hirschauer, in her book *The Securitization of Rape: Women, War and Sexual Violence* (2014), details the specific dangers that are presented in times of armed conflict, with rape being used as a weapon of war. Hirschauer explores the systematic rape and abuse of women and children in times of war. Although her main focus is on how rape was used as a weapon to demoralise the enemy in the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides, she also details just how further back these stories go, to the rape and massacre of Nanking in 1937 and the systematic rape of women in Soviet-occupied areas of Eastern Europe during WWII. She claims that

[n]ot all horror in war is created equal. Systematic mass rape has always carried itself well as a silent collaborator and casual bystander in times of conflict. Rape during war, its stories and clandestine silences, have haunted humanity for centuries... Wartime rape did not evoke the same degree and sense of terror on an internationally political scale than other war crimes and crimes against humanity were able to produce. Wartime rape was usually viewed as a purely domestic, social and private matter. Equally, states and their power agencies discounted the structural nature and effect of wartime rape. (4-5)

The shame, humiliation and demoralisation that accompanies rape, as well as unwanted pregnancies which may result from it, have caused many women throughout history to not share their traumatic stories. To Hirschauer, the fear of being seen as complicit or partially responsible, or, even after WWII, a possible collaborator with the Nazi regime by association with your abuser, may explain why women's perspectives and experiences of war are only now resurfacing, decades after the conflict themselves: "Wartime rape was successful in punishing perceived female 'insubordination', to feminize and emasculate men, mark women as societally 'undesirable' and, hence, damage the social cohesion and cultural dynamics of a community" (12). It was only in

1998, merely 22 years ago, after the Yugoslavian and Rwandan trials, that rape was interpreted by the United Nations “as a war crime and a crime against humanity, which could constitute acts of genocide” (84).

In other words, in war, women are subjected not only to the fears of death, destruction, hunger, cold and poverty, but also to a deeper kind of violation which, for the survivors, leaves not only physical scars but also lifelong trauma and stigma. Trauma for women in situations of armed conflict is, then, two-fold, and the need to communicate and come to terms with trauma may be impeded by fear of shunning and lack of acceptance. The process of narrating a traumatic war experience for women needs then to address not only the familiar issues which arise in writing war stories, but they must do so contemplating women’s unique struggles, as evidenced above. In the final section of this introduction, then, I will examine the link between memory, trauma and history and discuss the difficulties associated with the representation of war.

Trauma, memory, and history

Why are writers compelled to look back and bring to life traumatic war stories, when it is so difficult to do so? In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), a decisive book in the realm of trauma studies, Cathy Caruth defined how “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). This means that the processing of the trauma may take years, and narratives which account for this trauma may also be distanced in time from the event itself. Translating trauma into narratives is not an easy task, and it may sometimes take a new generation to look back on a community’s painful past.

In the chapter “War and Words” in the *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing* (2009), Kate McLoughlin writes of how “war reconfigures nations, displaces populations, devastates land. Difficulties in finding words for all this arise immediately” (15). She discusses the obstacles to representation – not only the ethical issues associated with it, such as the idea of “earning” the right to narrate through either personal experience or a particular connection to it – but also the psycho-physiological challenges associated with trauma and grief: silence. Indeed, this type of silence as a “is a well-documented response to trauma and particularly associated with grief” (17). Drawing on her earlier work, her next book, *Authoring War: The Literary Representations of War*

from the *Iliad* to *Iraq* (2011), contends that war “resists depiction... Yet, even as it resists representation, conflict demands it” (6) for myriad reasons, such as bringing order to the chaos of the experience; keeping the record for yourself, those who died and future generations; to help reassimilation into peacetime, to bring meaning and closure, to bring catharsis and to warn about the dangers of war and influence peace. To her, as difficult as finding words to represent war are, they must be found: McLoughlin calls this a “a meta-challenge: the sense that words are insufficient or unavailable might arise as a reaction to the difficulties... credibility, scale, space and time – or, indeed, as a reaction to a whole range of representational obstacles” (136).

Many works of war fiction must, then, account for this challenge and this concern in the narrative. In *The Book Thief*, when Liesel Meminger arrives at the Hubermann’s household, after the death of her brother and the abandonment of her mother, she is unable to speak for weeks, has constant night terrors and wets her bed. In *The Nightingale*, after Isabelle is captured by Nazi officials whilst working for the Resistance, tortured and imprisoned, once released she too retreats into herself, a shadow of the outspoken girl she once was. In *Girl at War*, when Ana witnesses the murders of her mother and father and is rescued by a well-intended family, she does not speak for months. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, after Olanna returns from Kano having witnessed her entire family murdered, she experiences long periods of being unable to speak, walk or even control her bodily functions – she is absolutely paralysed and shocked by the experience. The characters’ difficulty in relating the trauma suffered seem to resonate with the concern with words explored by McLoughlin. Yet, literature and reading feature in almost all of these works as a positive tool for healing. This may be connected to Nigel C. Hunt’s idea in the book *Memory, War, and Trauma* (2010) that

[w]e are natural storytellers and natural audiences. Narrative is an essential function. We use and manipulate our memories, consciously and unconsciously, in order to present ourselves to the world in a particular way. Our life stories are constantly changing according to circumstances... We are compelled to narrate. (3)

Additionally, Hunt argues that through narratives we are able to understand our own selves and our identities, whether as individuals or as groups. Memory of the event, then, is “constructed partly through narrative and the social context” (6). Memory is a central theme in the many studies of war and trauma, and in the field of Cultural Memory Studies there are many who have tackled this relationship. Michael Schudson, in his article “The Past in the Present versus the Present in the Past” (2011), explores how the creation of a shared past is a reconstruction, which is “limited

by three factors: the structure of available pasts, the structure of individual choices, and the conflicts about the past amongst a multitude of mutually aware individuals or groups” (287). These aspects have to do with, first, how much access we have to information regarding a past event; second, which elements of this past we choose to highlight over others; and third, how different groups within the same community might view the past in conflicting ways, so much that it is impossible to achieve any sort of consensus over the “truth”. Schudson also refers to certain traumas experienced within a community that are impossible to ignore and which compel representation:

Traumas, as I use the term here, are past experiences people (or organizations or nations) cannot ignore even when they would like to, cannot divert their attention from without courting anxiety, fear, and pain. Not only must Americans confront slavery, not only must Germans face the Holocaust, but they must do so repeatedly, obsessively, necessarily, whether they like it or not. (288)

This helps us understand why people have needed not only to narrate their own traumatic war stories, but how others need to read them and process them – how future generations need also confront this trauma that they themselves may not have experienced first-hand. This is why, after any war, commemoration, statues, plaques, street names, and remembrance parades of the winning parties ensue, to materialise this memory of important facts and leaders of the war and solidify them as a part of history, not just for those who lived it, but to guarantee endurance of that memory to the next generations. In *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2009), Margaret MacMillan writes that “dealing with uncertainty is not easy” (15) and that history can offer simplicity in the midst of chaos – it can bring order to patterns which explain things and soothe anxieties. History is comforting because we know less – it provides an idyll where no one was hungry or sad. It presents “facts” (or what we come to learn as concrete facts), and it can also present a narrative which is comforting to a nation coping with the aftermath of war and mass death – that we were righteous, on the good side of history. As such,

History takes on the role of showing us good and evil, virtues and vices... History with a capital H is being called in to fill the void. It restores a sense not necessarily of a divine being but of something above and beyond human beings. It is our authority: it can vindicate us and judge us, and damn those who oppose us. (20)

The establishment of “History” does not, however, guarantee that future generations will look upon these objects of memory in the same manner, and that they will escape scrutiny or even rewritings. Jay Winter, in “Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War” (2008), defines sites of memory as places where a particular group of people would share in a collective knowledge which asserted their identity. For him,

[t]he critical point about sites of memory is that they are there as points of reference not only for those who survived traumatic events, but also for those born long after them. The word “memory” becomes a metaphor for the fashioning of narratives about the past when those with direct experience of events die off. Sites of memory inevitably become sites of second-order memory, that is, they are places where people remember the memories of others, those who survived the events marked there. (62)

The novels chosen for this analysis all deal with traumas which were defining for an entire community and generation: The Holocaust (with all of its difficult ethical implications in literature), WWII, the Igbo and Biafran genocide in the Nigerian Civil War, and the Croatian and Bosnian genocides in the Yugoslavian Civil War. The authors of these novels may not have had first-hand experiences from the conflicts, but have drawn on connection to the cultural memory and significance of these wars to reimagine the events and bring them to life through stories. Born in 1975 in Australia, Markus Zusak is the descendent of German immigrants and knew of the war through the experience of his grandparents and parents, which influenced *The Book Thief*. Similarly, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself had not yet been born during the Civil War (as she was born in 1977, seven years after the end of the conflict), but heard the stories from her parents, grandparents and from her community – the trauma caused such a rupture in the fabric of their lives that generations to come must come to terms with it, which she did masterfully in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Born in 1960, Kristin Hannah was a teenager during the Vietnam War. In an interview with John Wilkens from the San Diego Union Tribune in 2018, Hannah tells how she witnessed the return and subsequent struggles of her father’s undiagnosed PTSD, which influenced her writing. On her website, the section “In Her Own Words: Interview with Kristin” is where she shares some of the inspirations behind her novels, and attributes her lack of an adventurous nature to a growing fascination with stories of courageous women. Hannah’s admiration for the women who were in the Resistance in WWII (such as Belgian Resistance fighter Andrée de Jongh, who was responsible for smuggling Allied pilots to safety through the Pyrenees from France into Spain,

which inspired the character of Isabelle) and those who hid Jewish children at terrible costs is brought to life in *The Nightingale*. Finally, not much is known of the family history of Sara Nović, except that she is of dual American and Croatian nationality and was born in 1987, four years before the outset of the Civil War represented in *Girl at War*. My point here is not to discuss the authors' legitimacy in choosing the subjects they write about, as I do not subscribe to the idea that novelists must be constrained to their own personal stories and backgrounds (just as I do not believe one has to be a female author to write good stories about women, such as is the case with Markus Zusak), but rather to show that they may be drawing on what Winter calls "second-order memory" (62) in the citation above – that the narratives they write about may have been influenced by the memories of those who experienced it first-hand, and that these narratives configure a necessary and powerful link to that past and the journeys and perspectives of women in times of conflict.

Throughout the course of this thesis, then, I will examine the journeys and experiences of the lead female characters in these novels and provide a discussion on how they negotiate the limiting conditions in war with a quest for personal fulfilment and autonomy. This thesis has been divided into four parts: this Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2, and a Conclusion. Chapter 1 will be divided into three sections and will explore the coming-of-age stories of Ana Jurić in *Girl at War* and Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief*. Chapter 2 will be divided into two sections and will focus on the role of women and sisterhood in war, focusing on sisters Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* (section 2.1) and Vianne and Isabelle in *The Nightingale* (section 2.2). Finally, in the Conclusion, I will review the key concepts and ideas explored throughout this dissertation, highlighting and summing up the protagonists' personal perspectives and experiences, and determining the extent to which they manage to influence their own destinies in times of conflict.

Chapter 1 - A Girl's Coming-of-age in Wartime: Understanding the Maturation Journeys of Ana Jurić in *Girl at War* and Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief*

1.1. The Coming-of-age Genre

The coming-of-age novel is a narrative in which the protagonist will undergo a significant journey of growth marked by a series of trials and tribulations, thus acquiring experience and knowledge, from childhood to adulthood, or immaturity to maturity. This psychological journey may involve a physical journey or a trip, although that is not a pre-requisite. This protagonist is usually an adolescent or young adult (Aguiar e Silva 731), but they can also be significantly younger, as is the case of Liesel Meminger and Ana Jurić, who are nine and ten years old at the start of their respective stories. In *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), Franco Moretti traces the origins of the genre in late eighteenth-century Germany and its extensive popularity in European literature in the following century, citing, for example, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* as important representatives of the genre. According to Moretti, this type of novel offers special insight into the protagonist's thoughts and feelings and "has the reader perceive the text through the eyes of the protagonist: which is logical, since the protagonist is undergoing the experience of formation, and the reading too is intended to be a formative process" (56). Moretti emphasizes this identification between reader and protagonist as one of the key elements in the genre, in which the reader has full access to the protagonist's mind – even if, at some point, the reader may come to learn that the protagonist's views are biased or mistaken. Another essential element is the struggle inherent to this coming-of-age journey, the trials or threats the protagonist must face in his or her journey of maturation. He writes of trials not as obstacles to the protagonist's growth, but necessary steps in this road towards maturity: "Trial, in the *Bildungsroman*, is instead an opportunity: not an obstacle to be overcome while remaining 'intact', but something that must be incorporated, for only by stringing together "experiences" does one build a personality" (48). In that sense, the protagonist changes because of the difficulties conquered, and his or her adult self is an accumulation of the experiences faced in the course of the journey.

The coming-of-age journey as a journey towards maturation was also proposed in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). In this book, Campbell discussed mythical heroes from a variety of different cultures and suggested that the hero's journey follows a certain structure and a cycle, which he synthesized as the formula of separation, initiation, and return. Campbell detailed a series of steps or stages in this cycle, which I will not delve into here, as I am mostly interested in the idea that the hero is essentially *changed* by the journey – not necessarily for better or worse. That the returning hero is not the same as the one who embarked on the journey can easily be applicable to both Liesel and Ana. War will leave its mark on these characters. In addition to the struggles faced during war, the final struggle and crisis for the survivor will be confronting society and people's inability to understand the experience. To answer the question I posed in the introduction to this thesis, as to why people write and read stories of war, I would like to point to the Introduction to the 2004 edition of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, in which she writes:

The people, the tribes, the groups and the clans of the world keep heroic mythos alive—keep stories important to the soul alive—by telling them, and then by trying to live them out in some way that brings one into more wisdom and experience than one had before. The same is given to us to do on our life's journeys also—to seek and follow the personal life myth, to see our worst and best attributes mirrored back to us in stories. (xlvi)

Literature has a central role in bringing to life stories that matter and are meaningful to our own lives, even if the struggles are not the same. In both *The Book Thief* and *Girl at War*, literature is an important element for the growth and maturation of the protagonists, in face of traumatic wartime events— it is a tool that aids them in bringing order and understanding to their own life story, whether through the act of narration or through the identification between reader and story. Still, the coming-of-age story, in war fiction, has been almost synonymous with the male experience and the journey of a young man who sets off to war and returns home a changed man, with a newfound understanding of the world. Whilst this journey would have had mostly positive connotations in the literature of war until at least the eighteenth century, from the nineteenth century on it is possible to find narratives in which this journey does not end, necessarily, with a positive outlook on the experience itself, or even with positive consequences for the protagonist, as is the case with Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, a coming-of-age novel set in the American Civil War. The narrative follows Henry, the young protagonist, across only a few days of his life, rather than years. In the novel, the reader has access to Henry's struggles with ideals

of heroism, masculinity, and courage. Indeed, in his first battle, he flees rather than fight, an act which tortures him immensely once he discovers that the rest of his comrades stood their ground. If found out, his desertion could have resulted in shame and being branded a coward, and possibly even in his execution. The novel shows Henry as not valiant and fearless, but scared and alienated from others. He struggles to cope with the behaviour that is expected of him in war, and his natural instincts of self-preservation. Although, in the end, Henry believes that he redeems himself by taking over for the flag-bearer when he dies and being an active part of the battle, the fact that he then foolishly revels in the attention, glory and celebration and creates an inflated, proud image of himself in his own mind – promptly ignoring his previous actions and desertion – leaves space for readers to wonder if Henry reached maturation at all or learned anything from his experience.

Although this type of discussion within a war narrative is not unusual today, it was far less common before WWI, which saw a significant increase in the critical discussion of the ideals of bravery, duty, and honour in war. In the war narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, at the centre of the protagonist's story is the exploration of trauma, loss, and pain, and with it a criticism of government war propaganda, growing anti-war sentiment and a denouncing of the entire experience. The coming-of-age represents a loss of innocence, and after witnessing traumatic events and the barbarity of war, the "growth" or "journey" is inevitably linked with the overcoming of trauma. The emphasis of this chapter is not to focus on the coming-of-age story of the male soldier, but instead to target the journeys and the perspectives of two young girls who must grow up during wartime, as is the case of Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief* and Ana Jurić in *Girl at War*.

For Ana and Liesel, the main trials they will face in their coming-of-age journeys involves not being a soldier and going off to battle like Henry, but rather experiencing war from the perspective of a civilian. Their trauma does not stem from fighting in the battlefield (which, for the male soldier, is the most obvious source of traumatic events), but rather experiencing war as a powerless young girl in increasingly threatening circumstances. The protagonists' hardships, their experience of loss, death and violence, and the subsequent loss of control experienced in times of conflict, will become an inseparable part of their identities. Nevertheless, like the male soldier, in addition to thinking of the war critically – including the political motivations behind it and deconstructing the idea of the "enemy" and "good" and "bad" – the protagonists in these narratives of war can achieve "maturation" by coming to terms with their trauma and beginning a journey of healing from the experience.

In *The Book Thief* and *Girl at War*, the protagonists must navigate not only the normal changes that girls must undergo as they grow older, but they must do so in increasingly difficult realities and whilst dealing with the unspeakable trauma of losing friends and family, and in that loss, losing a sense of their own identity as well. These are special coming-of-age stories precisely because of the juxtaposition of “normal” growing-up themes and the brutality of war. Ana and Liesel have to deal with the rise of poverty and food rationing, with it coming a corresponding lack of access to medicine and even “luxury” items, like new clothes or shoes. They witness how difficult it is for their mothers to put food on the table, and how hunger becomes a constant companion. Those, coupled with the constant, everyday threat of air raids and death – and the very real possibility of becoming orphaned, which indeed happens to both Ana and Liesel – are some of the aspects which surround the protagonists’ journeys. The shelter becomes a very familiar place in both novels. In *TBT*, Liesel comforts and distracts the people inside the shelter by reciting from one of her books: “By page three, everyone was silent but Liesel. She didn’t dare look up, but she could feel their frightened eyes hanging on to her as she hauled the words in and breathed them out” (*TBT* 389). In *GW*, Ana notices the presence of a bicycle, which fed the shelter’s generator. The bike would become a much-needed distraction for the kids, as the routine of making your way to a shelter and waiting for danger to pass could be quite long and boring. Ana and her classmates “would come to fight over the bike in subsequent raids, elbowing one another for a turn converting pedals into electricity that powered the lights in the shelter” (*GW* 15). This becomes part of a new routine and the new normal. Children who experienced trauma or lost someone, as was the case of Ana, were given priority to ride the bike, in an unspoken code between them.

The orphan is a common protagonist in the *Bildungsroman*, and estrangement from one’s family and being fostered or sent to distant relative’s houses are common plot devices that signal the beginning of the protagonists’ hardships (Bulger 2017). Indeed, both Ana and Liesel are separated from their families and are sent away to be fostered by new families – in Liesel’s case, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, and in Ana’s case, Jack and Laura. The girls are the eldest children who must endure alone the trauma of losing their families. The pain cannot be shared with a sibling who understands. Liesel’s youngest brother Werner dies at the beginning of the narrative, and she arrives at the Hubermanns’ household a broken and lonely girl. Similarly, Ana’s baby sister Rahela is seriously ill and taken to the United States for treatment through MediMission, an international medical humanitarian organisation that transports seriously ill children to the US for life-saving medical treatment. Although in this case the sisters are eventually reunited, Rahela is

too young to remember anything of the war or her biological parents, and Ana is left with the overwhelming burden of being the only one who has a connection to that past and who remembers.

It is important to note here, that despite women's increased risk of sexual assault during conflict, rape is not a central theme in either *The Book Thief* or *Girl at War*, as opposed to *The Nightingale* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The subject of rape is completely absent from *TBT* and, although it is present in *GW*, it remains mostly distant and in the fringes of the narrative, as neither the protagonist nor anyone close to her is affected directly. Despite being a known and widespread practise during both WWII and the Yugoslavian Civil War, the choice of not including it as a central theme might be related to the protagonists' young age. That would not, of course, protect them in itself from abuse in real life, but it might explain the authors' decision to exclude it. Nevertheless, this does not detract or impact negatively on the discussion of the novels as coming-of-age stories. Considering that these narratives concern young girls, one must contemplate the perspective of the child who must learn to navigate their new reality in times of conflict, as well as the usual changes and preoccupations which happen in puberty. As such, some of the themes which feature both in *The Book Thief* and in *Girl at War* include school (and difficulties including bullying or fighting amongst peers, literacy and learning), family dynamics, housework and chores, meaningful friendships, playtime, crushes, discussions around gender identity (being "feminine" or a "tomboy"), sexual maturity and sexual desire, and the overall theme of the forming of their identities, individually and within their community. Additionally, one must also consider how war dramatically changes a society, and how this will be evidenced within the narrative. In *TBT*, this changing reality is shown in stages, first with the rounding-up and deportation of Jews and the book-burning bonfire. Although obvious tell-tale signs, these do not actively affect the German residents living there. With time, the war becomes more obvious to the residents of Molching, due to the greater number of older men being drafted into the war, the rise of enemy air raids, the rise of poverty and hunger, and also the great numbers of Jews paraded in the city, on their way to the death camps. In the case of *GW*, as it is a civil war, the narrative evidences a number of spatial and political changes, such as the forming of a new nation and new territorial delimitations, new borders and checkpoints, new currencies and identification documents – and with it a whole different national identity to adhere to, which will be increasingly differentiated from that of the *enemy* – as well as the changes which occur within the city, like roadblocks, protective barriers, refugee centres, and designated bomb shelters.

Moreover, the novels share many similarities in terms of themes and in how the protagonists deal with traumatic experience and process it. In both novels, literature occupies a central position in the healing of trauma. Throughout this chapter, my aim is to demonstrate how literature (and not only the act of writing, but reading and storytelling as well) is one of the tools used by the protagonists of the novels to exert some control over their lives and create a sense of agency and autonomy over their personal journeys, and also to come to terms with their stories and traumatic experiences. I will also draw attention to the power of words and how community, language and memory are essential to the formation of identity. Throughout this chapter, I will draw some parallels and similarities between *The Book Thief* and *Girl at War* and also delve into their particularities and provide individual discussions of the novels. For the purposes of clarity, I will divide the discussion into two main subsections, in which I will tackle the how the protagonist's identity is formed and shaped by the experience of growing up during war, and how the protagonists conclude their coming-of-age journeys by overcoming their trauma and confronting their past, aided by the power of writing, reading and storytelling, through which it may be possible to find acceptance and healing.

1.2. The Issue of Identity and Growing Up in Wartime

Throughout the course of this chapter, I want to address how war is experienced by Ana and Liesel individually and how it impacts their coming-of-age journey and their development and maturation considering Erik H. Erikson's theory of child psychosocial development, as explained below. As I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it is difficult to write of complete autonomy or complete control over one's story when it comes to war, due precisely to war's unpredictability and uncertainty. The power of choice and personal determination is taken away, and whether someone lives or dies, or is violated, for that matter, will be determined by a number of factors beyond their control. Superstition is also a recurring theme of war, and people often indulge in certain rituals which they think might protect them, or even create their own set of rules that, to them, might bring order and meaning to the randomness of dying. In most instances, however, it can simply be narrowed down to a case of bad luck or being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the other way around as well, with some people escaping death narrowly.

In *Girl at War*, this happens when Ana's family is rounded up at a roadblock organised by orthodox Četnik soldiers alongside other Croatian captives, amongst them some painters, a couple, and a woman with "a run of blood down the thighs" (GW 86), the first indication of rape in the novel. Looking at her parents, Ana understands that they were as scared and as powerless as she was, and "[t]he realisation that my parents, too, felt pain and fear frightened me more than any strangers could" (GW 85). Ana's mother is shot first, and Ana's father saves her life by telling her to fall with him when he is shot and trick the soldiers. Ana escapes narrowly from death, partly due to her father's quick thinking and the fact that the soldiers were too drunk to notice. In *The Book Thief*, Liesel's entire neighbourhood is flattened by enemy bombs, killing everyone but Liesel: "Rudy Steiner slept. Mama and Papa slept. Frau Holtzapfel, Frau Diller. Tommy Muller. All sleeping. All dying. Only one person survived. She survived because she was sitting in a basement reading through the story of her own life, checking for mistakes" (TBT 503). Liesel is saved by the fact that she was awake, restless, going over her own narrative. If she had been in bed sleeping, she would have died as well. This is not, however, Liesel's first brush with death – she first experienced it years before, when she saw her brother die on train to Molching.

Both Ana and Liesel are marked by loss, and their struggles to cope with the trauma haunts them for years. This lingering quality to traumatic loss resonates with Cathy Caruth's notion that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Similarly, Lyndsey Stonebridge argued that "trauma divides the mind not only from itself, but also splits it in time: there's a lag, a snatch in the experience of the traumatized that pulls them out of linear chronology" (3). That can explain, for instance, the fact that Ana and Liesel struggle with their memories for years. For Ana and Liesel, then, another difficult element to deal with is their alienation from others and their isolation because of the experience of war. Caruth calls this an "oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable of its survival" (7). For Caruth, "[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (7). As a consequence of these traumatic experiences, Ana and Liesel will be forever changed, unable to go back to that initial state of innocence, often found in the pre-war memory. Although these events will be traumatic for them, which will be explored in depth throughout this chapter, alongside their individual journeys, it is a mistake to write off trauma as the *only* experience available during this time.

Drawing from Tim O'Brien's short story "How to Tell a True War Story" in *The Things They Carried* (1990), his collection of linked, metafictional short stories about the Vietnam War, the following quote highlights this well:

War is hell, but that's not the half of it, because war is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery. War makes you a man; war makes you dead. The truths are contradictory ... To generalize about war is like generalizing about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. At its core, perhaps, war is just another name for death, and yet any soldier will tell you, if he tells the truth, that proximity to death brings with it a corresponding proximity to life. (76-77)

In this sense, war brings forth not just one feeling, but a multitude of feelings, often contradictory, highlighting the ambivalence of experiences felt during wartime. This is another in a series of ambivalences which can be identified in war novels, such as the distinctions between male and female roles, wartime and peacetime, friend and enemy, combatant and civilian, and injured and healthy (Cole 2009). War is horrible and devastating, and it is not my point to negate that, or even try to characterise war as anything other than that. The point here is that generalising just one aspect of war and ignoring everything else does not provide the whole story, and it is not a truthful depiction of how humans cope, live and survive in war. As O'Brien points out, alongside horror, death, gore, pain, loss, despair and trauma, there can be found instances of love, friendship, kindness and tenderness – one does not erase the other, but they coexist in a difficult and contradictory manner. In order to tackle the theme of growing up in war and how it affects the protagonists of *The Book Thief* and *Girl at War*, I will draw from Erik H. Erikson's theory of child psychosocial development, which was developed in the 1950s and was heavily influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud. Today, it remains as one of the most popular and widely accepted theories of child development, focused on the influence of social interaction and relationships to the formation of personality and identity rather than Freud's theory of psychosexual development. Identity, then, is formed in relation to and influenced by one's relationship to their family, foremost, and their community. Erikson proposed eight stages of development which span a person's lifetime, and at the heart of each stage he outlines a main conflict that needs to be resolved. Whether you manage or not to successfully deal with these conflicts will have an impact on your personality and your relationships. In *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968), Erikson wrote that "every basic conflict of childhood lives on, in some form, in the adult. The earliest steps are

preserved in the deepest layers. Every tired human being may regress temporarily to partial mistrust whenever the world of his expectations has been shaken to the core” (82-83).

If we were to compile a list of things that would cause someone’s expectations to be “shaken to the core”, then certainly war, loss and ethnic genocide would be at the top of that list, although Erikson does not focus specifically on the effect of this type of traumatic experience on children’s development. For Erikson, the relationship between individual and group is essential for a person’s development. He posed that the development of identity and personality in children is influenced by one’s relationship to their family, friends, and community, and outlined how “geographic and historical perspectives (collective ego-space-time)” (48) and “radical economic goals and means (collective life plan)” (48) play a part in this construction. This means that, in addition to their personal relationships, a person’s identity is further defined by their community’s history and past, their socio-economic status, and the established goals and expectations within that community. Erikson’s theory connects well with Jay Winter’s concept of “sites of memory” – that certain places become sites of collective commemoration that preserve the memory of a meaningful and important event - and Michael Schudson’s notion that certain traumas are held collectively within a community, leaving a form of wound to the fabric of that society, and as such must be continually confronted by the individuals in that group (288). To him, “[t]here are some facets of the past we cannot ignore or forget without feeling the loss of some part of ourselves. Not only does the past, as Freud says, live in people’s mental life; people’s mental life lives in the past” (289).

If the experience of genocide and immeasurable loss is difficult to comprehend and certainly deeply traumatising for adults who already have a developed personality and identity, then it is particularly harmful and extreme for children who are still developing. Being persecuted for belonging to a particular group will leave a lasting impact on the formation of a child’s identity. Whilst it is not my purpose here to go into detail about all the stages and conflicts outlined in Erikson’s theory, I do want to discuss the issues of trust, intimacy and identity related to Ana’s and Liesel’s abrupt and precocious loss of innocence and childhood due to the traumatic events of war. The following extract is particularly interesting to the discussion as it equates the end of childhood with a “crisis of wholeness”:

The end of childhood seems to be the third, and more immediately political, crisis of wholeness. Young people must become whole people in their own right, and this during a developmental stage characterized by a diversity of changes in physical growth, genital maturation, and social awareness. The wholeness to be achieved at this stage I have called *a sense of inner identity*. The

young person, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between that which he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and to expect of him. (Erikson 87)

Traumatic loss negatively precipitates the end of Ana and Liesel's childhood, but does not allow them to really develop fully and healthily, and as such interrupts this continuity proposed by Erikson. Rather, it leaves them with paralysing and lasting trauma. Additionally, "[t]he fact that, while a war is in progress, it is not known when, or how, or if it is going to end gives wartime its special property of *open-endedness* or *endinglessness* (an acute form of endlessness): a situation in which various possible outcomes exist simultaneously" (McLoughlin 107). Because war has this "open-endedness" quality to it, it makes it impossible to visualize a promising future, or any future at all, as the possibility of death looms in the distance, and hence Ana and Liesel fail to experience wholeness and develop a strong sense of inner identity. A direct consequence of this is a lack of trust and real intimacy in their relationships:

It is only when identity formation is well on its way that true intimacy - which is really a counterpointing as well as a fusing of identities - is possible. Sexual intimacy is only part of what I have in mind, for it is obvious that sexual intimacies often precede the capacity to develop a true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with another person, be it in friendship, in erotic encounters, or in joint inspiration. Where a youth does not accomplish such intimate relationships with others - and, I would add, with his own inner resources - in late adolescence or early adulthood, he may settle for highly stereotyped interpersonal relations and come to retain a deep sense of isolation. (Erikson 135-136)

Whilst this particular struggle with identity, and also trust and intimacy is more thoroughly explored and evidenced in Ana's development in *Girl at War*, it is also possible to identify them in Liesel's journey in *The Book Thief*. Forming attachments will prove to be painful and difficult because of the fact that both of them lost those attachments they held most dear: for Ana, it is represented by the murder of her parents; for Liesel, the death of her brother and abandonment of her mother. It will take time for them to feel safe and secure in their new families, and to really develop trust and intimacy with them. As Erikson proposes in his theory, "[t]he counterpart of intimacy is distantiation: the readiness to repudiate, isolate, and, if necessary, destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own" (136). In other words, when intimacy

and attachment are painful and challenging for the individual, they will form instead superficial relationships and avoid forming a deep connection. Ana seems to suffer more heavily from this sense of isolation than Liesel does, yet both of them will experience a phase of distrust and alienation from their community, mostly immediately after their traumatic experience.

With this in mind, it is my belief that a central aspect of Ana and Liesel's identities is their relationship with their communities and their collective and individual traumas suffered during the wars. Their individual trauma stems from the personal losses they experience – parents, friends, loved ones – whereas their collective trauma comes from the ethnic persecution that defined the two conflicts. One of main themes of *TBT* is exactly how ethnic genocide is enabled by the inaction of the “good” citizens of Molching in stopping the genocide and the persecution of Jews – even those people Liesel grows to love, and who the reader begins to see empathetically. Alex Steiner, Rudy's father, did not personally hate Jews, but nevertheless became a member of the Nazi Party and he benefitted when Jews were taken away, as his tailor shop's business improved when the competitors, the Jewish tailors, were driven out. Steiner's portrayal as a sweet, gentle man becomes ambivalent when the reader knows that he, and millions of other Germans, allowed these evil acts to take place: “Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out” (TBT 65). On this particular topic, Death comments how it is “always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugliness and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both” (TBT 496).

The theme of ambivalence and duality is recurrent in the novel, and especially when it comes to the power of words. One recurrent phrase stands out from the rest in its ambivalent nature: “Heil Hitler”. Whilst “Heil Hitler” is of course a meaningful sentence in the novel, being the Nazi salute and a sign of support for the regime on the part of the population, this sentence is continually stripped of its importance in the book. The German children in the book consistently use this phrase simply because they have to, not because they believe in the words or even believe in Hitler. “Heil Hitler” is a tool for conformity, but it does not necessarily denote support or allegiance. For instance, in Frau Diller's shop, children learned that they would be only be served candy after they said it, and so it became customary that saying “Heil Hitler” was the first thing to do. Similarly, at Hitler Youth, “[t]he first thing they did there was make sure your Heil Hitler was working properly” (TBT 47). While these children are forced to use this sentence just to get by in their daily lives and fit in, its mechanisation and the little importance the children themselves assign to it does strip away some of its importance and power. Nevertheless, the novel shows how the Nazi ideology was disseminated through literature and the power of words in Max's book *The*

Word Shaker, a didactic tale of Hitler's rise to power and the power of discourse and indoctrination of the German people (Adams 170). Max also shows how words can be used for good, by including "a representation of Liesel as a 'word shaker' charged with cultivating the words, who, following an encounter with Max, instead plants a seed resulting from her tears of friendship and pity" (Adams 170). *The Word Shaker* is a beautiful story of Max's and Liesel's friendship and illustrates the power of friendship and love being used to oppose hate and totalitarian regimes. Nevertheless, words can still be used for hatred and violence, something Liesel realises after she says horrible things to Ilsa after a fight and thinks of the "[t]he injury of words. Yes, the brutality of words" (TBT 227).

Similarly, ethnic genocide is a central theme in *Girl at War*, and the role of the media in the escalation of tensions is seen as ambiguous. A man called Milošević gesticulates on TV ferociously and talks of "cleansing the land, repeating it over and over" (GW 8). This scene is a reference to Serbian politician Slobodan Milošević, who was at the time the president of Serbia and who proposed an ideology of ethnic cleansing that was behind a lot of horrors perpetrated against Croats and Bosnians. The mention of Milošević's speech and other events, such as the fall of Vukovar and the bombing of the Presidential Palace in Zagreb – a turning point in the war and the catalyst for the Declaration of Independence – situates the novel historically and brings legitimacy to the fictional story. The horror and destruction are made tangible through the perspective of Ana:

At first, the smell. The earthy scent of burning wood, the chemical stink of melted plastic, the stench of something sour and unfamiliar. Flesh, we'd learn... Then the smoke: three burgeoning columns above the upper town, broad and dense and dark red... everyone who'd emerged from the shelter moved as one toward the explosion... [people] formed a disorderly human chain... it was scarier now to separate than to walk into a city on fire. (GW 41)

This passage shows how war brings chaos, disorder, and loss of control. In a way, it anticipates how deeply world-shattering this experience would be for Ana, and how it would leave its mark on her identity. A foreign journalist reports live from the scene of the bombing, and when the children mock his accent and call him "stranac" (foreigner), the journalist retorts with "[o]h, what do I care if you all blow up, you gypsy vermin!" (43). Ironically, it shows that the same journalist reporting on the horrors of ethnic genocide displaying blatant racism and using racial slurs. The role of the media (and, by the extension, the figure of the reporter), then, is ambiguous: while, on the hand, it brings necessary information and awareness, on the other it is unsympathetic

and complicit, knowingly or unwittingly, in the disseminating of hate speech. This is just one of the various events which will be broadcast nationally and internationally. Indeed, it becomes a common occurrence, and Ana notices how “[as] a side effect of modern warfare, we had the peculiar privilege of watching the destruction of our country on television” (GW 27), adding that “[t]he news became the backdrop to all our meals, so much so that televisions lingered in the kitchens of Croatian households long after the war was over” (GW 27).

Furthermore, as the conflict rages on, dramatic footage of Serbian planes being shot down by Croatian anti-aircraft was made available to the people, and the shouts of ““Oba dva! Oba su pala!” Both of them! They both fell!” (GW 28) became a rallying cry to Croatians and gave them the false sense of safety they craved. It propagated the idea that they were somehow winning despite being “outnumbered [and] outweaponed” (GW 28). On the other hand, television also made available all the hatred and destruction being waged by the enemies. After the fall of Vukovar, plenty of footage with Četnik enemies shouting death threats was shown on TV. The novel includes phrases like “[b]it će mesa! Klačemo Hrvate!” (GW 64) written in Croatian and offers a translation immediately after: “There will be meat! We’ll slaughter all Croatians!” (GW 64). Additionally, after the Declaration of Independence, the differences between Croat and Serb became even more stark. Film, music, and soap operas were targeted at the different audiences, and even minor linguistic differences were exacerbated, such as the Croatian and the Serbian word for coffee (“kava” / “kafa”). This growing ethnic differentiation will become a crucial aspect of this war. In addition to the air raids, new shelters, spatial changes and growing number of refugees, the narrative documents how war brings a range of other changes to “normal life”. The war institutes a colour coding of life, with maps being used to determine which regions were dominated by which forces. Blue dots stood for the Croatians, red for the JNA (Serbs of the “Yugoslavenska Narodna Armija”, the Yugoslavian National Army) and skulls stood for the less organised, but still deadly Četniks, the Orthodox Serbs, who are easily recognised because of their beards. Practises that were common before the war became taboo. Beards, as well as the three-kisses greetings became signs of being Orthodox, and therefore the enemy, as noticed by Ana: “I knew the beards were important because I’d noticed all the shaving” (GW 20). The impacts and changes of the war are felt not only in individual families, but also as a social phenomenon that impacts all social circles, including friends, classmates, and neighbours.

These instances in the novel show how the issue of ethnicity and language is dominant in the narrative: as well as the idea of being persecuted and hunted for being the “wrong” ethnicity. Ana recalls how “[i]n school we’d been taught to ignore distinguishing ethnic factors, though it was

easy enough to discern someone's ancestry by their last name" (GW 9). This means that names become sources of meaning and differentiation. Ana's family is Croatian – Jurić – and so they use the Latin alphabet. Serbs use the Cyrillic alphabet instead. At one point in the novel, Ana comments on how Slovenia was an independent country, after only ten days of war. That was because "[t]hey didn't share a border with Serbia or have full access to the sea; they weren't the wrong ethnicity" (GW 31). Names will prove to be an important factor, because it is precisely someone's last name that will denounce their ethnicity and put them in danger. In fact, this is a foreshadowing of how Ana's family was identified as Croats and therefore killed. A Serbian or Bosnian family would have been let go. After her parents were killed, she understood "how one family could end up on the ground and another could be allowed to go on its way, that the distinction between Serbs and Croats was much vaster than ways of writing letters" (GW 89). Later in the narrative, Ana ponders "just how easy it was to erase a family" (GW 310). Ana's family being targeted and exterminated simply for being Croatian is the central source of trauma for Ana. *Girl at War* shows how personal war can get: the fate of the Jurić family is representative of the fate of thousands of innocent civilians which will have their entire lives changed by the war.

Similarly, Liesel loses her family because her parents were communists; Max has to go into hiding simply because he is a Jew; Hans and Rosa, despite being neither of those things, exist in a marginalised position because Hans was against the regime and on occasion even publicly helped Jews. If it had been discovered that they hid Max in their basement for months, they would have been executed. All of these characters, then, are essentially enemies of the Nazi state and their experience will be marked by fear of persecution and death as "outsiders" and traitors. Additionally, certain places in their stories hold added significance and meaning to their individual and collective experience. For Ana, some places which hold significant to her individual experience include the house in Tiska, where she used to spend her summers with her family and their handprints were memorialised on the setting concrete, the site of the roadblock and clearing where her parents were killed, and the burnt-down village she lived following her parents' massacre. Another site, however, represents a memorial for both Ana's individual experience and the whole collective experience for Croats: the Zid Boli (Wall of Pain) is a symbolic tomb for all those killed during the war, and as such holds a collective meaning to this community. These sites of meaning represent important moments of Ana's life, and they are revisited a decade later when she is concluding her coming-of-age journey.

For Liesel, her sites of memory are all connected to certain books that are important to her journey. After her brother is buried, Liesel steals *The Gravedigger's Handbook* from the undertaker's apprentice. This is the first book she steals, and it is symbolic that she steals it from the place her brother is laid to rest. The book represents a connection to her brother and his place of burial – an important site of memory for her, individually. Another important place in the novel is the street she lived in, Himmel Street (“Himmel” meaning Heaven in English), and the basement of her house. Himmel Street is an important location for both Ana and Max Vandenburg. Only a few months after Ana herself is taken into the Hubermann's household, Max arrives there in a terrible state. The manner in which Max arrived is quite ironic: Hans had sent him the address hidden inside a book: Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Holding the book on his journey to the house successfully hid him in plain sight. Max finds shelter with the Hubermanns and is slowly nursed back to health. Ana and Max strike an important friendship – they recognise in each other the same loss and trauma and same instinct for survival. The fact that Himmel Street represents salvation for these two characters – the daughter of communists and the Jew – is particularly poignant and ironic considering the painful history behind that name. The German name “Himmel Strasse” – “Heaven Street” – was the derisive name used by the guards at Treblinka prison camp during WWII to refer to the road which separated the prisoners' barracks and the gas chambers. It meant certain death for the Jews arriving in Treblinka. For both these characters, however, the arrival at Himmel Street signifies safety rather than danger, and life rather than death, as both of them manage to survive the war. During her time at Himmel Strasse, Liesel was gifted three books: one from her Papa, who had traded his last cigarettes for the book, and two were written by Max in the basement. Max's books are even more symbolic as he tore the pages from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, painted over them with white paint and then proceeded to write his own story over those pages. By doing so, he effectively reclaimed the power over his own story. Later in the narrative, Liesel will also reclaim her narrative by writing her life's story into a book. The basement is a double site of meaning: first it is representative of Liesel's relationship with Max, and second it becomes Liesel's literal salvation after the night bombing of Himmel Street. The street becomes a collective tomb for all of Liesel's loved ones who lived and died there that night. Considering these theories, it is essential to discuss Ana's and Liesel's identities in relation to their individual and collective influences, including their main relationships to both male and female characters – and by extend providing a discussion on gender that permeates both novels – and also their cultural, socio-economic, geographical, and historical background.

Ana and Liesel share many similarities in their upbringing, including struggles with poverty, femininity, and expectations, symbolised by their tough mothers and sensitive fathers. Liesel's immediate family unit is formed by her mother Paula Meminger and her brother Werner. On the way to delivering the children to be fostered at the Hubermann's house, however, Werner dies unexpectedly, and the journey must be stopped so they can bury him. Two days later, she is dropped off at Himmel Street and her mother leaves. Their goodbye is not particularly emotional, and Paula Meminger comes across as cold and cruel because her thoughts or feelings are never accessible to Liesel, and by extension the reader. When Liesel does not hear from her mother again, the conclusion is that her mother was probably sent to a prison camp. So, right at the start of the novel, Liesel is torn apart from her two most important familial relationships. Once there, she becomes part of a new family, formed by Hans and Rosa Hubermann. Rosa is described as a very tough figure, whereas Hans is described as softer and more sentimental. He takes time to care and love for Liesel: when Liesel wakes up during the nights, having wet the bed because of her night terrors, he cleans the sheets and starts reading *The Gravedigger's Handbook* out loud to Liesel. Throughout the next few months, he will also begin teaching Liesel how to read. Hans is an important influence to Liesel's development and overcoming of her trauma, because he is an empathetic figure and also a great supporter of Liesel's love for books, regularly using what little money he has to purchase books for her. Max Vandenburg, despite not being part of the family, is perhaps more closely associated with an older brother and equal – both Liesel and Max have suffered trauma and losses at hands of the Nazis. They recognise in each other that same trauma and hurt, and through their friendship both of them will begin to heal. Max is also another heavy influence in Liesel's love for books, writing two short books for her – *The Standover Man* and *The Word Shaker* – which will influence Liesel's writing years later. Another important relationship in this sense is Liesel's relationship with Ilsa Herman, the mayor's wife, who owns the library and allows Liesel to visit and read books freely. She also gifts Liesel the journal she will use to write her story.

Just as Liesel, Ana has two different family units throughout her journey. Ana's first family unit is characterised by her mother Dijana, her father Ivan and her sister Rahela. Later in the narrative, this unit will be comprised by Jack, Laura, Ana and Rachel (American for Rahela). Dijana studies languages at university and worked as an English teacher, but Ivan had no formal education. Ana remarks how her "parents were strict about school – my mother because she had been to college and my father because he hadn't" (GW 28). The fact that Ana's parents put such emphasis on her education and that her mother herself studied languages may explain Ana's later

choice of a degree in Literature. Additionally, Ana's relationship with her mother highlights a discussion about the role of women in society and in war. In the novel, the Croatian household is described as a mostly female dominion, and even after working all day at university, Dijana's second duties would start as soon as she got home: cooking "another meal from water and carrots and chunks of chicken carcass" (GW 27-28), and taking care of Ana and Rahela. In this household and society, mothers have the burden of ensuring the sustenance of their children in increasingly difficult situations, something that fathers don't seem to be responsible for, and young daughters are tasked with helping their mothers run the household: "My mother sent me to the butcher with a wad of new dinar and instructions to buy a bag of bones, and I watched as she made soup from the flavor of meat" (GW 56). This is also very similar to how women and mothers are portrayed in *TBT*. One of Liesel's chores is to help Rosa Hubermann by picking up and delivering the ironing back to Rosa's clients in the city. Despite the men in the novel all having jobs and their earnings being a considerable amount of those family's incomes, they are never described as doing anything regarding the household. On the contrary, all of the mothers in the novels are the ones responsible for enforcing the rules and taking care of cooking and cleaning, despite some fifty years dividing the two timelines (1940s and late 1990s).

As the enforcers of rules and tasked with the stressful responsibility of ensuring the survival of all people the household, that everyone has enough to eat, Dijana and Rosa are also frequently shown to reprimand the children. When resources are getting scarcer and water outages more frequent, Ana is reprimanded by her mother after wasting water in a game with some neighbouring girls, in which she gets completely soaked. An unusually tender side of her mother, however, is shown when "after a while, she smiled a little and swiped again at my hair. "At least I don't have to boil any for you. You've already had quite a shower"" (GW 70). Having a young, sick child also put a strain on the relationship of Ana and her mother: "I tried to think of my mother the way she was before my sister was born, whether she had always been annoyed with me, but found it difficult to remember a life that did not include a crying baby" (GW 47). This responsibility (and burden) falls on the women rather than the men. Liesel is constantly scolded by Rosa by arriving home filthy and late, from playing in the fields and woods. An awareness of gender roles is explicit when Ana joins the Resistance group "The Safe House". The members of the group all sport code names inspired by American popular culture – such as Indiana Jones (Ana's code name, identifying her as a tomboy), Rambo (Damir), a boy called Stallone, and the leader, Red Sonja. Receiving a name was an important rite of passage, a new baptism of sorts, and one that they put great thought into:

There was a philosophical divide in the Safe House about whether or not the girls should take on exclusively female nicknames. Some argued that they didn't want their pick of badass characters limited on the basis of gender, while Red Sonja said there were plenty of worthy women action stars who were actually more badass than their male counterparts, given they had to fight in tighter pants. (GW 235)

This quote shows, if anything, how the girls perceive women to be held to a higher standard, having to perform the same results with more restrictions in place. These problematic gender roles are not examined thoroughly or even discussed in-depth in the novels, except when they highlight the daughters' struggles with femininity and longing for freedom and autonomy. The girls do not identify with the "female world" and have no female friends – instead, they play with boys and are described as wild and tomboyish. Moreover, in *GW*, because of Rahela's age and illness, the two sisters lack a proper relationship, which Ana reflects on as the family delivers Rahela to the MediMission: "I wished I knew more about her and less about the patterns of her sickness. She was so small, so busy surviving that we hadn't gotten the chance to be like other sisters, but her hands still fit well in mine" (GW 79). So, while she recognises their lack of a bond, Ana does long for that connection, and as they grow older the sisters become closer. Nevertheless, both Ana and Liesel are consistently portrayed as having more of an interest and identifying more with the world of men, and the kind of freedom it bestows them. Dijana wanted Ana to "chat and jump rope, bake things" (GW 44), and she instead wanted to "ride my bike. Swim in the Sava, play football" (GW 44). The fact that Ana is not "feminine", submissive or delicate is aggravating both to her mother and her adoptive American mother, even though the two never met. Ana remarks how both women "might have bonded over their mutual distaste for my tomboyishness" (GW 137). Both Ana and Liesel enjoy a great amount of freedom, even in wartime, and this freedom is, undoubtedly, a privilege that boys enjoy naturally, and Ana and Liesel claimed as their own against the wishes of their mothers. Interestingly, another common denominator between them is poverty. Feminine products and clothing costs money, something their families do not have, and so the girls wear mostly old dresses or hand-me-downs. When asked by a girl why she dressed like a boy, Ana replies that it is to play football more freely – but in truth, "[t]he real reason was that they were my neighbor's clothes and we couldn't afford anything else" (GW 11). The link between Ana's tomboyishness and poverty is a recurrent motif *GW*:

all my possessions, including my bicycle, were castoffs of a boy who lived one floor up...
The path of hand-me-downs was a complex web that connected neighbours and strangers

across the city... on the weekends we spent our mornings scrubbing the stains from our new old clothes, wringing out each other's memories. (GW 44)

So, as disappointing as the girls' tomboyishness and masculinity may have been, the reality was that it cost little money, and there was no other choice for these poor families. Ana remarks, in fact, that Dijana "may have found solace in the fact that nearly everything sustaining my existence was free" (GW 44). Whilst Liesel and Ana are criticised for their lack of delicacy and being unfeminine, it is precisely their "masculinity" which allows them the kind of freedom not normally accessible to girls. It is interesting that the girls *transgress* expectations imposed on them, and not only in how they dress and play. Liesel steals books to reclaim a sense of power and control in her life, and for her own survival in defiance of censorship and oppression. Ana joins a Resistance group for similar reasons – "Combat was not an option... It was just a thing we did to live. A part of home... Firepower is the only thing that determines who eats" (GW 103-104). Both Ana and Liesel are survivors searching for their own identity and autonomy, and transgressing gender rules is one of their tools in search of freedom. Not surprisingly, some of their most important influences and friendships are male. The father figures in both novels are more closely equated with the role of friend and confidant, and the one who provides emotional comfort and healing. In *GW*, Ana remarks how "[m]y father and I thought in the same circles" (GW 67) and, in *TBT*, Papa becomes Liesel's most solid parental figure, and there is reference to how he taught her the act of "not-leaving: an act of trust and love, often deciphered by children" (TBT 43). The father figures are shown to have their own rituals of bonding with the girls. In the case of Hans, it involves reading with Liesel and playing the accordion in the basement. Similarly, Ivan and Ana bond over her bedtime stories and playing the piano, and later Jack would be instrumental in making Ana feel safe in the US through playing the guitar at night to her and watching baseball together. Such bonding moments are not shown to occur with the women in the novels. In addition to these father figures, the girls also foster important friendships with boys. Ana is described as spending most of her time playing with her best friend Luka, visiting his house, riding bikes together, swimming in the river, and also playing football with other boys. Luka was also the only person who would have an honest and unfiltered conversation with Ana about the war, and, later in the narrative, he is the only who Ana tells the full story of the massacre and her life at the Safe House. Considering that children are not usually contemplated in the adult discourse, and some effort was involved in an attempt of Ana's parents to shield her from what

was happening, evidenced by the lack of explanation her parents give her about the war, Luka is the one character who enables her to share thoughts, concerns and opinions:

Amid the disorder, Luka analyzed. It had always been his habit to ask me questions I couldn't answer, hypotheticals that supplied our bike rides with endless conversation... I'd always loved Luka's inquiries, and that he trusted my opinion. With other friends, the boys at school, he usually just kept quiet. And given the grown-ups' penchant for evading my questions, it was a relief to have someone who'd talk about it all. (GW 21-22)

In addition to being her best friend, Luka is also a possible romantic interest. When discussing the possible bureaucratic changes after the Declaration of Independence in Croatia, Ana asked which nationality (Bosnian or Croatian) would be on their children's birth certificates (GW 54). This concern over nationality is another important aspect of Ana's identity; because she is Croatian and Luka is Bosnian, she does not know what a mix of their children would be. This duality represents a binary thinking on Ana's part: you'd have to be either one *or* the other, but not both. This is a foreshadowing of Ana's subsequent struggle with her own dual nationality (Croatian/American) and her biculturalism. When Luka asks why she thinks they will get married in an uncharacteristically cool and sharp tone, Ana feels inadequate. This excerpt shows how Ana views Luka as a prospective partner because they were best friends, but feels ashamed for being called on it. Luka tells her that being friends is not enough, and that you had to be in love. Ana says she loves him, naturally, because they are so close, to which Luka replies: "You don't know whether you're in love until you're a teenager and you kiss... I mean we'll have to wait and test it" (GW 55). Romantic interest is a taboo subject when you are children, and Luka tells her not to mention anything at school, as he was already teased for being such good friends with a girl – which, in truth, people view as a unusual thing, and perhaps something leading to a future love interest. Their closeness was noticed by others, who also jumped to the conclusion that they would be romantically involved. In the case of Ana and Luka, this innocent interest does develop into a sexual tension when they meet again ten years later, yet it is never divulged if they get together or not. A similar dynamic is evidenced in the friendship between Rudy Steiner and Liesel. Rudy is, at the same time, her best friend and partner in crime, literally, as he helps Liesel steal books and fruit from the local farmers. He is also her accomplice in another matter: he is the only person outside of her family that she tells about Max, and he keeps her secret. Unlike Luka, who seemed wary of being romantically linked with Ana, Rudy is anything but shy. He continually asks Liesel for a kiss throughout the novel, and she denies him at every turn. After the bombing, Liesel finds

his body and sobbing, “[s]he leaned down and looked at his lifeless face and Liesel kissed her best friend Rudy Steiner soft and true on the lips” (TBT 539). Whereas Rudy and Liesel are torn apart in a tragic manner, Ana and Luka do find each other again and reconnect.

Another important element to the construction of the girls’ identities are their sense of attachment/belonging to a community and culture, which is heavily determined by their trauma. In Ana’s case, her changing identity is intimately connected with her trauma and with a desire to assimilate and distance herself from the experience as a mechanism for coping with her experience and fitting in. Additionally, by moving to the US, Ana will inevitably be influenced by the different culture, customs, and language. As a child, Ana saw English as a “a murky language, one whose grammar seemed to have been made up on the fly” (GW 33). It was not until her move that she began the process of adopting English as her “new” native language. Although she struggles in the beginning, with the passing of time and her assimilation into US culture and citizenship, English overtakes Croatian as her main language. Ten years later, when the reader is introduced to 20-year-old Ana, they learn that she is an English major, studying literature at NYU. This is a significant fact, showcasing not only the important role that literature has in her life, but also how English is the language through which she is able to connect to these works of literature. Additionally, the fact that she has been able to “pass” as American for a decade has allowed her distance from her own history and the difficult events she experienced as a child.

Ana experiences some initial discomfort at the differences between her Croatian culture and new American one, a discomfort which is commonly referred to in popular culture as “culture shock”. In Croatia, she lived in a capital city, and the urban setting is a backdrop to Ana’s experiences. She knows the map of the city by heart, and can move freely and with ease through its streets, either on foot or by bike. She was quite poor, and even riding a car was a special moment. Children “ran the streets without curfew and bought cigarettes and alcohol for the grown-ups” (GW 127), had little fear of strangers and nudity was considered normal. In America, however, life was the opposite. She went from a chaotic, busy urban setting to a strangely peaceful, clean, middle-class suburban neighbourhood in Philadelphia, surrounded by fields and forests. She understood America as the land of abundance – huge stores, huge people, huge portions. People needed cars for everything, and everything was “presliced and prepackaged” (GW 127). Ana comments how, for instance, she was considered a “normal-size fifth grader” (GW 153) in Croatia, but was deemed underweight in the US. Nudity was shameful, and people lived in “perpetual fear of kidnappers” (GW 127), so children were tightly monitored. Ana experienced a loss of the freedom she had enjoyed in Croatia. She also had to get used to a

completely different language, family dynamic and to the community around her. Adjusting to a new culture, including its expectations, perspectives, goals and taboos, proved challenging. In America, when trying to talk about the war, Ana realised that her “descriptions were met with an uncomfortable shifting of eyes, as if they were waiting for me to take things back, to say that war or genocide was actually no big deal” (GW 100). Ana experiences what veteran soldiers do when coming home, which is a lack of identification with civilian people who have no experience of the war and are not emphatic listeners. The people around her would “[w]ade through a polite amount of time before presenting an excuse to end the conversation” (GW 100). Because of this unwillingness to listen truthfully, “the version of things they ended up with was non-threatening, even funny. But to create a palatable war was tiring and painful, so one day, I stopped completely” (GW 100).

This lack of social support is the main reason Ana slowly withdraws and struggles to communicate about her experience. This is consistent with Nigel Hunt’s idea that “social support consistently comes out as being the most important factor concerning how people deal with stress and difficulty in their lives” (3). Ana is not encouraged to talk about her experience, but rather, slowly pushed into silence, as she noticed that “my time for grieving was running short. People were getting impatient. It wasn’t their fault. It was near impossible, even for me, to contain Gardenville and Croatia in the same thought” (GW 136). When asked to do a project about hometowns and family, she decided to write about New Jersey, and invent childhood memories that included Laura and Jack: “My teacher, who knew better, rewarded the lie with a good grade. The more I lied, the closer I came to fitting in. Sometimes I even believed myself” (GW 136). This is the main determinant as to why Ana repressed her memories and her trauma. Another form of erasure of Ana’s past involves her last name. Because she was formally adopted, her last name changed, even though the reader has no access to her new last name. When Sharon Feldman calls her by name of Jurić, Ana notes how “[i]t was a last name I hadn’t heard in a long time” (GW 97). Similarly, when her college professor pronounces her name “the Croatian way, not with the long, flat a’s most Americans used” (GW 120), Ana finds it strange, even though she was used to that as a child. The naturalisation of the American pronunciation of Ana’s name is suggestive of a deeper shift in her identity. These two aspects, while they may have been necessary changes so Ana could adapt and assimilate smoothly into her new culture, also function essentially as a silencing of her ethnic background and memories.

In adopting a new American identity in order to assimilate in American society, Ana erases her ethnicity, hiding not only her Croatian background but also her experience of the war. To all

the people who meet her, she is simply Ana from New Jersey, and not Ana from Zagreb. She creates a double persona to assimilate into her new suburban life: "I grew and my accent faded. For years I didn't reveal anything at all. I passed as an American" (GW 100). While on the surface it seemed that Ana's assimilation was a sign of healing, it was actually the opposite. She only learned how to lie convincingly to avoid questionings and discomfort. Losing her Croatian identity is not something Ana intends to do in the beginning, but it was a consequence of the failure of the community around her to embrace and support her process of healing. Because of this, even if on the surface Ana is assimilated successfully and becomes a functioning adult, there is still an element of her personality that could not mature and transition successfully into adulthood, and an element of her identity that was divided. Throughout the narrative, it is possible to document the changes which occur in Ana's identity, her subsequent struggles to contemplate both cultures and experiences in her journey of maturation, and also her quest to reconnect with the important relationships and sources of memory and meaning which she had abandoned when she left Croatia.

Another element which added to Ana's difficulty in dealing with the traumatic experience and the juxtaposition of the two cultures was the fact that she was the only one who remembered her deceased parents and her old life in Croatia. Because Rahela was too young when she left and could not remember her old life, this duality was not present. She was unquestionably American and "whole" – she did not even answer to Rahela, instead calling herself Rachel. She also lost the native language – too young to even speak when she left, English was all she knew. She had no memory of her life in Zagreb and as such felt no overwhelming conflict in her identity. For Rahela, "there was no one before our American parents, and the loss of these other people, the parents of technicality, was objectively sad but nothing more" (GW 146), whereas her older sister experienced this dual identity, which would turn into a full-blown crisis. Still, Rahela did long for a connection to the past and her biological parents, yet this desire was not as powerful as perhaps Ana's was. In one episode, Rahela asks Ana about the story of her birth and wants to see some photos of their parents, questioning whether she looked like them. Ana remarked how Rahela "held the photo so close to her face it looked like she was staring right through the paper. I thought of our parents and felt sorry that she could only see them blurred" (GW 148). This is her own attempt to connect with her past and her ethnicity. Although she feels she should be sad about losing her parents, she cannot conjure the emotion when she does not remember them or the bond they once shared. Consequently, she does not share in the same sense of loss and grief. She does exhibit interest in the past and a desire to know more – this may become an essential part of her

identity that Rahela will need to address as she grows older. At this point in the novel, however, this discussion is not fully developed. Rahela is presented as “whole” and the counterpart to Ana who is “fractured” (if we again return to Erikson’s notion of *wholeness* and *inner identity*). The difference in how Rachel and Ana cope with having been affected by war and having lost family shows that *memory* is a key element to emotional connection and identity. In fact, memory plays an important part in her search for her past: “Sometimes I could see fragments of them – my mother’s severe cheek bones, my father’s fair, bushy eyebrows – but I could neither zoom in nor cling to these moments of clarity” (GW 131). She cannot access those important and meaningful elements of her journey without confronting the memories she had been repressing later on in her journey. This divide in her identity is further exacerbated by her adoptive parents, as if she had “traded one family for another in a used-car deal” (GW 114).

When Ana arrives in the US and feels a lack of empathy or support over her experience, she alienates herself from people and that has an effect on her relationships. Although she forms a strong bond with her adoptive parents Jack and Laura, the relationship is partly hesitant because she feels it is a betrayal to her Croatian parents. In fact, every time she called her adoptive parents “Mom” or “Dad”, a “silent prefix of ‘American’ existed in my mind” (GW 138). As much as she learns to love them, she cannot forget the parents she lost. Ana’s shifting identity is further represented by her ability to speak Croatian and English, and which language is more dominant depending on the point in her story. Because of this duality, and despite having been assimilated into American culture and “passing” as American without question over her background (a privilege which certainly has to do with being Caucasian and adopted into an “Italian” family), it is possible to see the ambiguity of Ana’s identification with the *other* rather than with the *American* when she comments about the Iraq War:

In Croatia, life in wartime had meant a loss of control, war holding sway over every thought and movement, even while you slept. It did not allow for forgetting. But America’s war did not constrain me; it did not cut my water or shrink my food supply. There was no threat of takeover with tanks or foot soldiers or cluster bombs, not here. What war meant in America was so incongruous with what had happened in Croatia – what must have been happening in Afghanistan – that it almost seemed a misuse of the word. (GW 111)

Precisely because of her duality, Ana is able to empathise and understand the perspectives of underprivileged people trying to survive in this conflict, something that most Americans might not grasp due to the unawareness of their own privilege and security. Whilst the attacks in

September 2001 killed nearly 3,000 people, traumatised and mobilised an entire nation, and basically stopped the whole world for a few hours, Ana understood the reality of what was happening in Iraq, of how war fundamentally changed a nation and a people, something that civilian Americans could not begin to understand – which explains the use of the word “misuse” in this section. It is interesting that Ana chooses this particular word, considering the recurrent presence of duality in the novel and the multilingual nature of the narrative, which may suggest instances of mistranslation and struggles in communication that are significant in her journey, which includes being inserted in another country and having to adapt to a new language, as well as struggling to communicate her traumatic experience and feel understood. The second timeline takes place in the spring of 2012, roughly six months after the World Trade Center attack. During this time, the eyes of the world (and the media) were focused on this conflict. Whether she wanted to think about it or not, it was inevitable that the Iraq War would compel Ana to remember her own experience of another war. Then, the speech she gives at the United Nations brings to surface all the memories she had tried to hide for so long, pushing Ana to address that side of her identity.

This process of reflection will put into check two relationships she had formed in the United States: her boyfriend Brian and her mother Laura. Ana and Laura’s relationship becomes strained when Ana informs her of her intention to go to Croatia. Laura is against the idea, saying she will just “open old wounds” (GW 170) and not understanding why Ana needs to return. What Laura fails to understand is that the wounds never healed in the first place. Ana replies: “I’m already hurting. I am at a standstill with this shit. I’m never going to get better. Not like this... I’m not asking your permission” (GW 170). In the weeks before the trip, Ana completely distances herself and avoids any communication. Even if Laura was supportive of Ana’s past and respected the memory of Dijana and Ivan, Ana’s relationship with her American mother is a reminder of what Ana had to do to fit in, and how she had to forget her Croatian parents, which is precisely why she has to temporarily sever that bond in order to go home. Similarly, Ana distances herself from her boyfriend Brian. Although he is seemingly very supportive, the problem is that he tried to get her to talk about her experience: “Brian attempted to coax me into talking about what was bothering me, and in response I picked petty fights with him until we had spiraled into a cycle of bickering and making up” (GW 166). For Ana, he has no legitimacy in giving her any kind of advice. She is reluctant to let go of the image she had created for herself for so long. The truth of her duality creates a wedge between them that they cannot reconcile, even through sexual intimacy:

Brian and I had quiet sex that felt like an apology. Normally we were relaxed with one another, having learned the patterns of each other's bodies. But now we were overly careful, each of us fumbling to show the other we were willing to repair the trust I had broken. When it was over I felt a longing to the blitheness I had ruined. (GW 161)

This section is relevant because it is the first instance of sex being used as a way of trying to restore a sense of intimacy that was lost. This excerpt also shows Ana clearly as a woman engaging in consensual sexual activity, rather than being subjected to rape, and shows that she is not a child anymore, but a consenting adult. It also showed how the breach of trust in their relationship became irreparable because Ana was unable or unwilling to be open and vulnerable – highlighting again her difficulty with intimacy and forming attachments. Some days before she is due to fly, she breaks up with him. Even if unconsciously, she must let go of him and her attachment to him if she is to complete her journey. This happens because, at this point in her journey, Ana needs to choose her allegiance to either America or Croatia, and as such she unconsciously severs some important American connections. The resolution of this conflict, however, tends towards an eventual blending and acceptance of the two cultures within her identity, rather than opting for one and erasing the other.

Ironically, considering she left Croatia on a fake visa, Ana enters the country with her American passport. When she receives a customs card to fill out as either citizen or tourist, she does not know which one to tick – another evidence of the duality in her identity. Despite ticking “tourist”, Ana felt that, by coming home, she was finally embracing her roots. She spoke Croatian to the guard, for the first time in probably ten years, and it felt rusty: “The language that in my mind had existed for so long only in past tense was alive again in conversation and pulsing from the radio” (GW 181). Arriving back in Croatia was as big a shock as when she had first arrived in the US. Meeting Luka was a shock: the boy was now a man, and both Luka and Ana had difficulty conciliating the person in front of them with image they had of each other as children. The city she knew was now completely westernised and modern, and the Zid Boli was moved from the main square to the cemetery, as people wanted to move on from the memories of war. The way in which this site of memory changed places testifies to its transitory nature as proposed by Winter: “Sites of memory vanish, to be sure, but they can be conjured up again when people decide once again to mark the moment they commemorate” (72). Ana feels a sense of betrayal that people have chosen collectively to distance themselves from the reality of war – even if she herself did the same all those years back. Being in Croatia feels foreign because, for the first time in a decade, she is not alone in her pain – she is in the one place where people can relate to her

experience. However, as Luka tells her, not being alone in the experience means also seeing the pain of others: "It's not just your shit... You don't get to claim the war as your own personal tragedy. Not here" (GW 193). Their classmate, Tomislav, once the brightest in the class, saw his life fall apart during the war and now worked as a bartender. Even Luka, who did not lose loved ones and was not as affected by the war as others were, also had to deal with the economic and political aftermath. Also, by staying in Croatia, he had never suppressed the experience as Ana did and could then identify with his community and share in that sense of community support that Ana lacked in the US, which in turn helped him process the entire experience.

Surprisingly for Ana, Luka's extended family mostly viewed Ana as American rather than Croatian. Being nicknamed "American Girl" (GW 181) stirred up some resentment and she begins to question the home experience, and she realises she is not fluent enough in Croatian to even fight back. Ana tells him she wants to go home – even if she was "too aware I had no idea where that might be" (GW 182). Losing fluency in her native language is symbolic of Ana losing her link to her Croatian identity. Ana tells Luka she is experiencing culture shock, which in other words is a difficulty in adjusting both cultures she had grown to incorporate in her identity. Erikson considers this "culture shock" a difficulty that the child who grows up in two different settings (collective ego-space-time and collective life plan) have in conciliating essentially opposite cultures, who in turn "often seem blocked in their expectations and paralyzed in their ambitions" (49). Luka questions Ana as, for him, "you can't get culture shock from your own culture" (GW 187). Just as Rachel is "whole" in her American identity, Luka is "whole" in his Croatian identity, and he cannot understand the deep, existential duality that Ana has to conciliate within herself, as his own culture and identity was never challenged. Nevertheless, Luka's perspective offers information on how Croatian society has coped with the memory of the war.

He educates Ana about the efforts of reconciliation between Serb and Croatian youths, mainly through music, "'a mix of traditional Muslim and Mediterranean melodies'... the new postwar pop... they were what Luka termed a 'cultural cease-fire', an effort to bring the segregated nationalities back into communion with one another'" (GW 208). Amid some awkwardness and tensions, the two try to close the gap and regain the closeness and intimacy that was lost. They talk about college, their choices of different degrees – Literature and Finance – the latter which Ana thought was underwhelming: "I'd imagined him as a philosopher or a scientist" (GW 189). Despite the feeling that she should feel at home, now that she was finally back, the reality was she felt strangely displaced, just as she had felt displaced in the US. Ana is not Croatian or American, and feels alienated in both places. She is in-between cultures, and instead of opting

to identify herself with one or the other, she has to learn to incorporate the two. This is symbolised by the new language Ana and Luka use – not Croatian or English, but Cringlish, a system Ana and Luka “devised without discussion – Croatian sentence structure injected with English standards for the vocabulary I was lacking, then conjugated with Croatian verb endings” (GW 187). When Ana speaks in Cringlish, it represents a blending of the two identities and cultures, and this is a positive first step towards healing. For her coming-of-age journey to be completed, however, she will need to revisit the main places associated with her trauma and seek out the memories of her loved ones. Luka is symbolically her one true link to her past, and naturally he will be one to accompany her in her physical and psychological journey through Croatia. Through the processing of her traumatic memory and achievement of catharsis, Ana will finally reconcile the two cultures within her identity and conclude her coming-of-age quest.

In *TBT*, Liesel’s identity is not shown to be divided in the way that Ana’s is. Even though she loses her family traumatically and has to readjust to life at Himmel Street, she was still comfortably within her culture and language. Still, Liesel also grows to identify with the *other*, the enemies of the Nazi state, and this identification is initially characterised by her physical attributes: “Her hair was a close enough brand of German-blond, but she had dangerous eyes. Dark brown” (TBT 38), but this is not received negatively in the form of an existential conflict. While she looked Aryan enough to pass comfortably in this society and avoid direct persecution, her eyes secretly betrayed her defiance of the regime. It is exactly through this betrayal, through this transgression – with the books, the writing, and the stealing – that Liesel cements her identity. Liesel’s identity, then, is influenced a lot more by her autonomy and her ability to control words to her favour than by duality or divide. Liesel is also able to form intimate and meaningful relationships following her first traumatic experience, mainly with Hans, Max and even Rudy. Unlike what Ana experienced, Liesel was actually encouraged to find the means to express herself and deal with her trauma, mainly through the influences of Hans, Max and Ilsa. As such, Liesel is able to begin healing from the experience much sooner than Ana. Following her second traumatic experience, when she loses all of her loved ones in the bombing of Himmel Street, there is not enough information in the novel to say how she recovered from it – only that, even though she was severely traumatised by these losses, that having compiled a personal narrative may have given Liesel the tools to come to terms with her second traumatic loss. The struggles Ana and Liesel face in confronting their experience directly affects their development and socialisation, and how they form bonds with other people. Symbolically, both of them struggle with their speech, at some point or other in the novels. In one episode, Liesel is called to read out loud in

class, but stutters and struggles, feeling intense humiliation and shame (TBT 82). Following the massacre, Ana goes months without speaking, withdraws into herself and, even when she does speak, she avoids talking of her experience. Eventually, though, both of them overcome these issues and find, symbolically through words, the meaning for their experience – Liesel through writing her story, and Ana through finally speaking of her experience and reconnecting with her experience. In the following section, I want to explore Ana's and Liesel's trauma and show how they overcome it in their narratives.

1.3. Overcoming Trauma: An Analysis and Discussion of the Novels

In *Girl at War*, Ana Jurić is the protagonist and first-person narrator of the narrative which is set between Croatia and the United States. The main places in Croatia include the capital Zagreb and some of the countryside and coastline, whereas in the US the storyline is divided between New York and suburban New Jersey. *GW* is divided into two different timelines and four non-chronological sections, alternating between past, present, past, present. Parts I and III are set in 1991, and parts II and IV are set in early 2002, about six months after the World Trade Center attack. In Part I, Ana is introduced to the reader as a 10-year-old girl living through a civil war. Her story shows the changing of circumstances, heightening of tensions and ethnic hatred, and introduces her main traumatic event, the death of her parents. Part III, chronologically, continues with Ana's journey and how she copes as an orphan during wartime. She is eventually reunited with her godparents and sent to the US with the help of United Nations Peacekeeper Sharon Feldman to be adopted alongside her sister. Part II takes the narrative ten years into the future, where Ana is a student at New York University, majoring in Literature. The section begins with Ana going to the UN Headquarters to give a speech about her experience during the Yugoslavian Civil War. This speech sets in motion a series of uncomfortable thoughts and memories on Ana's part which fuel a desire to return to Croatia, which she does during her summer vacation. Part IV takes Ana back to Croatia to rediscover her country of birth and reconnect with her memories.

The non-chronological structure of the story is constructed to highlight certain points in the protagonist's story, rather than provide an overview of her life. Although it is possible to identify two narrative voices in the story, meaning Ana as a child and as an adult, for the most part the two voices do not interfere with each other and the reader has no insight into events to come. However, there are moments of subtle foreshadowing which hint at the deterioration of the

conflict and how all spheres of Ana's life will become marked by war. Most importantly, the structure of the novel provides certain clues into the stages of Ana's maturation and significant events in her story. The beginning of the novel encompasses the early stages of the war and the escalation of conflict, marked by a deterioration of conditions and a range of spatial and political changes. The main traumatic event of the novel happens in this section: the senseless murder of Ana's parents, Ivan and Dijana Jurić, at a Serbian roadblock, on their way back from delivering Ana's seriously ill sister, Rahela, to the MediMission office in Sarajevo. The magnitude of this loss is signified in the title of Part I – "They Both Fell" – indicating that losing her parents is a turning-point in Ana's story and symbolises both her loss of innocence and the end of her childhood. All other events in Ana's life must, irrevocably, return to this point of departure and try to make sense of it. Following this event, Ana is found and taken in by Drenka and Damir, a severely traumatised girl and paralysed by silence. Ana's silence "is a well-documented response to trauma and particularly associated with grief" (McLoughlin 17). McLoughlin explains how the representation of this struggle to speak of one's experience is recurrent in war literature, as she proposes that "war defeats language, as though words themselves have been blasted to smithereens or else suffer from combat fatigue" (17). Ana's silence protects her from having to relive and relate the painful experience to others. While living at the village, she joins the insurgency group known as the "Safe House" and trains as a soldier. This keeps her occupied and allows her to channel her grief into literal action:

While we were at the Safe House I was busy, felt useful, but at night I longed for my parents, ran their final moments through my head. In that first month I wasn't quite mourning. Instead my mind felt hazy and detached, crowded with ideas I knew weren't true even as I entertained them; maybe, if I worked hard enough, I could win them back. (GW 232)

Through physically fighting back, she is initially able to control her experience and feel a sense of purpose and even revenge. At only 10-years-old, she shoots and kills a Serbian soldier. Despite the momentary satisfaction of striking her enemy, this act of revenge and survival even does nothing to diminish the pain of her loss. Shortly after, Damir is injured and Ana is forced to break her silence and give information on where she came from. Drenka arranges her transport to Zagreb, where Ana will live with her godparents. Even then, however, she is reluctant to talk about the experience, but she finally feels comfortable conveying the story when she realises "Petar and Marina were mourning the loss of their best friends, that they felt the same pain I did, and the realization gave me a little courage" (GW 261). With their help, she builds a symbolic

tomb for her parents at the Zid Boli (Wall of Pain) monument, located at the Trg, the main square in the city. Ana returns to school and goes through the motions of a “normal” life, except she has been fundamentally changed and isolates herself from others. As explored in the previous section, when Ana arrives in the US, she does not feel understood or supported in her grief, and so withdraws completely. After the UN Speech, speaking of her experience for the first time in possibly ten years, Ana is left disturbed by the memories which come flooding in. For a decade, she had constructed an image of assimilation and wholeness, as if she had never lived through a war or lost her parents. What the title suggests, then, is that throughout those years, Ana was sleep walking - not physically asleep, but symbolically, through her omission and suppression of such an important part of herself and her experience. The speech forces Ana out of that dream state and forces her to really examine her trauma, unravelling then the persona she had created. Ana’s journey towards maturation and healing is determined, ultimately, by how she is able to *perceive* her experience, on how she is able to *construct* a narrative about her life. Her narrative is not written, but it is symbolised by the rearranging of her memories, visiting important places, and creating a visual storytelling (through pictures) of her trip to Croatia, essentially memorialising the experience.

Storytelling has been an important feature of Ana’s life since she was a child, through the bedtime stories ritual her father had built with her. The novel mentions one instance and one book in particular, entitled *Stribor – The Tales from Long Ago*. This title actually refers to the book *Croatian Tales of Long Ago*, or originally “*Priče iz davnine*”, a collection of extremely popular children’s fairy-tale stories by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić in the beginning of the twentieth century. Her style, which combined mythology and fantasy, has been compared to that of writers such as Hans Christian Andersen and J. R. R. Tolkien. In *GW*, Ana’s father reads the story of a young man who, when passing through the Forest of Stribor, is bewitched by an evil serpent, disguised as a beautiful young woman. When he takes the woman home, his mother is the only one who recognises who she really is. The fact that the mother is named Brunhilda is significant, as Brunhilda is a powerful female figure from German mythology, revered as a shield-maiden or valkyrie depending on the specific tradition. In this specific story, Brunhilda seeks the help of Stribor, the Lord of the Forest, who offers her a difficult deal in order to get rid of the serpent. Stribor would grant Brunhilda her youth and beauty back, free from the evil serpent, but she could never see her son again. Brunhilda declines his help and tells Stribor she prefers to suffer rather than lose her son. Her sacrifice ends up breaking the spell and Brunhilda and her son are free from the clutches of the serpent. This is a tale that has been told many times by her father, and he takes

great effort in acting out the scenes. This particular telling, however, is meant to teach Ana a moral lesson: that “sometimes hard things are worth the trouble” (GW 39). The symbolism in the story has a direct link with their current situation: Croatia is suffering and fighting against the repression and evil of their opponents, but this is a sacrifice worth living so that they can be free in the end. Ana must be strong like Brunhilda and, in the end, all will be well, and they will have a happy ending. Ana’s father, then, is trying to teach her a message, and the best way he finds to do it is exactly through fairy-tale literature that is aimed at children and as such is constructed with language and characters easily accessible and recognised by children.

As air raids became a constant part of her routine, waiting became a part of the routine: “Sitting on the floor in the dark I wasn’t afraid; the feeling was more like expectation during a particularly intense round of hide-and-seek” (GW 23). It is interesting that the language used by Ana involves a reference to playing a game. As a child, she associates anxiety, fear and anticipation with that particular adrenaline involved in hide-and-seek, and it is exactly through playing games that she can begin to make sense of her feelings. In the midst of all the escalating changes to the life they knew, playtime became not just a moment to have fun, but an opportunity for children to share stories without adult censure, and to make sense of this new situation. The next excerpt highlights the role of storytelling and of communicating and sharing information, and how these are essential activities that all people engage in:

We began collecting stories... Whoever kicked the ball between improvised (and ever-negotiable) goal markers got to tell their story first. An unspoken contest of gore developed, honoring whoever could more creatively describe the blown-out brains of their distant acquaintances. Stjepan’s cousins had seen a mine explode a kid’s leg, little bits of skin clinging to the grooves in the sidewalk for a week afterward. Tomislav had heard of a boy who was shot in the eye by a sniper in Zagora; his eyeball had turned to liquid like a runny egg right there in front of everyone. (GW 12)

This is the first instance in the novel of children using unfiltered storytelling to cope and make sense of this changing reality. The sharing of information and knowledge being shared through stories (even if they are gory or morbid) is representative of the role that storytelling has in aiding all people, not only children, to process these changes:

At home my mother paced the kitchen talking on the phone to friends in other towns, then hung out the window, passing the news to the next apartment building over. I stood close while she

discussed the mounting tensions on the banks of the Danube with the women on the other side of the clothesline, absorbing as much as I could before running off to find my friends. A citywide spy network, we passed on any information we overheard, relaying stories of victims whose links to us were becoming less and less remote. (GW 12)

Storytelling is a recurrent theme in the novel, and here it is made evident through the new games invented by the children. Serbs and Croats, possibly an adaptation of Cops and Robbers, involved two teams that played out a battle: “If we could convince enough people to be Serbs we’d play teams... it was essential to make eye contact with the person you were killing” (GW 50). There were some sub-contests to the game: most realistic machine-gun sound effects and acting out the best death – “those who died with their limbs bent in unnatural angles and could hold their positions the longest were the winners” (GW 51). This is, in itself, another instance of storytelling, of acting and imagining, however gruesome. Children were particularly vulnerable, as new mines were disguised as shiny objects in the street, which was “a hard lesson for an already frugal population under pressure of rations” (GW 51), and literature and storytelling provides an escape from their tough reality.

From bedtime stories with her father and gruesome re-enactments of battles with her friends, what stories do is provide a platform through which it is possible to understand and process that experience. Ana’s bedtime rituals with her father were also a bonding and reassuring experience. Through stories, Ana’s father comforted and instructed her. After he dies, his enduring legacy to Ana is the love of literature and words. She will always have a special relationship with literature and, while she refuses to communicate with others about her experience, she delves into the world of literature for comfort and reflection. For Ana, reading was “one of the only ways in which I allowed myself to think about the continent and country I’d left behind” (GW 118). She defines herself as a displaced person, saying that even her professor “seemed to know I was not at home in the world” (GW 118), and, discussing *The Emigrants* reveals how disconcerting it is “to come face-to-face with people who never recover from their traumas” (GW 119). This book is a significant reference to how Ana views herself as an outsider to that community and evidences the role of literature and storytelling in Ana’s journey. She sees herself reflected on the pages of *The Emigrants*, as their story resonates with her own story, and the discussion then begins to centre around the notion that memory is imperfect, which leads Ana to question her own memory and the fear that her recollection of her parents may be slowly fading: “That had been what scared me most. What if my memory of my parents’ final moments was all wrong?” (GW 120). The only physical evidence she had of her parents were blurry pictures. Fear,

then, that her memory was slipping awakened Ana and compelled to return to Croatia and strengthen her memory and her bond to these meaningful people and places from her past.

While there, she reunites with Luka and his family and goes in search for the meaningful sites of memory in her past, a journey which extends through Part IV, "Echoed By The Trees". Armed with her polaroid camera, Ana is ready to take back to the US some small mementos of her trip, including pictures of Luka and all the places she visits. Part II finishes with Ana recognising the road her parents' car got stopped a decade earlier and the clearing in the woods where they were shot to death. Part IV returns precisely from this point. As in Part II, the title of this section is not as obvious, but it may refer to Ana's intense emotional reaction upon arriving at the spot, who "cried the kind of suffocating sobs I hadn't since I'd been on the other side of this same road, ten years before" (GW 217), and how the nature around her may have "echoed" her cries. At the same she hated this place and its history, Ana notices how she felt "the strange calm of being close to my parents again" (GW 286), showcasing again an ambivalence of feelings. Despite the lack of an official monument marking this spot as significant, Ana marks it down in the map, as to memorialise the location and the experience of the people who died there. From there, Ana and Luka continue the journey and find the village where Drenka and Damir had lived. It was not a village anymore – it was "reduced to rubble" (GW 287). They find an inscription marking the death of the 79 civilians – Drenka and Damir included – when the city burned down.

Drawing again from Winter's theory on "sites of memory", we can understand that this plaque and Ana's markings on the map as forms of remembrance that are significant to the cultural memory of the people who suffered during the war and believed, collectively, "that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message" (Winter 62). This location holds meaning to this community, and Ana specifically, because it honours the memory of the dead – Dijana, Ivan, Drenka and Damir, among others – and becomes a place of celebration for "the survivors, for the families of those who were not there, and these people needed easy access to the sole signifier left to them – the name of the dead person" (Winter 69). Ana reminisces about the experience of living there, walking through the derelict and burnt down buildings, and she think about the man she killed: "When I was shooting – when I shot that guy – I liked it. I knew it was bad and I liked it. I wasn't sorry" (GW 291). Ten years later, however, what she feels is regret. This feeling of regret is incredibly important and demonstrates Ana's growth and maturation. Had her view of her enemy remained the same from ten years before, it would have meant that she did not develop throughout those years, and that her perspective of blinded revenge remained the same. This moment represents Ana's understanding of the duality between enemy

and friend, or good and evil. For Ana, “the guilt of one side did not prove the innocence of the other” (GW 292), and those most affected would still be the innocent civilians killed on both sides. In *Girl at War*, ten years after the horrors of the conflict took place, the two countries were trying to heal the old wounds – through language, culture, music, and through a new generation, representing the possibility of finding peace. Just as the two countries changed and developed towards conciliation, so must Ana find common ground in her own internal conflicts.

While in Part II Ana begins her journey of healing and reconnecting with her past and ethnic identity, Part IV is the culmination of that process. Reaching adulthood, for Ana, symbolises a conciliation with her past and a new perspective on her experience, and also a blending of both cultures which are a part of her. The last scenes of the narrative take place in Tiska, the fishing village she used to spend summers with her family before the war. There, she finds out Petar died and Marina moved away. As she walks through the house, Ana takes a series of pictures to show Rahela, including of finds “the family plot” (GW 310), a lasting memorial of her family made from the handprints the family (Ana’s parents, godparents, Ana and Luka) had immortalised in the outside patio. She traced the handshapes fixed on the concrete, and found even Luka’s toe-shaped smudge he had planted on the concrete all those years before, a testament to his importance as a member of Ana’s family. By taking these pictures, Ana is creating a visual story for herself and her sister. Ana calls home and leaves a message for Rahela, telling her about the handprints, the pictures and about their parents, and makes plans to bring her next year. This symbolises perhaps a new beginning for the sisters’ relationship and a way of helping Rahela find her roots as well. In the last scene of the novel, Ana and Luka lie in the bedroom of the house and look at the stars:

Through the gash in the roof we could see the sky, and we stretched our arms upward, tracing constellations. It calmed me, just like it had when we were small and hungry and scared of dying. Around the room the moon filled the shell marks in the walls with a pallid blue light, and they looked full again, like a home. (GW 316)

The word “home” used here signifies that Ana finally feels “at home in the world”, which relates to her feeling like she was not “at home in the world” (GW 118) and resonates with what she said to Luka in Part II, that she wanted to “go home” (GW 182). With Luka, she is able to find a sense of family and comfort. It is significant, then, that the novel begins and ends in Croatia. It symbolises Ana’s return to her point of departure, the closing of a cycle, and the possibility of acceptance is only made available to her because she returns. Had she stayed in the US, had she

not returned and had she continued to suppress her memories and her identity, she would not have been able to reach maturation. The reason, then, that the narrative focusses on Ana as a child, and then Ana as an adult, and misses that ten-year-gap in her assimilation into the US and teenage years must surely be because, during that time, Ana hid her history and her memories, and that it was not possible to really come of age and have some measure of control or autonomy over her own life and her own history until she revisited her past. In this way, by returning to Croatia, reconnecting with Luka and revisiting these sites of meaning, Ana is able to mature, to fully come of age and conclude her journey, having looked back to her own story, her own narrative and having made peace with the past, rather than becoming overwhelmed and controlled by it. Through achieving catharsis and acceptance, she is able to bring order into her grief, to reclaim and conciliate her Croatian and American identities, and to find autonomy.

In *The Book Thief*, the story is narrated by Death personified, who is the omniscient and omnipresent narrator and responsible for relaying the story of Liesel Meminger. Right at the start, Death announces three encounters it will have with Liesel throughout the novel, and associates them with three colours: white, black, red. Their first encounter takes place when Liesel's brother dies in the train to Molching; the second, when Liesel witnesses the crash and death of an enemy pilot; and the third, after the bombing of Himmel Street, when Death sees Liesel covered in ash and clutching a book. In this last encounter, Death notices how "[a] mountain range of rubble was written, designed, erected around her" (TBT 23). The language chosen to describe this encounter is quite significant once the reader realises this book is the one Liesel wrote about her experience, and that it was precisely this which saved her from being killed alongside everyone else. Just as Liesel wrote, designed, and erected her narrative, she also designed her own survival. With each encounter, Death associates a different colour: the first, white, the colour of snow, as it was winter when Liesel's brother died. The second colour is black, after the colour of the sky the night the enemy plane crashed; and the final colour is red, the colour of the sky during the bombing of Himmel Street. These three colours, in addition to being associated with the Nazi swastika flag, are recurrent symbols throughout the novel, and "the implied superimposition of these colours in the graphic accompanying this passage to make a swastika suggests that the insight to be gained from this 'overview' concerns the historical experience of the Nazi period" (Adams 158). The importance of colours and their symbolism is a particular trait of *TBT*, in comparison with the other novels discussed in this thesis, and is one of the strongest figurative elements of the novel.

The importance of this imagery is further evidenced and constructed through other recurrent colours in the novel, including blue, the colour of Rudy's "beautiful blonde hair and big,

safe blue eyes” (TBT 66); yellow, the colour of blond German hair and the yellow Star of David Jews were forced to wear; orange, the colour of the flames burning the books, and also the colour of explosions and fires; and brown, the colour of Liesel’s eyes as well as Hitler’s Brownshirts: “On the other side, beyond the blurry heat, it was possible to see the brown-shirts and swastikas joining hands. You didn’t see people. Only uniforms and signs” (TBT 118). Death also associates white as the colour of the millions of souls it picks up during the war, the souls of the people who died in the prison camps. In fact, although unexplained, it seems colours are Death’s main association with the human soul: “Your soul will be in my arms. A colour will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away” (TBT 14). In all three encounters with Liesel, someone else had died and because of that Death was able to view Liesel indirectly. In addition to these encounters, they will be reunited one final time:

When I travelled to Sydney and took Liesel away, I was finally able to do something I’d been waiting on for a long time... I pulled a dusty black book from my pocket. The old woman was astonished... Even though the text had faded, she was able to read her words. The fingers of her soul touched the story that was written so long ago in her Himmel Street basement. (TBT 553)

Liesel’s and Death’s reunion is not painful or traumatic – the impression is that they meet as old friends, and that the narrative is at the centre of their interaction. Interestingly, there is no indication of a colour associated with Liesel’s soul. Liesel asks Death if it has read and understood the book, and Death is pensive: “I wanted to tell the book thief many things, about beauty and brutality. But what could I tell her about those things that she didn’t already know?” (TBT 554). At this point, the reader understands that, perhaps, the reason no colour is associated with Liesel is because Death sees her as an equal, and that they share an understanding of the human life and the human soul, which suggests that Liesel transcended the limitations of human perception and experience and reached a stage of total awareness and maturation towards the end of her life. This ending closes the cycle that was opened in the beginning of the narrative, when Death informs the reader that it has read Liesel’s account of her life throughout the years, and that the book is slowly disintegrating. The reader does not know here how long it has been, only that it is suggested a long period has passed, even possibly spanning thousands of years. To save Liesel’s story from passing into oblivion, Death then decides to narrate the story the reader is about to read. As a result, there are two narrative levels to *The Book Thief* – the original story being the one Liesel composed in the basement of her house, and *The Book Thief* being Death’s retelling of that story. As such, the narrative has to account for the fact that the original events are experienced

through the eyes of a child, but also that there is another (older, mature) voice that interprets Liesel's experience. To Débora Almeida de Oliveira and Sandra Sirangelo Maggio (2017),

It is true that Liesel perceives the Nazi world around her through childish eyes, and is not capable to fully understand its social and political mechanisms. Yet, her lack of adult comprehension is compensated by the narrator's comments and evaluation about what she experiences but is not able to assimilate. The narratee does not have access to what Liesel thinks and sees, but to what Death thinks of what Liesel thinks and sees. (137)

Because of this particular structure of the narrative, the perspectives of Liesel and Death are sometimes not easily distinguishable. However, Death's voice is more easily identifiable when it anticipates events that will take place later in the narrative and when it provides commentary or an overview of the war that is not directly focused on Liesel, such as the following extract: "Death's Diary: 1942. It was a year for the ages, like 79, like 1346, to name just a few" (317), two dates which make reference to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Pompeii and the conquest of Britain (79 AD) and the Black Plague in Europe (1346 AD), again characterising Death as an omniscient and omnipresent character. In *Facing Death in The Book Thief: Confronting the Real of the Holocaust and Mortality* (2018), Abigail Christine Finkel highlights Death as an important figure in the novel, due to "his dual nature, which enables him to simultaneously expose and shield young adult readers from the difficult truth of the Holocaust and mortality" (2). Death has seen it all and knows it all, and the overwhelming sensation for the reader is that it is impossible for the characters of the novel to escape their future – as much as the reader may root for an alternate ending. Despite this feeling of inevitability, Death in *The Book Thief* is an empathic figure, and grows to care about the fate of Liesel Meminger. This is evidenced by the interest Death takes in her every time it sees her. Moreover, in "'Into Eternity's Certain Breadth': Ambivalent Escape in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*" (2011), Jenni Adams considers Death to be an ambivalent figure, familiar and inevitable at the same time. Though the reader learns of tragic events to come, Death as a comforting figure is soothing for the reader. To Adams, "[t]his ambivalence helps the novel to negotiate the conflicting expectations surrounding Holocaust literature aimed at children and young adults" (149), but also creates some problems regarding the representation of the Holocaust in fictional stories:

The central characters, Max and Liesel, survive, despite the fact that unspecified numbers of unnamed Jews are murdered, and several significant characters, most notably Rudy and Hans, are

killed. The reader's investment in these central characters is hence carefully handled, while the often deeply distressing deaths of others serve to portray more accurately the historical actuality, underscoring the unlikely nature of Liesel and Max's escapes. (162)

Adams considers Liesel's and Max's survival in *The Book Thief* to be evidence of a portrayal of "fetishistic escapes" (150), which are essentially unlikely escape stories which, to her, soften the reality of the Holocaust. Jerusha Yoder disagrees with Adams in "Death, Friendship, and the Power of Words: Reflections of the Holocaust in Liesel Meminger's Traumatic Story" (2018). For Yoder, the basis of Adams's claims is that the book "presents no traces of trauma, thereby ignoring the reality of the Holocaust and trivializing the story for the sake of entertainment" (5), and, throughout the course of the article, Yoder systematically disputes those claims, refuting the idea that *The Book Thief* may be an example of the "kitchification of the trauma story" (11) by providing evidence of Liesel's traumatic experiences and emotional growth in the novel. Whilst I too am wary of Hollywood-style "happy endings" in war narratives, especially those concerning WWII and the Holocaust, I disagree that Liesel's and Max's survival essentially amounts to a "glossing" of the grim reality of the Holocaust. Firstly, although certainly very rare, especially considering the millions of innocent Jews and dissenters murdered during the Holocaust, we do have access to some incredible stories of survivors, as unlikely as they may seem. Secondly, I agree with Yoder's understanding that *The Book Thief*, rather than trivialize the trauma of the Holocaust, highlights its traumatic nature by focusing on Liesel and Max's friendship, their traumatic experiences, and by documenting Liesel's journey of maturation and her journey to dominate words.

As explored throughout this chapter, Liesel experiences two journeys, which are interconnected and dependent on each other: a journey towards healing and adulthood, and a literary journey to become the author of her own narrative. When the reader first meets Liesel, at nine years old, she is virtually illiterate, not knowing how to read and write at her level. Humiliatingly for her, she is put in a kindergarten class. Although she had stolen *The Gravedigger's Handbook*, she is unable to read it, something she feels self-conscious about: "You can steal books but you can't read one" (TBT 82). Her lack of literacy is connected to a lack of autonomy and power over her own story, and a difficulty to express herself in an articulate manner. Another element which attests to this lack of autonomy is the fact that Liesel begins to wet the bed regularly, after her recurrent nightmares. To Yoder, Liesel "revisits the site of her trauma in her dreams and visions [of her brother and mother] to finally understand her encounter with Death" (23). The fact that she is haunted by these images is an indication of the severe trauma

she suffered and how it made her lose a sense of control in her own life. Considering Erikson's theory, Liesel's traumatic loss of her family and the life she had come to know translated into a crisis of her identity, due to the uncertain and dangerous nature the future now presented. Yet, according to Yoder, "by stealing books, she may reclaim that control once again" (24). Becoming skilled with words and constructing a personal narrative, coupled with the love and support of important people in Liesel's life, including Hans, Max, and Rudy, will constitute a positive healing experience for Liesel.

Although this initial lack of control over her bodily functions is extremely embarrassing for her, her Papa never makes her feel inadequate for it. Instead, he helps her clean the sheets and takes her to the basement (to escape the wrath of Mama, Rosa) and entertains her there, playing the accordion and reading *The Gravedigger's Handbook* with her. Despite not being well-educated, he can read and write, and so becomes Liesel's tutor, teaching her how to read in the basement by painting the letters on the wall. Slowly, she begins to make some progress, even if "[w]ords fooled her" (TBT 79), and manages to make it to her own age group at school. One day in class, the students are all called to read out loud, except Liesel. When a classmate questions this, Liesel tells the teacher she wants to do it – she feels confident enough, and while she begins well, soon "[h]er blood loudened. The sentences blurred. The white page was suddenly written in another tongue, and it didn't help that tears were now forming in her eyes. She couldn't even see the words anymore" (TBT 82). Liesel decides to, instead, recite *The Gravedigger's Handbook* out loud, and when a boy laughs, she hits him after school. Liesel uses violence to compensate for her public humiliation and the lack of autonomy she had just announced to the world – just like Ana, who saw joining the Safe House as a form of taking back some power over her experience, Liesel uses violence (in this episode and others) as a shield to mask her insecurity. As she becomes more articulate in her speech and writing, she does not need to resort to violence to boost her confidence. To Yoder, this incident "exemplifies Liesel's loss of control and identity... For Liesel, reading symbolizes her capability to control her world and claim her identity. Having lost her relationships, she turns to her books in a desperate attempt to find solace" (20-21). Despite this initial setback, she is never disheartened to continue learning and improving, and her confidence and self-esteem rise as she begins to control the words. Yoder argues that literature becomes a weapon of empowerment for Liesel, which transforms her from a weak victim to a powerful agent of her life, as she "claims fragments of her lost identity by learning to read" (21). Similarly,

Liesel turns to book thievery and reading in order to conquer Death. However, as she begins to recover from her trauma, she becomes the active author of her trauma story. No longer does she seek to erase her trauma from her life, but rather, through the reconstruction of her personal narrative, she assimilates the reality of her loss into her life. (Yoder 48)

Yoder suggests there is power in Liesel's transgression, evidenced not only by the stealing of the books, but also another, bigger transgression which is essential to Liesel's transformation: taking care of Max and actively defying the Nazi regime. While Hans teaches Liesel the power of words and how to use them, he also teaches her the power of silence. In one episode, when she discovers her parents were communists and are probably dead, she shouts on the street that she hates Hitler. Hans smacks her in the face and tells her she can say it at home, but never in the street, or all of them will pay the price. Liesel discovers then that words can also be dangerous. Although harsh, Hans is preparing her for the arrival of Max and teaching her to keep the secret of Max's existence in their basement. Max is an extremely crucial influence for Liesel, as the two of them bond not only over their tragic past and losses, but were also "held together by the quiet gathering of words" (TBT 258). Max is Liesel's second mentor and someone that Liesel identifies deeply with. He writes Liesel a number of stories and sketches, as well as two books. *The Standover Man* is a story of all the figures Max was scared of at some point in his life, including his father, bullies at school and even Hitler, and it concludes with the image of the "Standover Girl", looking at him in his bed (Liesel). The story is an autobiography of Max's life and highlights the positive impact Liesel has on him. Similarly, *The Word Shaker* refers to the positive impact Liesel's friendship has on Max's life. These two stories are essential parts of Liesel's quest in dominating words due to the message imbedded in them, that words have power, but also because of the gesture of love and affection they embody. When Max falls ill, Liesel is at his bedside constantly reading to him. She is also stimulated by Papa to write Max a note, describing the clouds in the sky to him, which were "like great white beast" (TBT 331). Finally, after "several different adjustments and additions, Liesel... imagined the vision of it passing from her hands to his, through the blankets, and she wrote it down on a scrap of paper, placing the stone on top of it" (TBT 331). In addition to becoming a confident reader, she is also becoming a skilled writer, and would then start writing letters to her mother, letters she never receives an answer to. At one point, she realises her mother is most likely dead, and that she will never receive a letter back. By confronting her traumatic experience, Liesel is able to begin a long process of healing and acceptance.

Liesel's third main influence in her cathartic and literary journey is Ilsa, the mayor's wife. After the book burning bonfire, Ilsa spots Liesel stealing a book. Instead of turning her in, Ilsa sees in Liesel a kindred spirit, and she opens the door to a world Liesel did not believe was possible. The Hubermanns were poor and had little access to books and education. Ilsa, however, had money and a huge library. The library belonged to Ilsa, not to her husband, and that meant something: "She didn't know why it was so important, but she enjoyed the fact that the roomful of books belonged to the woman. It was she who introduced her to the library in the first place and gave her the initial, even literal, window of opportunity" (TBT 467). The link between gender and the power of literature had already been highlighted earlier in the narrative, when Death commented that Liesel "was a girl. In Nazi Germany. How fitting that she was discovering the power of words" (TBT 154). Discovering that Ilsa has access to an immense and uncensored amount of knowledge is incredibly powerful and significant to Liesel. Ilsa is possibly Liesel's most important mentor in her quest for autonomy and empowerment. The library is an important place in the novel, as it is there that Liesel cements her love of literature and words.

Ilsa allows Liesel to go there and read books for hours on end, when Liesel goes to pick or deliver the laundry for Rosa. Through their relationship, we see that access to education is limited by two aspects: money and gender, and that Ilsa being able to possess both, whilst being a woman, is representative of the empowerment which was possible to women of the time through education and belonging to a certain social class. Of course, education is not really empowering if it is limited by those aspects, yet it becomes so for Liesel precisely because Ilsa grants her access to a universe she would never be able to witness because of her income. When Ilsa fires Liesel's mama and Liesel lashes out at her, she keeps her window open for Liesel to come and steal the books instead. Towards the end of the narrative, Liesel writes a letter to Ilsa to make amends for their fight, telling her that she both loved and hated the library, "because it's full of words" (TBT 526), again denoting this ambivalent nature of words. As Ilsa remarks that Liesel is talented with words and writes very well, her final gift to Liesel is a black journal, which Liesel will use and fill with her own story (the colour black is therefore associated with Liesel once again). Through this act, Ilsa essentially gifts Liesel with one of the tools of her own salvation – she "not only gave Liesel Meminger a book that day. She also gave her a reason to spend time in the basement – her favourite place, first with Papa, then Max. She gave her a reason to write her own words, to remind her that words had also brought her to life" (TBT 528).

Liesel's literary journey accompanies the strengthening of her self-esteem and also the healing of her trauma. It is significant that Max, Hans and Ilsa are the three characters that push

her towards empowering herself through words. For Yoder, this identification is significant because “each character carries his or her own story of trauma with which Liesel can relate. By interacting with these characters, Liesel begins to construct a basic understanding of herself as a victim” (36). One of the most important signs of the improvement in Liesel’s reading and her journey comes from the first air raid, when all the inhabitants of Himmel Street are huddled together in the shelter. The mood of the room is terrible, and to bring comfort and distraction, Liesel begins reading: “By page three, everyone was silent but Liesel. She didn’t dare look up, but she could feel their frightened eyes hanging on to her as she hauled the words in and breathed them out” (TBT 389). After this episode, Frau Holtzapfel, who had lost one of her sons in the war and the other by suicide, asks Liesel to come and read to her every night, and the two begin an unlikely friendship. A few years separate Liesel’s first public speaking and this moment in the shelter, and it is incredible to see just how much she has grown and how her reading becomes a healing tool for others as well as herself.

The final stage in Liesel’s coming-of-age journey is the process of writing her story and organising her experience into a personal narrative. Through this, she is able to assign significance to important events in her life and assess how they affected her. She is able to remember important people and give details about her own experience. This is evidenced by Death’s comment that “[w]hen she came to write her story, she would wonder exactly when the books and the words started not just to mean something, but everything” (TBT 37). The experience of looking back to her own story enables her to have perspective and to assign a beginning and also an end to her narrative. The *open-endedness* and *uncertainty* she had experienced regarding her future is replaced by an understanding of the whole, a knowledge of what came to pass, and as such a feeling of reassurance and *wholeness*. The final sentence in Liesel’s narrative indicates the responsibility Liesel feels in relating this story, but also a feeling of acceptance and conclusion: “I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right” (TBT 532). To Yoder, at this point Liesel ceases to be a victim, to be a survivor (59). Yoder claims that “[h]aving awakened to her position in the world, Liesel listens to the call of the survivor’s legacy. She hears the voice of the dead calling her to bear witness to their story. As the survivor, she must speak for the dead—to tell their story and fully connect with the next generation” (64).

The sole survivor of the bombing, the perpetual “expert at being left behind” (TBT 15), Liesel is again traumatised by the loss of the people she had grown to love and call family – Hans, Rosa, Rudy, and all the other inhabitants of Himmel Street. She became known as “the girl who stood there wearing a pretty dress and a layer of Himmel Street dirt” (TBT 546) for refusing to

shower. This refusal is symbolic of Liesel's desire for proximity to that place and the people who died there. Liesel is able to salvage her Papa's accordion, and she is taken from the police station by Ilsa Hermann and her husband. Despite this loss, what is suggested is that Liesel had developed the necessary tools, over the course of her literary and personal coming-of-age, to essentially process her trauma and grieve: "It would have been easy to say nothing, but Liesel had the opposite reaction to her devastation" (TBT 549). Liesel's books were her salvation: "After that, there were weeks and months, and a lot of war. She remembered her books in the moments of worst sorrow, especially the ones that were made for her and the one that saved her life" (TBT 550). Rudy's father returns from the war to discover his entire family had been destroyed. Liesel's survival, however, renewed hope for Alex Steiner, and the two of them found in each other a family and a reason to keep moving forward. Following the end of the war in 1945, Max finds Liesel in Steiner's shop and the two have an emotional reunion. No information is provided on what becomes of Liesel, Max or even Alex Steiner over the course of the next decades – how Liesel comes to be in Australia and what path she took to get there. The only information available to the reader is that Liesel ends her journey having understood something essential about the human condition and having finally come to peace with Death.

Chapter 2 – Gender Roles, Violence, Sisterhood, and the Role of Women in War: Exploring Dualities Between Sisters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Nightingale*

In Chapter 1, this thesis focused on the manner in which war affected the maturation journeys of protagonists Ana Jurić and Liesel Meminger, two girls who experienced unbearable trauma and loss at a very young age. Throughout that chapter, I discussed how growing up in war affected the formation of their identities and their development, and how reaching adulthood for them was symbolic of the processing of their traumatic experience of war and the development of a personal narrative. Now, in Chapter 2, I want to turn my attention to the experiences and perceptions of adult women in times of war as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Kristin Hannah's *The Nightingale* (2015). Although these narratives approach similar themes and comparisons can be drawn between their protagonists' journeys and representations, for the purposes of clarity this analysis will be separated into two different sections, focusing on each novel independently whilst still offering a dialogue between the novels. Moreover, it may be important to highlight that, even though the narratives can be analysed from a range of different perspectives and offer plenty of room for critical discussion, the purpose of this thesis is to understand the female protagonists' experience of war and explore their relationship as sisters and as women in society, and for that reason this analysis may prioritise certain elements of the novels to the detriment of others, in order to remain within the scope and focus of this thesis. As such, to understand the journeys of Olanna and Kainene in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Isabelle and Vianne in *The Nightingale*, this chapter will highlight the sisters' dual personalities and trajectories and how it relates to issues of femininity and gender roles, as well as discuss rape as a gendered threat women face in war, and its employment as a weapon of war. The chapter will finally consider the protagonists' personal journeys of empowerment and agency in wartime.

In both of these novels, the narratives are centred around the relationship of the two sisters – unidentical twin sisters Olanna and Kainene Ozobia in *HYS*, and older sister Vianne Mauriac and younger sister Isabelle Rossignol in *TN*. The relationship between the sisters, their families and romantic partners, as well as their occupation and employment during wartime, provides a discussion on the roles that women occupy during war, either willingly or unwillingly, through choice or by force, and the different ways in which they might find empowerment and autonomy

even in the toughest of times. Also, because the novels tackle the subject of sisterhood, and especially sisters who take different paths in life – Vianne and Olanna get married and raise children, whereas Isabelle and Kainene deviate from that maternal role and occupy roles more traditionally associated with the “male”, such as Resistance fighter and successful entrepreneur – the narratives also explore the different gender roles assigned to women in their particular communities, and how women are viewed in relation to these roles, and especially when they deviate from them – simply put, how women are placed in different categories according to how much they adhere to the social standard. Interestingly, the sisters in these novels, by taking on divergent paths and distinct identities and roles as “women”, become doubles of each other (particularly Kainene and Olanna, who are literal twins – yet unidentical, which is key to their differentiation throughout the narrative), and they embody different societal roles and take different paths during the war – only to converge at a certain point in their respective narratives and experiences as women, marked by their shared traumas and their bond as sisters. Despite their divergent paths and personalities, the women (and, in specific cases, young girls) in the novels are subjected to specific threats and traumas because of their gender and their position in society. My goal is to understand, despite these elements, how these women negotiate control of their own lives during times of war.

2.1. An Analysis of Olanna and Kainene Ozobia in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Half of a Yellow Sun tells the tale of the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960s, leading to the formation of Biafra and the ensuing war between Biafra and Nigeria, as experienced through the perspectives of three main characters: Olanna (sister to Kainene and the romantic partner of university lecturer and intellectual Odenigbo), Richard (a white Englishman, researcher and professor who becomes Kainene’s romantic partner), and Ugwu (Olanna and Odenigbo’s servant boy and “surrogate” son). The narrative is divided non-chronologically into four parts and thirty-seven chapters, and the timeline alternates between the early 60s (Parts I and III, some years before the war) and the late 60s (Parts II and IV, immediately before, during and after the conflict). In Parts I and III, the reader is presented with some information regarding the ethnic and religious tensions between the different tribes (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) and the geo-politics of Nigeria are first outlined, essentially dividing it into South (Igbo) and North (Yoruba/Hausa). In fact, one of

the main themes of the novel is the rising ethnic tensions between these different ethnic groups and the political coups that eventually lead to the secession of the South, which is mostly Igbo. In addition to addressing the issue of a changing national identity (of a new Biafra and its people), and the role of literature and rhetoric in creating such an identity (represented by Odenigbo's manifesto), the novel highlights the use of the local languages as an identifier of one's ethnicity and identity and discusses the importance of having access to these languages within the narrative. Olanna, who received a classical education both in Nigeria and in England, learned French and Latin but not Hausa or Yoruba, two important languages belonging to the two other tribes in Nigeria. In addition to being a representative of the polarisation and lack of relationship between tribes, which adds to the interethnic component of the war, it is also a comment on how at the time conventional education was centred around classical Eurocentric knowledge, rather than the local culture, history and interests. Because she does not have access to this knowledge, Olanna feels a sense of being incomplete and perhaps disconnected from her peers: "[Olanna] wished she were fluent in Hausa and Yoruba, like her uncle and aunt and cousin were, something she would gladly exchange her French and Latin for" (HYS 41). Indeed, the fact that her cousin Arize speaks Hausa will actually save their lives at one point, when they are caught up in a mob and must pretend not to be Igbo by replying to a gunman in Hausa: "She could not believe how easy it had been to deny who they were, to shrug off being Igbo" (HYS 133). These ethnic tensions also have religious roots, as the Igbo were predominantly Christian, the Yoruba practised their own faith, and the Hausa were Muslim.

It may be noticed that the non-chronological, alternating structure and themes explored in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are similar to *Girl at War*, one of the novels discussed in the previous chapter and which was published roughly a decade after *HYS*. Additionally, not only do both of the novels focus on civil war, but they also tackle the issue of ethnic violence and genocide. Additionally, in both novels the female experience is at the centre, although in *GW* the narrative is focused on the perspective of a child, and in *HYS* the focus is on the perspectives of adult women. Additionally, as I have explored in Chapter 1, Ana Jurić is able to enjoy certain freedoms as a child due to her tomboyishness and transgression of certain gender expectations, linking her more to the "male" rather than the "female" world. In this chapter, I will argue that Kainene is also given more freedom and power in her own trajectory precisely for the same reasons. Moreover, just as *GW* is divided into two timelines, encompassing events that happen during war and post-war, *HYS* focalises the pre-war and wartime timelines. Throughout the novel, the reader is introduced to Olanna and Kainene at various moments, and given insight into their relationships, including the

evolving conflicts between them. Amongst the main sources of conflict is Odenigbo's infidelity and the impregnation of Amala, his mother's young servant who was coerced into having sexual relations with Odenigbo, as part of an orchestrated plan by Mama to separate him and Olanna. Following this, the second important conflict in the novel arose: Olanna and Odenigbo's separation and long period of strife and heartbreak. During their separation, Olanna sought the comfort of Richard's friendship, and one night the two get drunk and have sex. This led to the most important conflict in the novel which is Olanna's and Kainene's estrangement over Olanna's betrayal. Although Kainene and Richard's relationship is salvaged, and eventually Odenigbo and Olanna reunite and adopt Amala's child, the two sisters' relationship will never be the same, and this strained relationship is at the heart of both sister's journeys in the novel. Additionally, some of the relationships in *HYS* elicit ethnic and socio-economic tensions, such as Olanna's friendly relationship to ex-boyfriend Mohammed (who lives in Kano, in the North, and is a Hausa Muslim); Richard and Kainene's relationship, representing the postcolonial tensions between the white British expatriates and the local Nigerians; and the conflicts between Olanna and Odenigbo and Ugwu and Odenigbo's mother, who represented different segments of the Nigerian society at the time. Olanna and Odenigbo represent the intellectual elite who denounced the vestiges of colonial rule and British influence, urging instead that Nigerians take back control over their own identities and narratives (yet, ironically, who studied abroad at top universities and spoke perfect English, such as Olanna, Odenigbo and the other professors at Nsukka University), whereas Ugwu and Mama represent the superstitious, uneducated and conservative villagers.

Olanna's relationship with Odenigbo is shown in her own narration but also through the eyes of Ugwu, but Kainene's relationship with Richard is shown mostly through Richard's perspective. The domestic sphere is shown mostly by Ugwu's perspective, who is in the background of Odenigbo and Olanna's dinner parties where other intellectuals at the University of Nsukka are invited to discuss current events and have heated arguments over politics, philosophy, and literature. Ugwu is always listening in and becomes interested in the topics being discussed, even though he does not really understand the topics. In fact, being hired as Odenigbo's servant will enable Ugwu to pursue an education. Odenigbo is insistent that Ugwu goes to school and gets an education, something his family could not afford to do in his village. This is one of the instances which show that education is not available to the widespread population, but only to those who have money. An idealist, Odenigbo believes that "[e]ducation is a priority. How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?" (*HYS* 11). Despite this belief, he fails to comprehend how poor people live, and how little they have – he struggles

to understand that Ugwu has never seen a refrigerator before, and berates him for hiding food in his pockets, not understanding that Ugwu does this because he is not used to having enough to eat. Still, despite this lack of touch and understanding of the reality of the less fortunate, Odenigbo becomes a champion of Ugwu's education, and in the end, the reader discovers that it is Ugwu that has written the book "The World Was Silent When We Died" by its dedication: "For Master, my good man" (HYS 433). Despite the focus of this thesis being the perspectives of the female protagonists, namely Olanna and Kainene and how their experience of war is shaped by being women, it is important to note that not only women are affected by war and by inequality. In the novel, access to education is not just an issue of gender, but also of class. This issue is more closely represented by Ugwu, who only has access to education because his Master Odenigbo decides to pay for his studies. Without that, he would never have had the opportunity to become a skilled writer and write his own account of war – a piece of information which the reader does not have access to until the end of the novel.

This happens because the non-chronological nature of the novel means the full truth about the characters' interpersonal conflicts are withheld at certain moments of the narrative and revealed only later. For instance, in Part II, the reader is given information that the sisters are estranged and that Odenigbo and Olanna have a child, but are not told the details of how all of that came to be. This information is only revealed in Part III, when the narrative returns to the early 60s and the reader is introduced to all the facts. Parts II and IV cover the two political coups which take place in late 1960s Nigeria, the first being an Igbo-led coup and the second coup by the Northerners six months later, leading up to the persecution and massacre of the Igbo (including Olanna's entire family in the North, such as her Aunt Ifeka, Uncle Mbaezi and cousin Arize) and the subsequent creation of Biafra and the war against Nigeria. Olanna had been visiting her family when the massacre took place, and the only reason she was not killed as well was because she was having afternoon tea with Mohammed when it started and he saved her by giving her a scarf to wear over her hair, which allowed her to blend in as a Muslim. Mohammed organises for Olanna to go home on a train, yet first she must go to her relatives' house and see what happened to them – she finds Aunt Ifeka's and Uncle Mbazi's brutalised bodies, but not Arize's, who had been pregnant and is assumed to have been killed brutally as well. Witnessing the horror alongside her, Mohammed is in shock and tells Olanna, shaking: "Allah does not allow this... Allah will not forgive them. Allah will not forgive the people who have made them do this. Allah will *never* forgive this" (HYS 148). Mohammed, by protecting Olanna and denouncing those violent acts, becomes one of the figures in the novel that contest the idea that certain tribes are inherently evil

or good. Throughout the novel, Olanna is shown to oppose such categorisations and evaluate individuals on their deeds rather than tribal animosity and stereotypes. In one instance, when Odenigbo shouts at Miss Adebayo, who is Yoruba, and basically calls her the enemy, Olanna forces him to apologise. On the train back, Olanna has her eyes fixated on a woman cradling a calabash. When she looks inside, she sees a small child's severed head inside (the woman's child), and the woman is talking about how she braided her girl's hair and showing it to people. This is an incredibly shocking scene, and one which will stay with Olanna and will be featured in Ugwu's book about the war. It is important to note that excerpts from Ugwu's book are referenced throughout the novel under its name, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, but there is no indication that this is the novel that we are reading. Ugwu's book, it is assumed, is rather a parallel narrative that complements the plot, although some events from the main narrative may also be featured in this parallel narrative.

Because the novel is written from the perspectives of Olanna, Ugwu and Richard, it is important to note that the information received is informed by these narrators' perceptions of the events and their relationships, not based on objective truth. As such, the book is not an impartial or historical account of the war, despite its usage of real names, places, and events (Makokha 111). Additionally, some characters are not given a voice of their own – for instance, the reader never has full access to the thoughts of Odenigbo, Kainene, Arize or even Baby, and so it must be said that the perception of events is also limited by the narrators' access to and interpretation of information. Despite her being one of the central characters of the novel, Kainene's perspective is never shown directly, leaving her thoughts and feelings to be interpreted by other characters. This is essential to the construction of Kainene as a dark, brooding, and mysterious figure, and also adds to the ambiguity of what happens to her at the end: she goes missing, presumed dead, and the characters (and, by extension, the reader) are robbed of closure. The reader is only able to construct an image of Kainene indirectly, through Olanna's and Richard's eyes. Interestingly, John C. Hawley argues in "Biafra as Heritage and Symbol: Adichie, Mbachue, and Iweala" (2008) that "Adichie does a masterly job of orchestrating these various lives and showing their interconnectedness during the mounting violence" (21) and that "the war is a vortex that threatens to pull her characters to pieces: hers is a national novel... getting at the spirit of the Nigerian people, recreating that spirit in the specific lives of compelling characters, but at the same time refusing to be overtaken by the events of the war" (23). As such, this personal outlook on the war and how war affects relationships is one of the important aspects of the narrative that urges readers to understand the human and emotional toll of the war. In fact, Joke de Mey discusses in "The

Intersection of History, Literature and Trauma in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2011) the importance of the "emotional truth" (21) of the past rather than the "historical truth" (21) of events and how "the historical dimension never takes over the personal one... The characters live through the events of the Nigeria-Biafra War, but what takes precedence is how it is felt to be there, and how it still feels" (54). This element of Adichie's narrative resonates with Tim O'Brien's notion of "happening-truth" and "story-truth" explored in *The Things They Carried*. In the short story "How To Tell a True War Story", O'Brien highlights the role of fiction in storytelling, writing that "a thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth" (79). In the short story "Good Form", from the same collection, he explores the subject further:

I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth ... What stories can do, I guess, is make things present. I can look at things I never looked at. I can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God. I can be brave. I can make myself feel again. (171-172)

In this sense, Adichie is not focused on simply portraying historical facts, but on accurately relaying the subjective human experience and representing the emotional truth of the war, what the characters *feel*, rather than bent on writing down a list of places, names, and dates. Additionally, Ruth S. Wenske compares Adichie's work to the renowned Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe in "Adichie in Dialogue with Achebe: Balancing Dualities in *Half of a Yellow Sun*" (2016) and claims that both authors share a "focus on the complexity of individual life in a time of collective trauma" (85), leaving the endings "frustratingly open, for it offers no catharsis of conclusion or absolute meaning" (85). In addition to the dichotomy between collective and individual, Wenske also explores the tensions between different worldviews – such as those clinging to traditional tribal beliefs (the old, conservative and prone to superstition) and those looking for change (the new, rational thinkers, intellectual elite) – worldviews which are determined by someone's class, status and "level of Western-style education" (73). Most importantly, Wenske highlights how Adichie explores the tension between the African and Western by her usage of Igbo in her writing:

Adichie uses Igbo quite generously: she applies Igbo terms not just for words lacking an English equivalent, but also for greetings and expressions of affection, giving the narrative a "feeling of Igbo"; she also quotes Igbo proverbs in both languages, as if protecting them from being lost in

translation... In their mastery of both languages, Olanna and Odenigbo represent the same conscious efforts as Achebe's novels display – combining European and African elements as a way of reconciling a new and essentially hybrid postcolonial identity. (77-78)

Adichie, therefore, uses English not as a colonial language, but as a language that Africans use and that coexists with other languages, such as Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Still, an important element in *HYS* is the discussion around post-colonialism and the role that the British Colonial Rule had in destabilizing Nigeria and heightening ethnic tensions, pitting groups against each other and forming imbalanced power structures. According to Cruz-Guzman (2012), “it was colonial rule which further divided the tribes and ethnicities in Nigeria, favouring the Northern Yoruba to the Southern Igbo, which led to the first coup preceding the Biafran War” (40). Cruz-Guzman further argues that the tribes “had coexisted before, but the burden of exploitative colonialism stressed their relationships” (40), and concludes that there is an “original trauma” (40) present in postcolonial writing which refers to PTSD originating from colonial rule. Interestingly, nearly all of the white foreign characters in the novel are portrayed as either oblivious, demeaning, and offensive in some way– such as Susan, who “spoke with authority about Nigeria and Nigerians” (HYS 55) – or as condescending admirers, fetishizing the local culture and thinking it is “exotic”, which Richard is seen to do at certain points. Although he “did not have that familiar superiority of English people who thought they understood Africans better than Africans understood themselves” (HYS 36), he is still called out on some racist and patronising behaviour throughout the novel. In one episode, he is speaking to Okeoma about Igbo art, and Okeoma comments on his tone of surprise, “as if you never imagined these people capable of such things” (HYS 111). Richard is extremely hurt and seeks Kainene's reassurance, and her crisp reply is that “[i]t's possible to love something and still condescend to it” (HYS 114). On the way back from a trip to London, Richard witnesses the reality of the second coup, and watches as Igbo people are massacred in the airport. Instinctively, he knows he is safe because he is white and English: he felt like a voyeur, one who “had watched them through the detached lens of knowing he was safe” (HYS 168).

Still, later in the narrative, Richard mentions he wants to write a book about the Biafran War and name it *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Kainene questions his authority in writing such an account: “‘We? The world was silent when we died?’” (HYS 374). Nevertheless, unlike the other white foreign characters in *HYS*, Richard shows the ability of self-reflection and growth. Towards the end of the novel, Richard is speaking with Ugwu and tells him that he had given up on the book and that “[t]he war isn't my story to tell, really” (HYS 425), to which Ugwu “noded.

He had never thought it was” (HYS 425). The juxtaposition between the white European perspective (represented by prejudiced characters such as Susan, the British expats, and American/European journalists) and the black African perspective (with its particularities in terms of religion, ethnicity, social and economic status, and so on) is one of the pillars of the discussion of post-colonialism in the novel. Richard is employed by the Biafran state to write journalism pieces to be featured in the international media – the idea reinforced here is that white Europeans only listen to other white Europeans, and that black voices and experiences are silenced in favour of those voices. The twist is that, knowing this, Richard is “used” by the state to convey the messages they want. In the end, however, as discussed above, Richard seems to resign his position of “spokesperson” for the Biafran War when he acknowledges that this is not his story, and that it is not his place to speak for the Biafran or Nigerian.

Interestingly though, the English language occupies a position of prestige in this society. It is the language of sophistication and the educated, as can be seen in Ugwu’s perspective, when he is talking about Odenigbo and Olanna: “Master’s English was music, but what Ugwu was hearing now, from this woman, was magic... Her Igbo words were softer than her English. He had not expected English that perfect to sit beside equally perfect Igbo” (HYS 22-23). Additionally, the British (represented by Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who is often mentioned in the narrative) also aided Nigeria’s effort against Biafra, despite their use of hunger as a war strategy: “Starvation was a Nigerian weapon of war. Starvation broke Biafra and brought Biafra fame and made Biafra last as long as it did” (HYS 237). While the discussion around postcolonialism is extremely relevant and important in the novel, my intent is not to focus on it directly, but rather on how it shapes the ethnic and geo-political relations in the novel, affecting the lives of the main characters and impacting their relationships. Throughout this section, I have sought to refer to experienced scholars who have discussed postcolonialism in Adichie’s work in order to better understand and contextualise Olanna and Kainene’s experiences of the war.

As the narrative is centred around their relationship, it is important to understand Olanna’s and Kainene’s characterisation in the novel and how they are portrayed in opposition to each other. Whilst Olanna is considered the beautiful, polite, sensual sister and attracts more male attention, Kainene is considered the ugly, androgynous, masculine sister – something she is resentful for and mentions repeatedly throughout the novel. Even their names differentiate them in the eyes of their parents: Olanna was born first, and Kainene suggests that her name shows she was the initial favourite: “Her name is the lyrical *God’s Gold*, and mine is the more practical *Let’s watch and see what next God will bring*” (HYS 58). Interestingly, in her article ““Half and Half

Children’: Third-Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel” (2008), Jane Bryce explores Olanna and Kainene’s condition as twins and argues that “[t]he use of twins as a narrative device has emerged ... as a means of exploring the repressed feminine in relation to a socially conditioned version of femininity, inflected by issues of exile, hybridity and metissage” (50). She further explains how, in *HYS* and other novels by third-generation Nigerian women writers, “the doppelganger is far from being an unsettling and disturbing stranger, rather the intimate other half of a protagonist in quest of her own identity and self-hood” (59). Bryce associates Kainene with the image of the “Ogbanje”, a mystical Igbo folklore figure often associated with an evil spirit or a changeling child, originating from an “unsettled condition of simultaneously existing in several spheres” (62). Bryce cites Catherine Acholonu’s definition of ogbanje, according to which “[a] child is referred to as ogbanje when his behaviour is ambiguous, when he is difficult to deal with, and above all when there are indications of a dual personality” (qtd. in Bryce 62). Interestingly, this definition alludes to a masculine figure and adds to the body of evidence that Kainene is more readily associated with “masculinity” and androgyny rather than standard femininity. Kainene is the more ambiguous of the two sisters, precisely because the reader is never allowed into her most private thoughts and emotions. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the novel, Kainene is characterised as sharp and forthright, saying whatever is on her mind without sparing people’s feelings: “Kainene had always been the withdrawn child, the sullen and often acerbic teenager, the one who, because she did not try to please their parents, left Olanna with that duty” (*HYS* 36). Olanna considers Kainene to be the best person to deal with a crisis, because of “her sharp edges and her bitter tongue and her supreme confidence” (*HYS* 218).

However, Olanna, who had tried to please their parents at every turn, ultimately failed to match their expectations. Olanna “was used to her mother’s disapproval; it had coloured most of her major decisions, after all... Still, each time, the disapproval made her want to apologise, to make up for it in some way” (*HYS* 35). One of their main sources of disapproval is her choosing to move to Nsukka to teach at the University and her choice of partner, the idealistic Odenigbo, instead of one of her father’s friends, to whom he could trade Olanna for business favours. This is even explicitly stated in a conversation between Kainene and Olanna: “The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait” (*HYS* 35). Additionally, Olanna thinks of how her beauty has made men think they are owed her body or her affections: Olanna “was used to this, being grabbed by men who walked around in a cloud of cologne – drenched entitlement, with the presumption that, because they were powerful and found her beautiful, they belonged together” (*HYS* 33). In “Portrayal of the African Woman in *Half Of A Yellow Sun*” (2014), Gloria

Ajami Makokha argued how Olanna's father sees her as "an object for sale and an agent of sex for commercial purposes" (114) – despite her education and enlightenment, "her father still wanted to impose a man on her" (114), as she is still seen as his property and, as such, he expected to have control over her body and her romantic life. Nevertheless, "Olanna's constant rejection of these men and sticking to Odenigbo, a university lecturer with little wealth, brings out the fight for the right of women to choose their marriage partners" (Makokha 2014). The same does not happen to Kainene, partly because she is not considered to be attractive (a recurrent trope in the novel), but also because, to some extent, she is viewed in this society as being her father's male heir. In "O Olhar sobre Feminismos Africanos e a Expressão Literária. Exemplo de *Half of a Yellow Sun* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" (2018), Natalia Telega-Soares references the work of scholar Chukwuemeka Nwoko and discusses the gender identity known as "female husband", common in Igbo culture, which relates to an older daughter who, when no male heirs are present in the family line, assumes the social role of the son and heir:

em muitas sociedades africanas existem múltiplas categorias sociais que não têm as suas origens na distinção corporal dos sexos. Um bom exemplo desta situação é a categoria do *female husband* – o sistema de género praticado por Igbo na Nigéria (Chukwuemeka Nwoko), onde uma rapariga mais velha entre os filhos pode ser escolhida pelo seu pai, caso não haja na família um herdeiro masculino, para assumir o papel social do homem. Biologicamente a filha é uma menina, mas o seu "género social" (o de rapaz) tem mais peso na sociedade do que o biológico. (Telega-Soares 54-55)

The reason I want to highlight that Kainene is read as "male" but only to a certain extent is because, despite her social gender and being accepted as her father's heir, Kainene is still read in this society, and especially in war, as a woman. As such, she is equally at risk of the gendered threats and violence against women. When Kainene goes missing, she is not just presumed dead: just as with Arize, there is the unspoken understanding of the sexual violence she may have suffered before she died. Even though she is in charge of her own life and is shown to be resourceful, resilient, and having taken some measure of control over her destiny through her success in her professional and personal life, war actually removes the possibility of total control, and anyone can be affected – even one as autonomous and impressive as Kainene. Because Kainene chose to take over their parents' business, as such complying to an extent with their expectations, she becomes closer to her parents whereas Olanna distances herself from them. Kainene is considered the "male" heir to the family and is able to inhabit places traditionally

associated with the male, such as the world of business. Chief Okonji, one of her father's friends, even comments to him: "Whoever said you lost out by having twin daughters is a liar. Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two" (HYS 31). Kainene is also described in androgynous, almost masculine terms by Richard: "She was not pretty at all. She was very thin and very tall, almost as tall as he was, and she was staring right into his eyes, with a steely black expression. Her skin was the colour of Belgian chocolate" (HYS 57). He is intimidated by her and by her lifestyle, which is complete without him: "Richard was bewildered by Kainene's busy life. Seeing her in Lagos, in brief meetings at the hotel, he had not realized that hers was a life that ran fully and would run fully even if he was not in it" (HYS 77). In fact, the narrative is marked by Richard's feelings of inadequacy towards Kainene. He feels emasculated by her and her apparent coldness, which he called "melancholy mystique" (HYS 65) and "ached to know what she was thinking" (HYS 65). His inadequacy is symbolised by his impotency and lack of erections during sexual activity: "Richard felt a swift surge of irritation, towards himself for being uselessly limp, towards her for that half-mocking smile and for saying there were other ways, as if he was permanently incapable of doing things the traditional way" (HYS 68).

Despite her apparent coldness and unattainability, Kainene does display emotion openly a few times: the first, when Richard announces he has left Susan, and she "came over and hugged him, a tremulous tightening of her arms around him. He was so surprised he did not hug her back" (HYS 70). In another instance, she writes him a note when he is in England visiting family: "Is love this misguided need to have you beside me most of the time? Is love this safety I feel in our silences? Is it this belonging, this completeness?" (HYS 150). This is one of the readers' rarest moments of insight into Kainene's mind, which is very soothing for Richard – "an absurd lightness draped itself around him; all things were possible, all things were manageable" (HYS 150). Richard's description of Kainene is contrasted with his description of Olanna the night he meets both of them:

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

In Richard's description, it is possible to see that Olanna's body is hypersexualised and objectified in this society, not just by white foreigners, who view her with the lens of the colonial stereotypes regarding the body of the "African" woman, but also by the men in power, such as

her father's friends, who perceive her as a possession that they can buy if they want to. Interestingly, when Richard is unfaithful and has sexual relations with Olanna during a night of drinking, "he had never been so firm, never lasted so long as he had with her. Now, though, he was bereft" (HYS 237). Richard's "admiration had thrived on her being unattainable, a worship from afar, but now... he felt a strange loss. He had lost his fantasy. But what he worried most about was losing Kainene" (HYS 237). As much as Richard claimed he did not condescend to the local culture, he clearly felt a sense of arousal and confidence (which he was unable to get with Kainene) for being able to "conquer" something he had idealised and perhaps fetishized. As Kainene is so independent and formidable on her own terms, Richard is unable to conquer or possess her, leading to his recurrent impotency. When Kainene finds out, she tells him: "So you have been lusting after my sister. How unoriginal... It would be forgivable if it were somebody else. Not my sister" (HYS 256). Kainene does not end their relationship; however, she burns his unfinished book manuscript as revenge, and cuts ties with her sister: "You're the good one and the favourite and the beauty and the Africanist revolutionary who doesn't like white men, and you simply did not need to fuck him. So why did you?" (HYS 255). The rupture in the sisters' relationship would last for years, as Olanna "knew her twin well, knew how tightly Kainene held on to hurt" (HYS 255). Although the sisters were already distanced in the beginning of the novel due to their personal differences, they had grown closer when Olanna decided to adopt Amala's child, and Kainene even named the child as she was chosen to be godmother. After the betrayal, the two sisters cut all contact until a few years later, towards the end of the war.

As the daughters of Chief Ozobia, a rich and powerful man, they enjoyed a high status throughout their lives, which allowed them wealth and comfort, but most of all, the possibility of being educated abroad, in London, which in turn gave them the power to choose their own destinies. The novel suggests that, for women to be empowered and have freedom of choice, especially regarding marriage and motherhood, they need education. As such, the novel seems to indicate that education is as a tool for female empowerment. Indeed, both women are able to wield some control over their lives, even in times of war, through their access to education and meaningful employment: Kainene is a successful businesswoman and Olanna becomes a primary school teacher, teaching the new generation of Biafran students. They are also both believers in the Biafran cause and the advancement of the country, though Olanna is more idealistic whereas Kainene is pragmatic. Because Olanna and Kainene had access to prestigious education, their expectations go beyond motherhood, something completely different than their cousin Arize. Whilst Olanna wants to teach and further her career at Nsukka University and Kainene followed

into her father's footsteps as a successful businesswoman, Arize's expectations are limited to marrying well and having children. Although motherhood is not portrayed in a negative light in the novel, having your path limited and having no freedom of choice is. In one episode, Olanna says she does not want to get married, to which Arize replies: "It is only women that have too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know Book wait too long, we will expire" (HYS 41). Later in the narrative, when Arize is pregnant and Olanna goes to visit her, she touches Olanna's face to her belly, hoping that the "child [would] imbibe her features and look like her" (HYS 129). Yet, the traits that Arize would want her child to catch are not Olanna's beauty, but rather that "she must have your brain and know Book" (HYS 129). What Arize's comment suggests here is that the path to freedom for women lies in empowerment through education. Despite this, the desire for motherhood is present in the novel, mostly represented in Olanna's character, but not Kainene, who is not associated with femininity or motherhood, but rather with an androgynous, gender-fluid identity which permitted her more power and agency in her choices.

Although Olanna didn't have the "fabled female longing to give birth" (HYS 104), which her mother called "abnormal", in the course of her relationship with Odenigbo, "the longing in the lower part of her belly was sudden and searing and new. She wanted the solid weight of a child, his child, in her body" (HYS 104). Despite trying to conceive, Olanna feels a sense of foreboding that her body is indeed "useless", and that she may not conceive a child: "The sudden thought that something might be wrong with her body wrapped itself around her, dampened her" (HYS 107). In the next few months, they will try to conceive, to no result. The issue of infertility becomes a problem in a society that puts so much emphasis on motherhood and children, especially to a generation of older, conservative women, represented by Odenigbo's mother. To her, women having access to education is a hindrance, as "these girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless. No one knows if she can have children" (HYS 98), adding that "too much schooling ruins a woman, everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband" (HYS 98). In fact, her distaste for Olanna lies heavily on the fact that she is a highly educated woman, and also on her unmarried status and apparent infertility, which combined make her "useless". Mama is representative of a conservative generation, which believed a woman "was expected to be a mother once she started living with a man, whether legally or traditionally married. A child was what identified a real woman from a 'spoilt' one, and lack of children was perceived as a sin" (Makokha 114). Additionally, "Education was considered as a male's dominion. A woman in postcolonial Nigeria was not

supposed to go to the University. The older women perceived highly schooled girls as spoilt” (Makokha 114), as they would not be submissive to their husbands and had greater opportunities to even escape an unhappy marriage. Another element which heightened the tension between Mama and Olanna is the fact that Olanna is not only educated and “spoiled”, but also infertile; as such she is left, in the eyes of the more conservative group, “without an identity in the society” (Makokha 114).

One instance which highlights this conflict well is the plan concocted by Mama against Olanna. When Olanna is away in England, Mama uses vulnerable Amala as a temptation for Odenigbo, who has sexual relations with the young girl. Throughout her stay at Odenigbo and Olanna’s house, Mama makes her contempt for Olanna quite clear, calling her “a woman who is living with a man who has not paid her bride price” (HYS 212). The whole ordeal is not without its share of mysticism and superstition. Mama believes, and Ugwu does too, in the power of the *dibia*, a traditional spiritual doctor and practitioner in the Igbo culture. Old spells, rituals and curses are still strong in the mind of the people, despite Odenigbo’s contempt for this sort of mysticism. Ugwu, however, believes firmly that Mama has cast a spell on him, having witnessed her slipping things in his food and whispering and rubbing Amala’s back: “There was something wrong about the way Mama’s hands were moving in circular motions, slowly, as if in consonance with some ritual” (HYS 214). Some days later, he also sees a mass of flies at the sink, which he calls a “sign of bad medicine from the *dibia*” (HYS 215). It is in fact Ugwu who witnesses Amala leaving Odenigbo’s bedroom one morning. Olanna discovers the truth, but instead of believing in the *dibia* magic as Ugwu does, she holds Odenigbo responsible for his own actions, despite his excuses that Amala had forced herself on him and that his mother was at fault, to which Olanna said: “Did your mother pull out your penis and insert it into Amala as well?” (HYS 241).

After their separation, it is perhaps the first time the reader has access to Olanna’s private life, including her work, her friendship with black American Edna Whaler, her charity work, gardening and cooking long meals to herself. Despite taking charge of her life, Olanna “was pining” (HYS 229). The truth was that this life of independence did not really complete her as it did Kainene. Her home and her relationship were really at the centre of her life and she longed for a family. She goes to Father Damian for advice, and he tells her to forgive Odenigbo: “What will you do with the misery you have chosen? Will you eat misery?” (HYS 230). Edna tells her: “Look how beautiful you are. Why do you need so much outside of yourself? Why isn’t what you are enough? You’re so damned weak!” (HYS 232). It is during this period that she has sex with Richard and damages her relationship with her sister almost irreparably. She finally decides to

move back in with Odenigbo after Edna arrives at her house crying desperately and tells her that a black Baptist church was bombed in her town and lots of people, including children, were killed. Olanna “thought about how ephemeral life was, about not choosing misery” (HYS 245). A few months later, after they have already gotten back together, she confesses to him what happened with Richard, and Odenigbo is mad. She tells him that it was never Amala who she blamed, and that he should do the same: “It was to you that I had given my trust and the only way a stranger could tamper with that trust was with your permission. I blamed only you” (HYS 246).

One element at the centre of the problem around Odenigbo’s infidelity is the issue of consent and gender relations of power. Although his encounter with Amala is not equated to the other sexual abuses in the novel, as the act was technically consensual, after Amala’s labour and subsequent rejection of the child, Olanna looked at her and was certain she “[h]ad not even considered she could say no” (HYS 250). Olanna considered how “[h]e was the master, he spoke English, he had a car. It was the way it should be... Perhaps it was hate she felt for Odenigbo. How much did one know of the true feelings of those who did not have a voice?” (HYS 250). Amala, because of her position in society, was not given a choice over what to do with her body and her life. The reader is never given insight into her thoughts, much like the reader is never given insight into Kainene’s thoughts, but there is evidence of Amala’s suffering and her attempts to remove her pregnancy, such as when Ugwu catches her eating peppers because “pepper can remove pregnancy” (HYS 240). Here, Adichie is also tackling the problem of enforced and compulsory motherhood, which is representative of one’s lack of control and power over their own destinies. Olanna, unlike Amala, had the social status and the education to make a choice, and she chooses to adopt Amala’s child as her own. Even when she adopted Amala’s biological child, the fact that the baby is a girl is another source of disappointment for Mama, who cut all contact with Olanna and the child, as bringing a girl into this society is not seen as advantageous.

In “The Female Voice and the Future of Gender Relationships in the Nigerian Nation in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*”, Georgiads Mboya Kivai argues that “[i]n commodifying daughters, Adichie is condemning the difference of being the owner of property, the heir (for boys and men) and being the property (for daughters and women) and thus suggesting a revision to the existing gender parities” (48). Similarly, Kivai argues that “women’s education is a strong socialization tool used by women in Adichie’s novels to fight female subordination and oppression” (53) and that “education delays a woman’s entry into marriage” (54). Kivai further discusses how Adichie explores the themes of rape, child abuse, sexual exploitation, violence against women, issues of motherhood and fertility and female

objectification, by highlighting that the female characters in her novels come together notably to “challenge the effects of patriarchy or to aid one another to overcome male-created misfortunes” (57). Indeed, Kivai suggests that the strengthening of female bonds between the characters is a positive element in the novel and promotes female empowerment. Kivai notes how Kainene and Olanna, despite having cut ties with each other, “come together during hard times and help each other to surmount the effects of war and starvation. Kainene welcomes the sister to Orlu and is ready to stay with Olanna and her family as the war rages” (58). Kivai also highlights the relationship between Olanna and Mrs. Muokelu, who helps her with food and teaches her how to make soap, and also Olanna’s tight bond with her Auntie Ifeka, who breastfed her as a child. In Kivai’s view, “Adichie uses these episodes to propagate the idea of bonding among women so as to overcome problems of oppression and exploitation occasioned by mothering” (59). Nevertheless, despite these important efforts of women coming together, especially after Olanna and Kainene’s reconciliation, which is extremely important to both characters’ trajectories, women are still portrayed as being at an increased risk of sexual violence during war. In “Sex as Synecdoche: Intimate Languages of Violence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Aminatta Forna’s *The Memory of Love*”, Zoe Norridge argues that sexual violence and the threat of rape is a pervasive element in *HYS* and that “such violence occurs both as part of the interethnic conflict and within the Biafran state itself” (25). The fact that violence comes from both friend and foe, showcases the fact that sexual abuse and objectification are not just a side effect of war (although they are certainly aggravated during conflict), but rather complex societal issues that touch on matters of unequal gender relations and gender violence, racism and postcolonialism. This is symbolised by the rape of the bargirl by Ugwu and the group of soldiers (who are all Biafran), the molestation of the young girls at the refugee camp, who are raped by Father Marcel in exchange for food, and the objectification and exploitation of young girls to white foreigners, who are prejudiced, crude and condescending to the local girls, evidenced in the American journalist’s saying that “I hear there’s a lot of free sex here. But the girls have some kind of sexually transmitted disease?” (*HYS* 369).

Additionally, Norridge explains that Ugwu’s “sexual coming of age... is written through with the daily presence of sexual violence and unequal power dynamics” (25). When he joins the army, Ugwu takes part in a more “masculine” role, and is around more men than women for the first time – even in his village, he was always around mostly women, such as his mother and his older sister Anulika. By his association with his fellow soldiers, Ugwu at first feels a sense of accomplishment and “belonging” – he saw soldiers with admiration, and longed to wear the same

“half of a yellow sun sewn on their sleeves” (HYS 179). As I have explored in the introduction of this thesis, the idea of belonging to a brotherhood and fulfilling one’s role as man is a recurrent element in war literature that is focused on the perspective of the male soldier. Indeed, during his first battle, Ugwu’s “fear mixed with excitement at the thought that he was a soldier fighting for Biafra” (HYS 359) – he idealised the image of the hero fighting for Biafra and saw himself as being a heroic figure. However, a critical event to the debunking of Ugwu as a heroic figure is the gang rape of the bar girl in Umuahia. According to Norridge (2012),

[t]his is rape depicted both as an extension of the sexuality of young boys—they chose, after all, to have sex with a young girl—a girl whom they might have found attractive under any other circumstances—and rape as depicted as a bonding male exercise in the practice of war. The gang rape is not, however, a military tactic—the soldiers are located in Biafra, raping one of their own, with none of the strategic purpose of abjection, marking, and pollution attributed to many sexual war crimes. (27)

Although he takes part in the rape, Ugwu knows that what he is doing is unforgivable, as the moment of orgasm is depicted as a “self-loathing release” (HYS 365) and he is haunted by the girl’s eyes, which were focused on him and translated a “calm hate” (HYS 365). Not long after this episode, Ugwu hears of the fall of Umuahia, which symbolises not only a military failure and the conquest of the city by Nigerian forces, but also a moral fall epitomised by the rape of the bargirl by her own countrymen. The fact that such a beloved character, one who the reader has grown to care intimately for, takes part in such a violent and horrible act causes the reader to, at first, feel disgusted by him. Eventually, the reader grows to sympathise with his struggle as he experiences feelings of regret and sorrow over his actions. His initial excitement at serving in the army becomes disillusionment: with himself, the ideology of Biafra, the army and ideals of heroism and patriotism: “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” (HYS 399). When Ugwu learns the name of Richard’s book, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, the title “haunted him, filled him with shame. It made him think about the girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor” (HYS 396). In fact, Wenske argues that

Ugwu does not succumb to this evil but keeps his humanity intact through his regret, his willingness to atone, his own trauma. He does not become a “bad” character because he is seen

not only as a rapist, but also as a brother, a houseboy, a believer, a teacher, a writer; his multiple sides never cease to exist, but have to find a way to balance themselves with the ugliness imprinted on Ugwu by war. (76)

Ugwu is able to achieve redemption through regret and repentance, as he is forced “to see himself through the eyes of others” (Wenske 76) – he is, at the same time, a victim of a society that objectifies and abuses women, and a victimizer of women. Ugwu is willing to face this reality, and when he learns that his sister Anulika was raped in the war, he views himself as one of his sister’s rapists and recognises his part in a greater problem within this society. As explained by Makokha, “[d]uring the Biafran war, girls and women, who were also referred to as ‘food’ (Adichie, 458) were raped both by the white mercenaries and the Biafrans themselves” (115), showcasing how “[w]omen were sexually exploited by the men in power” (115) and were seen as “sexual objects” (116), regardless of tribe, religion, or ethnicity. In doing this, Adichie shows how immoral acts can come from anyone, rather than just the “enemy”, and argues against the tropes of *us* versus *them*, essentially the idea of our allies being completely “good” and our adversaries being entirely “evil”. Wenske claims that

[b]y setting up the binary between the anonymity of the collective and the individual who is affected by it, Adichie circumvents the polarization of tribes. We see such situations of collective anonymity in both Igbo and other tribes; moreover, we see the good in individuals on both sides as well. (76)

These good individuals are represented by Mohammed, who saves Olanna, and the Hausa soldier who lived with Nnesinachi (Ugwu’s childhood crush) and protected her from harm, debunking the idea that certain tribes were monsters whilst others were saints. Moreover, as much as sexual violence is an important theme in Adichie’s novel, consensual, loving sex is construed as an important form of romantic expression. Additionally, to Norridge, “[i]n *Half of a Yellow Sun*, loving sex is pictured not as antithetical to rape but as related to the traumatic imaginary associated with sexual violence” (27). In one instance, when Olanna and Odenigbo have sex after her traumatic experience in Kano, “when he slid into her, she thought about Arize’s pregnant belly, how easily it must have broken, skin stretched that taut. She started to cry” (HYS 160). Norridge argues that through healthy sexual interaction and “[t]hrough Odenigbo’s tenderness she is able to access a sense of the sadness, the horror of her cousin’s probable rape, mutilation, and death” (28), something which can only be possible when lovemaking “is repeatedly figured

as pleasurable, supportive, loving, and empowering” (28). Through sexual intimacy, Adichie is able to allow the reader deep into Olanna’s emotions, including love, yearning, desire, loss, and grief, and documents her changing relationship with Odenigbo: “Sex again is used as a form of coding for communication, its loss symbolic of emotional as well as physical distancing... Olanna’s physical responses to Odenigbo signal distancing more eloquently than any conversations” (Norridge 32). Still, despite consensual sex being portrayed as a means of communication and intimacy between couples, throughout the novel the references to sexual violence are much more overpowering and recurring, with women being objectified and abuse by men on both sides of the conflict. Drawing again from Sabine Hirschauer’s studies on rape and sexual abuse during times of war, it is important to understand that “[w]artime rape was also sexualized; women were raped solely because they were women” (Charlesworth 1994 qtd in. Hirschauer 12) and that sexual violence is often used as a weapon during war “because of the unequal gendered relations that reign in society, and through the violent militarization of masculinities” (Baaz & Stern 2013 qtd in. Hirschauer 12). It is impossible to ignore the extreme hatred present in the portrayal of the Nigerian-Biafran conflict and the amount of torture, violence, and cruelty the victims endured, with survivors carrying, at the same time, great stigma and lifelong trauma.

When Olanna is summoned to Ummunnachi, the village of her people, to give account of her relatives’ massacre, she is told “[t]hey were happy she did not see Arize’s body; everyone knew what those monsters did to pregnant women” (HYS 193). Just as we do not see Arize’s body, we also do not see what happens to Kainene. Adichie is careful not to trivialise their bodies for sensationalism and avoids exposing them to a second violation through the display of their brutalised bodies, leaving enough hints of what happened to them whilst still honouring who they were and their stories. This is not a way of erasing what happened to them and the reality of what women face during war, but rather a respectful approach to the subject which honours the memory of these victims. According to Hirschauer, “[w]artime rape and structural sexual violence during various conflict and post-conflict settings, including colonialism, remained for decades and centuries in modern times, a mere side note rendered to the peripheries of the many human tragedies” (69). Here, despite Arize’s and Kainene’s bodies being left out of view, what the novel does is push their stories out of anonymity, and let us grieve with Olanna their profound loss. Olanna’s bond with Kainene and Arize are deeply meaningful, which is why the story of their loss, and particularly Olanna’s and Kainene’s story of separation and reunion, is so crucial to understanding the female protagonists’ experiences of war in the novel.

Right from the start, the reader learns of Olanna's distanced relationship with Kainene and her parents. Kainene's perception of those relationships, however, is never made available through her own words, but only through the indirect conversations and interactions she has with other people. As has been mentioned, the focus is on Olanna's insight and her struggle in not living up to her parents' expectations, including their attempts to set up an arranged marriage for political and economic gains, only to be frustrated and horrified at her choosing her own partner, yet still refusing to get married and prioritising instead her academic career at Nsukka University. Olanna feels inadequate and uncomfortable with her immediate family, and seems to only feel at ease and loved with her relatives in Kano, including her Uncle Mbaezi – "Olanna wondered if she would admire him as she did if he were not so different from her mother" (HYS 38) –, her Aunt Ifeka, who breastfed her when her mother could not (a possible symbol of Ifeka performing a maternal and comforting role, which Olanna does not get from her mother) and her cousin/sister Arize, to whom she has more of a sisterly bond than her actual sister:

Arize was laughing. Her plump body, her rounded arms, shook as she laughed. Olanna held her close. She felt a sense that things were in order, the way they were meant to be, and that even if they tumbled down once in a while, in the end they would come back together again. This was why she came to Kano: this lucid peace. (HYS 39)

In fact, Olanna's bond to her aunt, uncle and cousin is so strong, that when she discovers Odenigbo's infidelity, she goes to their house in Kano rather than her parents' house in Lagos. Instead of comforting Olanna, who was wallowing in self-pity and pining after Odenigbo, her aunt scolds her for being "weak" and pushes her to be independent: "Odenigbo has done what all men do and has inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away. Does that mean somebody died?" (HYS 226). She tells her to reclaim her life, including her flat and her job, and concludes by saying that "[y]ou must never behave as if your life belongs to a man" (HYS 226). Aunt Ifeka represents, at the same time, the idea that women must be independent and strong, and also that support can come through the exposition of hard truths. Although Olanna wants to be coddled and perhaps even pitied at this moment, her aunt's tough love has an important impact on her search for autonomy. The characterisation of Olanna's strong bonds to her aunt, uncle and cousin exacerbates the loss she (and the reader) feels years later when they are all murdered in the Igbo massacre in the North. Olanna is unable to tell her family what happened, and instead she confides in Odenigbo, who then passed on the horrible news to her family: "her mother collapsed.. It was the first time Olanna saw her mother without make-up...

and the first time Olanna saw Kainene cry since they were children” (HYS 157). Kainene sobs and tells Olanna she does not have to talk about it, but “Olanna had not even tried to talk about it” (HYS 157). Despite their estrangement, through their grief they are united, even if momentarily. By relaying Olanna’s story, Odenigbo performs an important function of the war survivor, which is to give account of what happened and to honour the memory of the dead (McLoughlin 7). Although Kainene is shown to break down and cry when told of the news of their murder, her grief is not explored in the novel as Olanna’s suffering, due again to the fact that Kainene is not a narrator and her most intimate thoughts are never known.

Some days after her traumatic experience, Olanna begins exhibiting symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – she gives these symptoms the name of “dark swoops” (HYS 156), a series of recurrent events which included paralysis, inability to walk and speak, and a loss of bladder control: “a thick blanket descended from above and pressed itself over her face, firmly, while she struggled to breathe” (HYS 156). Interestingly, a period of time separates the traumatic event and the beginning of her symptoms, which is consistent with current understanding of how trauma is a “belated experience” (Caruth 7) and splits the subject’s mind, pulling them out of “linear chronology” (Stonebridge 3). Joke de Mey further claims that these “[t]rauma symptoms seem to resemble (post) modern literary techniques such as repetition, focalization, lacunae, confusion, open or undecided endings, and disrupted chronology” (39). During the worst of Olanna’s paralysis and trauma, it is Ugwu who keeps the house running: he becomes the ruler of the household, tasked with food shopping, cooking, cleaning, organising, taking care of Baby and Olanna, feeding and even bathing both of them: “Ugwu still stood there, and she knew he would not leave until she started to eat” (HYS 161). The experience completely changed Olanna, who became “so much more inward” (HYS 186). Her loss and her trauma shows, to the reader, the first example of just how personal the escalation of conflict, hatred and violence can get.

It is interesting that Ugwu performs the duty of carer, when in the beginning of the novel, he developed a sexual attraction to Olanna: “The thought of her saliva in Master’s mouth has both repelled and excited him... It was the same way he felt about her moaning at night; he did not like to hear her and yet he often went to their door to press his ear against the cold wood and listen” (HYS 84-85). However, after Olanna becomes a mother and after the events which transpire in Part II and Olanna’s traumatic response, Ugwu does not sexualise her anymore, and instead they develop a deep relationship akin to mother and child. The structure of the family is constituted by Olanna as the mother, Ugwu as the older brother, Baby as the younger sister and Odenigbo as the father. Whilst Odenigbo is the financial provider, he is strangely absent from any

household duties and is not actively involved with the actual caring for Baby or even Olanna. When war comes, this will be even more noticeable. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, women (and Ugwu, for being associated with the domestic sphere and the “feminine”) are tasked with the running and feeding of the household and ensuring the survival of the family, just as it also happens in *Girl at War*, *The Book Thief* and *The Nightingale*.

During Parts II and IV, the reader witnesses the escalation of conflict and violence, as well as the worsening of conditions for people in Biafra, represented by Olanna and Odenigbo’s “downturn” in life. They go from living in a modern, elegant house at the Nsukka Campus, filled with Western-style kitchenware, to living first in Mama’s house, in the village of Abba. Without Olanna’s expensive kitchen appliances that were left behind in Nsukka, their meals and their lives became simpler. Olanna joined the local village’s sewing circle, and the women initially ignored Olanna when she mourned the loss of her kitchenware, the books, the pianos, her Singer sewing machine, her china, and her clothes, as these concerns were not relatable to them (HYS 185). Here, Olanna is characterised as privileged and even a little snobbish – becoming accustomed to a less sophisticated life was hard on her. Odenigbo, despite being amongst the intellectuals who envisioned Biafra, did not receive a prestigious position, and the family has to move into a modest house in Umuahia, complete with “two bedrooms and a kitchen and living room and dining room” (HYS 197), which Ugwu deemed unworthy of the family. Before the war, Olanna did not need to do her own shopping. Now, she had to stand in line for hours to get meagre rations of food, something which “made her feel uncomfortable, blemished” (HYS 269). Soon, however, she became ruthless in protecting her food, even with what Ugwu called “her English-speaking properness” (HYS 284). The supervisor at the relief centre, having recognised Olanna from years before, would help her occasionally by giving her extra food that was not made available to the population. This highlighted the fact that people working at the relief centres were diverting a considerable part of the relief food brought by humanitarian aid organisations.

Olanna finally agrees to marry Odenigbo, yet the ceremony is interrupted by an air raid, and Olanna mourns the absence of the wedding pictures as the guests all had to flee. Feeling increasingly powerless, she lets herself feel defeated momentarily. At one point, after three days of incessant bombing, she decided “she would no longer exist limply, waiting to die. Until Biafra won, the vandals would no longer dictate the terms of her life” (HYS 280). Through her change in attitude, Olanna takes back control of the only aspect of her life she can try to control – her own mind and spirit. She begins teaching the children in her back yard, and even after she moves into the block of flats, she teaches children at the courtyard as well. When they move to Kainene’s

house, she continues teaching children in Kainene's garden. The parents of the children looked up to Olanna and brought her several gifts, such as food and books. Ugwu was her assistant, and Odenigbo took pride that "my wife and Ugwu are changing the face of the next generation with their Socratic pedagogy!" (HYS 293). Still, despite her intellectual and professional accomplishments, when the family's condition becomes less stable and comfortable, the household responsibilities fall on Olanna rather than Odenigbo, showcasing the gender inequalities and expectations and roles within this society.

Although Olanna is not seen to grieve for her independence, or even question why she held the responsibility for the household, she does struggle with the loss of financial stability – in fact, there are several instances in the novel that showcase her discomfort: Olanna remarks how Odenigbo's "eyes saw the future. And so she did not tell him that she grieved for the past" (HYS 262); and later, when they moved into the one-bedroom in Umuahia, she looked at "the clutter that was their room and home... and felt a surge of revulsion, the urge to run and run and run until she was far away from it all" (HYS 337). Olanna's daughter, Baby (whose real name is Chiamaka, a name chosen by Kainene, but was not called that since their estrangement) becomes ill and starts losing weight rapidly, but also refuses to accept most of the foods given by the Red Cross. The only food she accepted was fried egg yolk (made from dry egg yolk given at the relief centre). Because of this, Olanna has to stand in different lines to make sure she gets food for Baby and for the rest of the family. Despite her dedication, Baby is still suffering from malnourishment, so much that her hair begins to fall off – in fact, the entire family struggle as their means become tighter. Faced with this predicament, Olanna turns to superstition, which she once rebuked, by believing in the common wartime notion that you would be safe if you followed certain rituals, as if death abided by a set of rules. To Olanna, "[i]f heavens were fair, wartime misfortunes would be mutually exclusive; since Baby was sick, she could not be harmed in an air raid. A cough was something Olanna could exercise control over, an air raid was not" (HYS 263).

When Odenigbo's mother dies after refusing to leave her home in Abba, which was overrun by Nigerian forces, his life unravels. Unlike Olanna, he is not shown to have experienced symptoms of paralysis or anxiety/panic attacks. Instead, he starts drinking and spending all their money on alcohol. This stems from a necessity to numb or escape from his grief and traumatic loss. In the fifth edition of the *Clinical Handbook of Psychological Disorders: A Step-by-Step Treatment Manual* (2014), David H. Barlow edited this comprehensive guide alongside several distinguished contributors and compiles important theories, techniques, and procedures to understand and treat psychological disorders. Of particular interest to this analysis are the sections

on posttraumatic stress disorder, trauma and grief, and substance abuse. In Chapter 2, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”, Candice M. Monson et al. mention Mardi J. Horowitz’s work in cognitive theory and how he

theorized that there is a basic conflict between the person’s need to resolve and reconcile the event into his or her history, and the desire to avoid emotional pain. When images of the event (flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive recollections), thoughts about the meanings of the trauma, and emotions associated with the trauma become overwhelming, psychological defense mechanisms take over, and the person exhibits numbing or avoidance. Horowitz suggested that a person with PTSD oscillates between phases of intrusion and avoidance, and that if successfully processed, the oscillations become less frequent and less intense. (Monson et al. 67)

As such, when Odenigbo drinks heavily and avoids going home to Olanna or going to work to fulfil his obligations, he is struggling with the trauma of losing his mother (and the guilt for not being able to travel to Abba and bury her, due to the roadblocks) and avoiding and numbing the pain through alcohol. In fact, in Chapter 13, “Alcohol Use Disorders”, Barbara S. McCrady (2014) discusses how substance abuse is correlated to depression and anxiety disorders (535), precisely those stemming from unassimilated grief (563). Moreover, Odenigbo’s behaviour is consistent with at least five of the recognised symptoms of SUD (substance abuse disorder), enough to qualify as possessing that disorder. His symptoms include:

(1) failing to fulfill major social role obligations, such as those related to work, home, or school; ... (3) continuing to drink despite the fact that drinking is causing social or interpersonal problems; ... (5) drinking larger amounts of alcohol or drinking over longer periods of time than planned; (8) neglect of other activities; (9) spending considerable time obtaining alcohol, drinking, and recovering from its effects. (McCrady 534)

Unlike Olanna, who experiences her grief deeply and allows herself to *feel* her traumatic loss, Odenigbo evades feeling his loss (which in itself is characterised as avoidance, a symptom of PTSD) and turns to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. Okeoma, one of their closest friends, tells Olanna that “Odenigbo has never known how to be weak” (HYS 322), meaning he would not allow himself to feel vulnerable. Although Odenigbo’s grief is clearly great and understandable, and not all people cope with loss in the same way, his response is seen negatively by the characters in the novel – who have all experienced loss and trauma – as Kainene claims

that “[w]e are all in this war, and it is up to us to decide to become somebody else or not” (HYS 388). Eventually, he stops going to work altogether, and money becomes even shorter – Olanna initially lives off their savings, then with the help from some of Odenigbo’s friends. Eventually, she must use the money her sister had given her, until she ultimately moves to Kainene’s house in Orlu. Ugwu becomes suspicious that Odenigbo is being unfaithful again, due to his strange closeness with a girl named Alice, that lived in their block in Umuahia. Ugwu remains responsible for taking care of the household and takes on the task of watching over Odenigbo, as Ugwu is wary of the family breaking up again. However oblivious to the situation at first, Olanna eventually becomes suspicious as well, but at this point the situation at home has already grown progressively strained and Olanna and Odenigbo are increasingly distanced from each other. Olanna had forbidden Ugwu from being in the streets due to her fears of him being kidnapped and forced to serve in the army – these fears were proven to be accurate, as one day, when Ugwu is out meeting Erebechi, the local girl he is in love with, he is kidnapped on his journey back and forcibly conscripted, setting him on his journey separated from the household which will culminate in the rape of the bargirl and his disappearance.

Parallel to this, as Olanna’s and Odenigbo’s relationship grows more tense, to which is added Ugwu’s disappearance and later presumed death. Olanna snaps and finds him at the bar and tells him to “drink and drink and don’t stop” (HYS 381). She is repulsed by him and his attempts to make it up to her, grieving Ugwu as her own son. In parallel to Olanna’s journey, Kainene is experiencing war differently. Unlike Olanna, war has caused Kainene to thrive, as she continues to be a successful businesswoman, making a profit importing stockfish. Olanna initially resents Kainene’s success and the fact that she had not diminished her conditions, having even bought and renovated a house in Orlu. Unlike Kainene’s journey, at the background of Olanna’s trajectory are her worries with her family, the scarcity of food, the threat of air bombardments and the growing financial difficulties. An important marker of losing social status is the fact that Olanna also cannot afford cosmetics, new clothes, shoes and particularly wigs, which were a symbol of status, femininity and even power for Nigerian women. At the reunion, Olanna notices how Kainene “looked elegant in a knee-length tan dress” (HYS 343) and paid special mention to her “leather bag that was the same earth-brown shade as her coiffed wig” (HYS 343), feeling inadequately dressed in the presence of her sister. Kainene brings Olanna some British pounds their parents had sent (because they fled to England when the war started) and two new dresses for Chiamaka, as she tells Olanna “[i]t’s about time the girl began to be called Chiamaka. This Baby business is tiresome” (HYS 344). The reason Kainene has finally visited is because,

following the bombing of Port Harcourt, she witnesses the death of her servant Ikejide, who is decapitated by shrapnel in front of her. This change in Kainene's attitude connects with Tim O'Brien's idea in *The Things They Carried* that being so close to death can make someone feel more alive (77). In this sense, being close to death but surviving, or watching someone die, effectively changes you, and this change resignifies what is important and what is not. As Kainene herself tells Olanna: "There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable" (HYS 347). In Kainene's case, her brush with death meant the renewal of a desire to become closer to her sister and heal their rift. Although the two sisters' trajectories could not be more different, their conciliation at the end seems to attest to the power of their similarities and their bond rather than their differences. When the two sisters embrace, Olanna remarks how Kainene "smelt of home" (HYS 344) and how later, as they walked together, "Kainene slipped her hand into Olanna's" (HYS 349).

After Umuahia falls and people start evacuating, Kainene invites Olanna and Odenigbo to live with them. Odenigbo does not want to go, and Olanna tells him that "if he wants to find a place he can go ahead and live there alone" (HYS 387). Olanna and Kainene's reapproximation is a powerful healing moment for both of them: "Olanna laughed and noticed that they were both walking at a leisurely pace and that their steps were in harmony, their slippers coated in brown dust" (HYS 390). This extract is extremely symbolic: the sisters had, from the beginning of the novel, been described in relation to their differences rather than their similarities, and their long-standing strife had weighed heavily on both women. Towards the end of the narrative, these significant bonding moments symbolise a coming together, a sense of unity and of peace that was not achievable in any other moment since the beginning of the war. After it is discovered that Ugwu is alive and he is brought to live with Kainene and Richard as well, the reader is able to view the sisters through Ugwu's eyes. Ugwu "listened to the conversations in the evenings, writing in his mind what he would later transfer to paper. It was mostly Kainene and Olanna who talked, as though they created their own world that Master and Mr. Richard could never quite enter" (HYS 399). In one of the sisters' last scenes together, Richard remarks how "Kainene laughed and Olanna laughed and slapped their arm; Richard saw the similarity in the curve of their lips, in the shape of their lightly larger front teeth" (HYS 403). Their reunion also heightened the tragedy and strength of Kainene's disappearance and Olanna's loss, who joined the hundreds of people looking for their loved ones, for any sign of news, good or bad.

The months pass, the war ends with Nigeria victorious, and the family (Odenigbo, Olanna, Baby and Ugwu) returns to Nsukka, to try to rescue the remnants of their old life and possibly

begin a new one – all marked by Kainene’s absence. Adjusting to this new situation was complicated, as Biafrans suffered reprisals from the military and the government, having lost their homes, bank accounts and even personal belongings. Unable to get closure, Olanna experiences something “greater than grief. It was stranger than grief. She did not know where her sister was” (HYS 431), obsessing over their last moments together, the clothes Kainene may have been wearing, trying to picture her sister in her last moments. Olanna is unable to achieve any peace through clinging to reason and facts. Instead, she visits a *dibia*, something she would have never done before in her life. When Odenigbo tells her the *dibia* only wanted money and had scammed her, Olanna replied: “I believe in everything. I believe in anything that will bring my sister home ... Our people say that we all reincarnate, don’t they? ... *Uwa m, uwa ozo*. When I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my sister” (HYS 433). Where reason cannot deliver resolution, Olanna turns to the power of faith, mystery, and ancestral knowledge to find acceptance and healing. In their journeys, Olanna and Kainene strove to live by their own terms and decide their destinies, despite the difficulties and growing uncertainty. Through re-establishing their bond, they gave each other strength and had priceless, precious time to make amends. Despite the fact that Kainene’s death reminds us again that war obliterates the possibility of control over one’s fate, the manner of her disappearance does not diminish the autonomous life she lived. In fact, she went missing crossing over to enemy lines to purchase much-needed supplies for the refugee centre, an incredibly brave and selfless act, and was later presumed dead. Olanna, through her belief in maintaining this powerful bond with her sister into the next life, can come to terms with her loss and continue her own journey of healing.

2.2. An Analysis of Vianne Mauriac and Isabelle Rossignol in Kristin Hannah’s *The Nightingale*

In *The Nightingale*, published in 2015, the narrative is divided into 39 chapters and, just as *HYS*, it encompasses two different timelines, one taking place in 1995 (in Oregon, United States and Paris, France) and the other in 1939-1945, during the Nazi occupation of France. However, unlike *HYS*, in which the plot is more evenly divided between timelines, in *TN* the majority of events are set in the past, during the war, and only five chapters take place later in the timeline. In the past timeline, the narrative is in the third person, and the focus shifts between the perspectives of Isabelle or Vianne, and as such the reader has access to both sisters’ evolving

inner thoughts and feelings throughout different moments of the narrative, again differently from *HYS*, where only the perspective of Olanna is available to the reader. Because of this, the reader has full access to both sisters' inner thoughts and emotions, and grows to know them equally and intimately. During the past timeline, the reader learns of unfolding events as Isabelle and Vianne do. However, when the story shifts to the future, there is a first-person narrator, an old woman whose identity is unknown (and could be either an older version of Isabelle or Vianne, or possibly someone else), who is reminiscing about the events which transpired in the war and consequently gives ambiguous hints of events to come. It is important to note that, because *The Nightingale* was only published five years ago, the body of critical works focused on this particular novel are still few, though that may certainly change in the near future. Even though we do not benefit from an array of diverse critical studies as we do with *Half of a Yellow Sun*, for instance, which was published a decade earlier, one can benefit from the fact that there is still a lot of room and fresh ground for discussion. For the purposes of the analysis here, I will alternate my discussion of the sisters' journeys in the novel with some information regarding the structure and the plot as well.

The first chapter of *The Nightingale* is set in Oregon, in 1995, and is narrated by an old woman who is dying of cancer and being taken care of by her adult son, Julien. The knowledge of her diagnosis draws her to think about the war, some fifty years prior. Just as happens to Olanna and Kainene in *HYS* and was proposed in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, which I have mentioned throughout this thesis, this seems to suggest that in close proximity to death one is compelled to *feel* more alive, to reconnect to an important part of one's life. For this narrator, this meant looking back to the experience of war and facing those meaningful – yet painful – memories of the past, introducing thus the theme of memory – and of losing one's memory, and perhaps one's identity, with time. The traumatic and devastating nature of WWII – the immense scale of death, horror and destruction that it brought – seared into the survivors' lives were the memories of their deceased loved ones and their interrupted hopes and dreams, which resulted in profound and lifelong trauma for those who survived. At the same time that being alive and having survived meant a renewal of hope and a chance to start anew, survivors also carried great feelings of guilt. When this narrator moved to the US, after the end of the war, Europe was in crisis whilst the United States was thriving and inviting – so much that, indeed, many did eventually immigrate to the US after the war. Whilst building her new life – marked by the absence of those who did not make it, after all, and the knowledge of what transpired during the war – the narrator remarked how she cherished the “value of forgetting, the lure of reinvention” (TN 1) in order to better adapt in the US: “For years, I kept the memories at bay. I hid them in a dusty attic, far from prying eyes.

I told my husband, my children, myself, that there was nothing for me in France. I thought I could come to America and make this new life for myself and forget what I had done to survive” (TN 297). At that moment, forgetting was an important survival skill that allowed her to build a new life. This passage resonates with Ana Jurić’s journey of assimilation into American culture in *GW*, where the protagonist essentially suppressed her ethnic identity, her cultural identity, and her memories of the war to adapt to her American family. However, just as Ana must confront the memories she suppressed in order to complete her maturation journey in *GW*, this narrator must do the same and come to peace with the experience before she dies: “My eyes fail me often – in the darkness, when headlights flash, when rain falls. It is unnerving, this new unreliability in my vision. Perhaps that’s why I find myself looking backward. The past has a clarity I can no longer see in the present” (HYS 1). Faced with her own mortality and how her body is slowly weakening, she must then delve into her own memories and revisit her own story, including those she lost, in order to come to peace with her life and her death.

The narrator is moving out of her family home and into a care home, as she can no longer look after herself. As she begins the process of packing her things, she empties an old trunk which holds several items from her past. These items, including books of poetry by Julien Rossignol and a French ID belonging to a Juliette Gervaise, elicit important elements to the narrative, which will be revealed as the story advances. In time, the reader discovers that Julien Rossignol is Isabelle and Vianne’s father, and that Juliette Gervaise is the name on the false identification papers used by Isabelle during her work for the Resistance. These two elements, coupled with the fact that the old woman’s son is named Julien, leads the reader to conclude that this narrator may be either Vianne or Isabelle, although this is ambiguous for most of the narrative. Throughout the novel, the truth of the narrator’s identity will be continually teased and hinted at; only in the last chapter does the reader discover that the narrator is Vianne and that Isabelle died briefly after the war. Interestingly, going through these meaningful artifacts will attest to the materiality of the narrator’s memories and brings them to “life” in this future timeline, whilst also providing the reader with information to come. The future timeline also hints at other important elements, such as the letter the narrator receives in Chapter 14 inviting her to attend a celebration for “passeurs” (people who helped during the war) and receive a Croix de Guerre, a celebratory decoration awarded to those (both military and civilian) who fought alongside the Allied forces in WWII. When her son asks if the letter is about his deceased father, the woman remarks how “[m]en always think war is about them” (TN 146), echoing the studies of Margaret R. Higonnet (1994), which I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, that war and war fiction is generally associated

with the male, rather than the female, experience, trauma and heroic bravery, and as such women's stories have been forgotten or erased throughout history in favour of men's stories. In fact, as stated in the introduction to Bernard Cook's historical encyclopaedia detailing remarkable women in war, such as Isabelle's hero Edith Cavell, oftentimes "women are invisible (in history) unless we are looking straight at them" (Rosenhaft qtd. in Cook XXXI). Cook's encyclopaedia, then, aims to "contribute to the visibility of women in this unfortunate aspect of the human experience" (XXXI) by shining light on their deeds and commenting on women's situations in war. Additionally, Cook explains that "[i]f women survived war, many found themselves psychologically and economically ravaged by it" (XXXII). As such, the letter received by the narrator elicits painful and potentially traumatic experiences from the war. Here, the narrator provides two hints of events to come, and foreshadows traumatic moments in Vianne's story: "the man I killed" (TN 146), who the reader later discovers is Captain Beck, and "the one I should have" (TN 146), revealed towards the end of the narrative to be Sturmbannführer Von Richter, the second German officer who billeted at Vianne's house, tortured her psychologically and physically for months, including recurrent rapes and beatings, and got her pregnant as a result of those abuses. Vianne's traumatic experience highlights the reality that

[m]ore frequently and throughout history, women have been the victims of war. They have been forced to grieve slain husbands and children. They have been brutalized and killed. Women have been viewed as property to be seized in war and enslaved... Rape has been recurrent in warfare whether or not the warfare was primarily ethnically based... Rape was utilized as a weapon of demoralization. (Cook XXXI-XXXII)

As I have explored throughout this thesis, rape and sexual abuse have been a recurrent and widespread issue during many wars across the centuries, with women being placed increasingly in positions of vulnerability and risk during conflict. Once the war ended, these women were not given support or space to discuss their traumas. Rather, it was expected that they should hide it in order to protect themselves and the reputation of their husbands. In Vianne's case, for instance, it is not known whether her husband Antoine knew that the child was not his, or if he knew about the sustained rapes and abuses Vianne suffered at the hand of the Germans. However, Vianne's physical and psychological reactions to her husband at the end of the novel show that she was struggling with the aftermath of a very traumatic and life-changing experience:

He was her husband, the love of her life, and yet, when he touched her, it was all she could do not to turn away... Their kiss was sad, an apology almost, a reminder of what they'd once shared... she closed her eyes and returned his kiss, waiting for her body to come alive at his touch, but when she slid beneath him and felt their bodies come together as they'd done so many times before, she felt nothing at all. (TN 394-395)

Between post-war Vianne and this elderly narrator, there is a gap of about fifty years which is not accounted for. According to Thurlow, “[d]uring the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, women found themselves in positions which required they did whatever they could in order to provide for their families” (4), adding that French women were even encouraged to pursue relationships with the Germans, and yet after the war some were harshly judged for their choices. Thurlow claims that “[t]he aftermath of the war left two distinct categories of women, stripping them of their own individual stories and placing them within a larger, mythical construct of the good resister and the evil collaborator” (7). If a woman was deemed to be one of the *collaboratrices* (collaborators), either through a willing relationship with a German or through force, coercion and abuse, she could expect to be labelled a traitor to her country, as well as her husband or family (a categorisation that Vianne could have easily fallen into, even considering her circumstances). The *résistantes* (women that were part of the Resistance), however, were seen as heroes to the cause (Isabelle’s most likely category). It did not matter that these women were securing their own survival and the survival of their families, or even if they were abused and coerced. To Thurlow, the categorization of women into *résistantes* or *collaboratrices* was less about facts, and more about public perception of events and even gossip or slander from your neighbours (9). According to Thurlow, while the *résistantes* “became greatly admired and placed on a pedestal” (6), their glory was matched by the “terrible humiliation” (6) faced by their counterparts, the *collaboratrices*. Some women, who came to be known as *les femmes tondues*, had their heads forcibly shaved to mark their betrayal to France. These outcast women were “used as blame for the defeat of France, exemplifying how a weakened France had fallen with the help of certain individuals who did not have the interests of their country at heart” (75). It can be understood, then, the dangers that were present for women in post-war France, and the reasons why women chose to keep their stories secret. As such, most of these stories were not public knowledge once the war was over, partly because these survivors “often remained silent because of the shame and social pressures such violence represented” (Hansen qtd. in Hirschauer 200), and partly because of the dangers of being accused of collaboration, which could lead to public shaming and dishonour.

The reason behind Vianne's choice to hide the truth of Julien's paternity and the sexual assault suffered during the war might relate, then, to a fear of being labelled a traitor to both her husband and her country, instead of being recognised as a victim of violence. The reader is never given full insight into how Vianne reconnected with her husband, only that it began with the birth of their son and the restoration of their family unit. Her personal struggle and trauma during the aftermath of the conflict is not addressed in the novel. The information that is available to the reader is that Vianne hid the truth of what happened to her, and possibly that she feared retaliation and humiliation that the *collaboratrices* endured. Bearing the child of a German, then, also presented a complicated situation in post-war France – another possible reason why the family chose to emigrate to the US. Regardless of whether her husband knew or what he thought, the reality is that Vianne was able to find meaning and happiness in her post-war life, despite her loss and suffering, by starting anew in a different place. In addition to this, Vianne's conformity to her role as a submissive wife and mother also worked as a shield that allowed her to adapt to her post-war reality. When the men were sent away to war, women found themselves becoming the head of the household, which came with increased responsibility and freedom: "As the heads of households disappeared, women had no choice but to step up and take over, even though this contrasted greatly with the goal of the regime to place women back in the home" (ThurLOW 24). Once the war ended, "[p]eace temporarily reversed many of the wartime changes. Perhaps surprisingly, in 1945, 75 per cent of working women said they wanted to become traditional housewives" (Ross 29). This was certainly the case with Vianne, who returned to her traditional role as a mother and a wife following the war, and comments on how her son has an image of her that is not the full truth of who she is and what she experienced:

I have let him think I am weak, all these years; he watched me lean on his father and defer to his decision making. He heard me say, "If that's what you think, dear," a million times. He watched me stand on the sidelines of his life instead of showing him the field of my own. This is my fault. It's no wonder he loves a version of me that's incomplete. (TN 298)

Perhaps, by not confronting her husband (over guilt, maybe), she also avoided suspicion and scrutiny over her actions during the war. Interestingly, a part of the narrator's journey will include enlightening her son about her struggles and her sacrifices. Fifty years later, this older narrator, despite feeling overwhelmed with the flooding of memories and resurfacing emotions, is at a place where she is able to look back on the experience with some sense of closure and acceptance – however painful the process was. In Chapter 26, the reader discovers that the

ceremony the older narrator is invited to is, in fact, in honour of the famous Nightingale, a Resistance operative who helped hundreds of downed Allied pilots make their ways safely through the Pyrenees into Spain. At this point, the reader already knows that Isabelle is the Nightingale, but that is still not concrete and definite evidence that she is this narrator. Previously in the narrative, the narrator had made a reference the man she killed (TN 146), and just in Chapter 25 the reader discovers that Isabelle and Vianne had killed Beck together: Vianne hit him with a shovel, and Isabelle shot him dead. Although it is impossible to tell which action landed the fatal blow, in truth both sisters held responsibility for his death. As such, the mention of the Nightingale, which had seemed to confirm the identity of the narrator, is now put into question because of this new information. Additionally, because the narrator's son is named Julien, the same name as the sisters' father, either of them could have chosen to honour their father in this way. Ambiguity and foreshadowing is used recurrently in the novel to tease the reader with hints of events to come and also cause them to look for clues in the narrative to determine the narrator's identity.

Instead of telling her son the truth about the invitation, the narrator decides to go to Paris to attend the ceremony alone. This is interesting and again echoes Ana Jurić's journey back to Croatia in *GW*: just as Ana must temporarily sever her connections to her family in the US and travel back to her native country and access her memories of the war and her cultural identity, so must the older narrator of *TN* (who we here know it's Vianne, but in the novel we would not find out until the final chapter) do the same. I want to recall here Jay Winter's notion of *sites of memory*, which I have explored throughout this thesis, as well as Michael Schudson's important discussion on collective traumatic experiences. The narrator cannot fully come to peace with her past without going back to France, an important place that is linked to her traumatic experience, and where she can reunite with others who shared her experience, her struggles, and also her losses. She is unable to fully grieve in the United States as she is removed from her community, which had a shared traumatic experience of the war and could come together, collectively, to honour those memories. As such, just as Ana attempts to sever connections when travelling to Croatia, Vianne also intends to do the same, leaving her son behind. At the airport, the narrator meets a young girl who is running away from home, and expressing great concern for her, her first instinct is to care for the girl. Noticing her own behaviour, the narrator comments that "once a mother, always a mother" (TN 342). Here, one may argue that the fact that this narrator is associated with motherhood may be a hint for her identity, as Vianne is identified with the role of mother from the start, but it could still be (at this point) a ruse to confuse the reader.

The narrator's plan to go to Paris alone is foiled by the fact that her son races to the airport and joins her by surprise on her flight in Chapter 31. Despite her desire to return to her home alone, Vianne is not able to exclude Julien from the experience, as he is an integral part of what happened in her past. Vianne's experience is bound to Julien's experience as well, even without his knowledge, and that is why he must accompany her on her journey. As he urges her to tell him the story from the beginning, Vianne struggles to provide him with the linear, chronological narrative he desires, because she cannot witness her experience linearly: "How can I start at the beginning, when all I can think about is the end?" (TN 345). This may account also for the non-chronological nature of the narrative and the presence of alternating timelines. It is not uncommon in war novels to find this metafictional concern for portraying one's story and experience, and linearity presents a challenge to the accurate representation of the emotional truth of the novel. In Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds*, the novel I discussed in my undergraduate monograph in 2015, the narrator argues how "the marks could not be assembled into any kind of pattern. They were fixed in place. Connecting them would be wrong. They fell where they had fallen. Marks representing the randomness of the war were made at whatever moment I remembered them: disorder predominated" (217). The formation of a personal narrative, then, is also constrained by the limitations of memory and time. The narrator did not believe that "one's life can be distilled to a narrative that has a beginning and an end" (TN 345). Interestingly, *The Nightingale* begins in the future, travels back and forth between the future timeline and the past, providing the reader with knowledge of the sisters' journeys but also the hindsight of the future narrator, and finally ends the narrative in the future timeline – representative of the narrator's journey and the completion of a cycle.

In the last chapter of the novel, the narrator and her son have finally made it to Paris. Here, the narrator can embrace her "Frenchness", highlighting one of the tensions in the novel regarding the cultural differentiation between a French mother and an American son. Julien is shocked that she wants to walk to the ceremony, as before, having lived in the suburbs of Oregon, they likely needed a car for everything. To this, she simply replies: "I'm French" (TN 430). Although the cultural conflicts between an American identity and a French identity are not as developed as the cultural differentiation that Ana experiences in *GW* with her Croatian and American identity, there are moments in the novel where this element is highlighted. In Paris, mother and son walk leisurely and calmly and enjoy the day rediscovering the city. As the time of the ceremony approaches, Julien remarks that it is time to go, which amuses the narrator as she realised "he had been keeping time all along, waiting. He is so American. No sitting idle,

forgetting oneself, not for this young man of mine” (TN 431). At the ceremony, the narrator is asked to go on the podium to give a speech, during which the reader discovers she is Vianne and that Isabelle died a few months after the end of the war and Vianne’s daughter Sophie lived unmarried alongside her mother for decades, but had died a few years prior. During her speech, Vianne is honouring both the memory of her sister and also her father. She tells the audience that “Isabelle died both a hero and a woman in love. She couldn’t have made a different choice” (TN 435). Like her idol Edith Cavell, Isabelle became renowned for her actions in the war, yet sadly did not survive. At the meeting, Vianne encounters an older Gaetan, accompanied by his daughter Isabelle, who was named after her own sister. There, she also reencounters Ari (only surviving child of her best friend, Rachel de Champlain) for the first time since the war. The encounter is very emotional for both parts, as they had developed a strong mother-son bond after Rachel was taken to a concentration camp and Vianne became responsible for keeping Ari safe. After the war, he was taken in by relatives and the two had never met again. Ari shows the narrator a picture of a young Vianne and his mother Rachel, smiling together. This final meeting is symbolic of Vianne reconnecting with an important part of her past and her own story, and inevitably it draws her to think of her greatest secret, “the secret that made me bury it all” (TN 438). Julien was the son born of Vianne’s rape and abuse during the war. His birth, rather than bring the family apart, was “a miracle in the midst of despair” (TN 438), the glue that healed the broken pieces of her family after the war. Vianne, as I will explore more in depth in the next few pages, is continually associated with the figure of the mother, and motherhood is shown to be a positive, healing tool for her. Additionally, the establishment of a secure family unit is what initially pulls her together from her childhood trauma. If Vianne is readily associated with motherhood from the beginning of the novel, then her husband Antoine is more closely associated with fatherhood, which the narrator confirms in the end of the novel by saying “Antoine was Julien’s father in every way that mattered. It is not biology that determines fatherhood. It is love” (TN 438). Family and love, then, are continually described in the novel as compelling forces that connect the characters, help them heal and thrive, and give meaning to their actions and choices throughout the war. The focus of the narrative is not exclusively about war, then, but about the human relationships and the struggles and journeys undertaken by them. As Tim O’Brien proposed in *The Things They Carried*, “a true war story is never about war... It’s about love and memory. It’s about sorrow” (81). What I want to understand throughout the course of this chapter is precisely how Vianne and Isabelle face the challenges presented to them during the war and continuously fight for their autonomy, for their own survival and to protect those they love, and also show a commitment to

doing what is right regardless of the personal cost involved. Both women risk a lot and endanger their own safety to fight the Nazi regime, though in different ways. Throughout their parallel journeys during the war, the sisters are still connected by a powerful, meaningful bond, even when their relation is difficult and strained. Their troubled relationship is at the centre of the novel and their stories are inevitably intertwined, and in this chapter I will document how their relationship changed in the course of war and how, in the end, their coming together symbolises peace, closure, forgiveness and the restoration of their bond as sisters. This moment is extremely significant to both of their stories because it allows them to make amends before Isabelle dies a few months later.

Despite the novel being set mostly in the past with some intercalating chapters taking place in the future (Chapters 1, 14, 26, 31 and 39), I have chosen here to contemplate first the aforementioned chapters pertaining to the future timeline, and now turn my focus to the past timeline, which will comprehend most of the novel. The story begins in the summer of 1939, just before the breakout of the war. Vianne is living with her family at Le Jardin, her country family home in Carriveau, and Isabelle has just arrived in Paris to live with their father, Julien Rossignol, after being expelled from the latest convent for poor behaviour (she had questioned why she needed to learn table manners or sewing when France was at war). Vianne is around twenty-eight years old at the start of the narrative, and she has been married for twelve years. Isabelle, who is around eighteen at the beginning of the war, has a complicated relationship with both her sister and their father. Fourteen years before, when Vianne was fourteen and Isabelle was only four, the girls' mother died unexpectedly and their Papa, Julien, "gave up on being a father" (TN 6) and "their family had been irreparably broken" (TN 12). The loss of their mother was a destabilising factor in their family and a source of trauma for the sisters. Here, I want to briefly recall Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development discussed in Chapter 1, especially in relation to the impact of a traumatic event in a child's life and development. To Erikson, a child's social environment – including parents, siblings, extended family, and local community – plays a determining role in the development of their personality, their confidence and self-worth, how they form attachments and deal with conflict. Some bonds, however, are more pivotal than others, and Erikson considers one's relationship with their parents to be an important determinant of basic personality traits and how they negotiate feelings of trust and mistrust; intimacy and isolation; autonomy and dependence; confidence and inadequacy, amongst others. To Erikson, a child is "deeply and exclusively 'identified' with his parents, who most of the time appear to him to be powerful and beautiful, although often quite unreasonable, disagreeable, and even dangerous"

(115). As such, children are definitely impacted, whether positively or negatively, by their connection with their parents. As I have explored in the previous chapter, Erikson refers to a *crisis of wholeness* that is correlated with a *crisis of identity* – essentially, that it is critical that a child experiences a sense of continuity and stability from their past and their future in order to feel complete. Any traumatic disruption to this continuity may have lasting impacts in that child's development.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the destruction and loss brought on by war severely impacted Ana's and Liesel's development. Certainly, in the case of *The Nightingale* it would have been possible and interesting to analyse the narrative through the perspective of Sophie, Vianne's young daughter who, akin to Ana and Liesel, grows up as a woman during the war. However, my intention here is to discuss Isabelle's and Vianne's past and determine the important events that shaped both of their futures. Losing a parent is an earth-shattering event at any age, but for young children who are still developing their basic attachments and beginning to develop their sense of identity and personality it is particularly devastating. Instead of stepping up fully into a fatherly role, their father hired a governess to care for the girls and withdrew emotionally from them. Two years later, at only sixteen, Vianne got pregnant and married Antoine Mauriac, and Isabelle initially lived with them. This at first indicated that Vianne was ready to take her mother's place as the mother of the family, including becoming a mother figure to her young sister. However, Vianne suffers a miscarriage and, undone by grief, withdraws from her family ties and rejects Isabelle, sending her away to be raised in a convent. This act of betrayal (as Isabelle saw it) was the root cause for the sisters' difficult relationship throughout the rest of their lives. After many miscarriages, Vianne had Sophie and finally fulfilled her expected role within society. Despite her tragic losses and her lack of a relationship with her father, Vianne found a way to cope with this loss by marrying Antoine and forming a family with him, which would become her main source of stability and comfort. Essentially, she was able to find a sense of completeness and purpose through the formation of meaningful attachments that were based on trust and intimacy. Isabelle, on the other hand, suffered not only the loss of her mother to illness and the rejection of her father when she was only four years old, but she was further rejected by her sister, two years after her mother died. As a result of her loss and these rejections, Isabelle quickly learned that "she had to rely on herself" (TN 24), was raised in strict convents and boarding schools, and grew to mistrust others and have difficulty in forming attachments. Isabelle struggled to feel *whole* in her relationship with others, and so she turned her attention inwards, becoming individualistic, rebellious, and unpredictable. In fact, her future work in the Resistance is facilitated by the fact

that she is used to being alone and has a distanced relationship with her family. Additionally, there is no mention in the novel of Isabelle making friends, except perhaps the relationship she forms with some women of the Resistance and, later, the other prisoners at the concentration camp. Aside from this, the only attachment she does form as an adult is to Gaet, and even so, their relationship is not exactly conventional – their routine is characterised by stolen moments of passion, followed by months-long separation, and the latent threat that they might die. Because their lifestyle is so dangerous and their shared goal so important, the possibility of domestic bliss, of marriage and children, is never made available to them: “They met, they ducked into shadowy corners or dirty tents or back rooms, and they made love in the dark, but they didn’t get to lie together afterwards like lovers and talk. He was always leaving her, or she was always leaving him” (TN 251). In short, the sisters’ personalities (and the romantic relationships they developed) were directly shaped by the tragic loss of their maternal figure and the abandonment and rejection of their father’s love, yet in entirely opposed ways. While Isabelle had learned to trust herself and be autonomous, even if at times careless and selfish, Vianne had mostly delegated responsibility to her husband, consequently not focusing on her own strength and potential, and was “given to fear and anxiety” (TN 42). These characteristics, which during peacetime were perhaps only a source of mild nuisance, during war became increasingly impossible to conciliate, leading to the sisters’ estrangement.

Not long after Paris falls under German occupation, Isabelle is sent to Carriveau by her father to be with her sister, as the countryside was considered to be safer than the capital. Isabelle, however, is adamant that she wants to stay and fight – she tells him she is not afraid and that she wants “to be like Edith Cavell” (TN 33). Edith Cavell was a British nurse who was arrested and executed by the Germans in 1915 “for hiding Belgian, British and French soldiers and assisting them to escape” (Cook 100). Cook shares an account of Edith Cavell told by Hugh Gibson, the Secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, based on Cavell’s interactions with Mr. Gahan, an Anglican priest who visited her in prison, in which she is portrayed as fearless and remarkable: she was “calm and prepared and faced the ordeal without a tremor. She was a tiny thing that looked as though she could be blown away with a breath, but she had a great spirit” (Cook 100); Cavell “told Mr. Gahan that soldiers had come to her and asked to be helped to the frontier; that knowing the risks they ran and the risks she took, she had helped them” (Cook 101); she is recorded to have said she “had nothing to regret, no complaint to make, and that if she had it all to do over again, she would change nothing” (Cook 101). Even the German military chaplain, who stayed with her and gave her burial rites, was shown to greatly admire Cavell and her bravery:

“She was courageous to the end. She professed her Christian faith and said that she was glad to die for her country. She died like a heroine” (Cook 101).

Knowing Edith Cavell’s history, it is not surprising she is Isabelle’s hero and a source of great inspiration. Still, regardless of her brave and remarkable acts, Isabelle’s father is sure to remind her how Edith Cavell died – executed by the Germans. This is a foreshadowing of Isabelle’s journey in war, including her brave but dangerous activities with the Resistance and her ultimately premature death at the age of twenty-five. Interestingly, in both *The Nightingale* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the sisters who take little risk and are concerned mostly with ensuring the survival of their families are the ones who survive the wars (Olanna and Vianne). The more autonomous and daring female characters, represented by Isabelle and Kainene, despite showing immense bravery and agency in their actions, do not. Because they transgress certain social expectations of female behaviour and lead active lives engaging in vital, but essentially dangerous, activities, they are at an increased risk of violence and death. That is not to say that Olanna and Vianne are exempt from the gendered violence of war because of their situations. As mothers whose main concern is ensuring the safety of their families, they will also be exposed to risk and danger and be forced to make difficult sacrifices in order to survive. Nevertheless, the possibility of survival is made available to them perhaps precisely because they continued to adhere to the social standard and expected behaviours for women at their time. In *The Nightingale*, the sisters’ father represents the dominant conservative thought in 1940s French society, in which men considered women as “useless in war. Your job is to wait for our return” (TN 27). Although Julien’s view is in accordance with the beliefs held at the time regarding the place of women in society and in war, shaped by his experience of war during WWI, in the 1940s women were crucial to the war effort. Whether as nurses, teachers, drivers, translators, engineers, farmers, factory workers, and even spies (special agents or members of the French Resistance), women’s roles were more than just wives and mothers waiting at home. Isabelle is not concerned with occupations traditionally associated with femininity and meekness, including sewing or proper etiquette. Isabelle is more interested in the current political climate of France and the looming prospect of war. Isabelle is consistently characterised as being pragmatic and realistic, as well as brave, reckless, and impulsive. Full of ideals, she is ultimately still innocent and unprepared for the toll that the war will have on her: during her evacuation, instead of bringing food, valuables or even wine, she takes money, books, and clothes. These items highlight Isabelle’s lack of understanding of how war will change people’s priorities and how certain things which were important, such as money, lose their meaning once war begins, as people will look to trade food

and valuables in order to guarantee their sustenance. Isabelle takes a ride with her father's neighbours, who are also travelling to the countryside. Soon, however, the car journey is interrupted by the thousands of refugees blocking the road, meaning that Isabelle must walk to Carriveau instead: a journey that would have taken perhaps three hours in the car will take possibly days. Alongside the refugees, French soldiers march in shame on the road, a sign that the French have capitulated.

It is during this journey that Isabelle meets Gaetan Dubois – known as Gaët – for the first time. Isabelle follows the smell of food into a clearing in the woods and is surprised by the man, who is both alluring and menacing. His presence evokes an element of danger, as the threat of rape is present and recurrent in the novel, as evidenced by Isabelle's comment that she hopes he is a gentleman (TN 39). Isabelle's naivety in approaching him represents her lack of awareness over the gender-specific threats women face in situations of conflict. Still, as Gaët is characterised as honourable and respectful, Isabelle is able to avoid a much grimmer fate. The two become travelling companions and eventual love interests, and Isabelle discovers he is a communist who was freed from prison and that he is planning to join the Resistance against the Germans. When he calls on Isabelle to join him in the fight, she feels "something so new she couldn't quite grasp it. She knew she was beautiful. Beauty was just another way to discount her, to not see her. But this felt different" (TN 40-41). By being treated as an equal and being called to fight – instead of being discounted for her beauty and femininity – Isabelle feels valued, and this will instigate even more her thirst for resisting and making a difference in the war. Not long after their encounter, Isabelle experiences the horror of her first air raid: "Gaetan threw Isabelle to the ground and covered her body with his. The world became pure sound: the roar of the aeroplane engines, the rat-ta-ta-tat of machine-gun fire, the beat of her heart, people screaming" (TN 45). She sees "mangled bodies everywhere, and fires, and billowing black smoke. People were screaming, crying, dying" (TN 46). This will be Isabelle's first touch with the war and its devastating effect on innocent civilians. Isabelle's close encounter with death and destruction sears in her a deep hatred of the Germans and a desire for revenge and for the liberation of her country.

Unlike Isabelle, who is more readily associated with autonomy, independence, and rebellion, Vianne is associated with submission, compliance, and dependence. The tensions between the sisters will be an underlying thread that connects the novel. Similarly to what happens with Olanna and Kainene in *HYS*, Isabelle and Vianne are more closely characterised throughout the novel in relation to their differences rather than their similarities – however, towards the end of the narrative, the sisters reconnect and become closer, representing perhaps a breaking down

in these distinctions. In *Female Collaborators and Resisters in Vichy France: Individual Memory, Collective Image* (2013), Katherine Thurlow discussed how French women were put into categories of “good mothers or bad modern women” (4), adding that “the roles of women emphasized the moral struggles that encompassed those of France as a whole” (4). Indeed, Isabelle and Vianne are representative of those conflicting roles imposed on women at the time (and the idea that you could be one *or* the other, but not both), and their opposition within the novel also symbolises the conflicts that these opposing images held at the time of the Vichy regime. Despite the fact that society was changing and women were slowly gaining more autonomy, something which would be exacerbated greatly during the war, as most men were away and women were thrust into positions of power and responsibility, the existing ideal still placed enormous value on a woman’s status as a wife and a mother.

Vianne complies with this role from the beginning, relying heavily on her husband to take charge and make decisions as the head of the household. She embodies the role of mother and wife, and revels in her domestic bliss – the reader becomes intimately familiar with the routine she shares with her husband Antoine and her young daughter Sophie. Isabelle, however, has a modern mind and sees 1940s France as a place where women can decide their own futures outside of marriage and family. For her, “a woman can go to war these days” (TN 27), and much like Kainene in *HYS*, she looks for ways to assert her independence and occupy places traditionally associated with the male world. As such, she is also not associated with the idea of motherhood or family. In fact, in addition to having never pursued these options, Isabelle comes to understand that they are out of her reach because of her choice to fight in the war. Her relationship with Gaët is marked by their shared commitment to the cause rather than to a future family and children. When the two arrive in Carriveau, bloodied and filthy, following days on the road and surviving a bombing together, their experience creates a lasting bond between them: he “smelled of sweat and blood and mud and death, but she knew she smelled the same” (TN 56). When she tells him that she loves him, he does not correspond, even though the feeling was mutual. In war, love can make you vulnerable, and forming attachments is dangerous. Later in the narrative, this will be Julien’s directive to Isabelle: that she cut ties with everyone in order to protect herself and her family. Unable to get into Le Jardin because Vianne had locked all the doors and windows, the two sleep in the garden, but when Isabelle wakes up, he is gone. Vianne discovers a sleeping Isabelle in her garden the following morning, and during the first year of the war the relationship between the sisters will become increasingly strained, until they must eventually part ways.

Following the surrender of France, life in Carriveau changed dramatically, as “food became scarce. Laundry soap: unobtainable. Ration cards could not be counted upon. Phone service became unreliable, as did the mail” (TN 65). The diminishing of conditions also adds pressure on the sisters’ relationship and becomes a source of much stress for Vianne, who considers Isabelle to be unreliable, volatile and “impossible to live with” (TN 65). The sisters have completely opposite ways of viewing the current situation of France. Whilst Isabelle looks for ways to resist and fight the Germans, Vianne believes in passive compliance and trusting the Vichy government. For her, it is essential to obey the directive of the government, avoid trouble and, consequently, ensure the survival and the safety of her family. Weeks prior, when war was just a looming shadow that threatened to disturb the bucolic peace of Vianne’s life, she ignored it: “War. It was all anyone could talk about these days, and Vianne didn’t want to hear it. Especially not on this lovely summer day” (TN 9). When war arrived at her doorstep, symbolised by the thousands of hungry, scared, destitute refugees, she still refused to see its significance. She believes that France’s surrender means normal life will resume, whereas Isabelle instinctively knows things will only get worse. While Isabelle is portrayed as an idealist with a distaste for routine, and although “apparently it made no sense to her that she should have to shop for food” (TN 66), Vianne is portrayed as someone who refuses to see reality. Even as situations get gradually worse, she continues to maintain a naïve hope that things will just get better on their own – simply put, at several instances she fails to prepare for the worst possible situation. She did not see the enemy as a threat – to her, they “looked young and clean shaven and eager” (TN 66).

Soon, however, Vianne will feel the consequences of the war, as she struggles to protect herself and her daughter Sophie. While she does survive the war and does prove herself to be resourceful and resilient, her survival is largely dependent on other people: one day, instead of queuing for food, Isabelle buries all of the family’s valuables, such as jewellery, food and paintings, in the cellar. The next day, the Germans arrive and seize the remaining items in the house, but the most valuable ones were hidden. This will be crucial for the family’s survival, as Vianne will have to sell these items throughout the course of the war in order to buy food. Vianne also relies on the help of Captain Beck, the German officer billeting at her house, with food and medicine. Although Beck is a kind man, associating yourself with a German was a dangerous choice during the war. Additionally, Isabelle held a deep hatred for the Germans, and the relationship between the two is hostile. One day, Beck compliments Isabelle’s hair, and her response is to cut it down to her shoulders the following day, as a sign of defiance. Vianne understood, then, that Isabelle posed a threat to her family due to her inability to compromise her

ideals and treat the enemy kindly, even if that meant ensuring the safety of Vianne and Sophie. It is pivotal, then, that the two sisters' trajectories are separated and that they embark on their own journeys during the war. Later, when Beck is killed and another officer, Sturmbannführer Von Richter, takes up residence in her home, Vianne must endure months of torture and pain if she wants to survive. Despite her brave attempts to protect those she loves and later in the narrative to save Jewish children, for the most part Vianne is at the mercy of others and sacrifices much in order to survive.

In the beginning, though, despite her reservations in accepting "kindness from this man who had invaded her home" (TN 95), Vianne eventually strikes a cordial friendship with Captain Beck. This meant having more food and keeping the house warm in the winter, as the Germans were never short in supplies. According to Thurlow, "[d]uring the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, women found themselves in positions which required they did whatever they could in order to provide for their families" (4). Vianne's motivation, then, arose first from a need for survival, but gradually became closer to crossing the line into romantic interest in Beck. This was taboo both because he was a German and because they were both married. At the heart of Vianne's worries is her concern for her husband, Antoine, who becomes a prisoner of war to the Germans. When she discovers that he is imprisoned, her world crumbles. Somehow, she had expected him to return at any moment and restore things to the way they were before. Vianne tells Isabelle she had never been on her own and that she was not as strong as Isabelle, to which Isabelle simply replies: "You will have to be. For Sophie" (TN 110). Being a mother means, here, sacrificing your feelings and desire, and it was "[t]he reason she couldn't eat a bowl of arsenic or throw herself in front of a train" (TN 110). Later in the narrative, Vianne comments on the sacrifices inherent to raising a child during war – that motherhood, at these times, means forsaking all else to ensure the survival of her child. Vianne knew that keeping the peace with Captain Beck was instrumental in her survival, and she also knew that Isabelle was too volatile for diplomacy. When she hears General de Gaulle's speech on the radio that "the flame of French Resistance must not and shall not die" (TN 72), Isabelle finds the validation and encouragement she needed to defy the Nazi regime. One day, she writes V (for Victory) on a poster, something highly illegal and dangerous. She is discovered and taken to a dark room, but instead of the Germans, it is the Resistance who have found her. Isabelle is eager to join and begins distributing some forbidden posters across the town. One important strategy used by Isabelle throughout the course of her work in the Resistance is turning her attractiveness into a tool to outsmart German soldiers. She manages to hide her true motivations by playing the role of a silly, vapid girl. Thurlow argues that, in Vichy France,

“women could use feminine images – whether the idealized mother and housewife or the stereotypical promiscuous woman – to reach their goals” (9). Thurlow continues by saying that

[t]he idea of using beautiful women as spies is interesting, as it appears that beautiful women were at once more threatening and less likely to be suspected... In turn, this meant that sexualized women would be more likely to get important information by playing on this image. At the same time, by realizing that this was occurring, being a beautiful woman also posed a threat. (47)

Indeed, Isabelle successfully uses her attractiveness to advance her work in the Resistance. She flirts with German soldiers openly, to the distaste of other French people, including her father. She dresses to look as young and as pretty as possible, and smiles broadly to gather the favour of the soldiers. What Isabelle does with incredible ease is subvert imposed notions of femininity in order to pass without suspicion. Some months after beginning working for the Resistance, Isabelle secures a travel permit from Captain Beck, lying that their father is ill in Paris. As soon as she arrives, she is taken to a meeting with senior members of the Resistance, including a man called Lévy, an old friend of her father's. In the meeting, Isabelle is given more responsibility, and as such she will need a new identity to be able to perform her duties. Isabelle felt like “she had been accepted! A sense of destiny seemed to fill the room” (TN 169). Isabelle is warned, however, that her rebellious nature has to be stopped – she must be cautious and obey orders: “It is time for you to grow up and do as you are told. Always. Without exception. It is for your safety as much as ours” (TN 171). If she is captured, Isabelle is reminded that she would be imprisoned “as a *woman*. You understand? They have special unpleasanties for us” (TN 171). Isabelle “had thought – briefly – of imprisonment and execution. This was something she had never even considered. Of course she should have” (TN 171). If imprisoned, she is told to wait out two days to give her comrades a chance to escape. When she comments that two days is not so long, Anouk (another female member of the Resistance) remarks on Isabelle's youth and naivety. In fact, when Isabelle is actually caught a few years later, she will remember this particular interaction and understand, then, the horrible reality of what had awaited her.

While in Paris, Isabelle and Julien's relationship is strained and distanced. Isabelle resents him for “betraying” France and working for the government, whereas Julien resents her for reopening his bookshop and selling books to German soldiers, all the while flirting with them. The bookshop was once a house of poets, writers, and academics – now, it is full of Germans. Julien denounces Isabelle's decision to serve Germans, telling her, “Thank God your Maman did not live to see who you have become”, to which she replies, “Or you, Papa” (TN 173). The

bookshop is, of course, merely a front so Isabelle can meet contacts in the Resistance, but Isabelle still had to endure the judgement of those who did not know her true motivations. Thurlow further states that “women played upon multiple images of women at once to reach their desired ends - the image of the nourishing female, the unintelligent girl, and the ignorant woman who would have no idea that the Resistance movements would even be going on” (Thurlow 56). Indeed, women manipulated these conceptions to their benefit, and it gave them an advantage against their enemies:

While women were deemed by society to need protecting, it rarely dawned upon the officials of the regime that they may need protecting against these women. By recognizing this advantage over the patriarchal system which was blinded by their ideas of women, female resisters had many encounters in which they used assumptions about their beauty and femininity to scrape by in difficult areas. (67)

One day, Isabelle rescues a downed RAF pilot, Lieutenant Torrance MacLeish, off the streets of Paris. At great personal risk, she helps him and hides him in her own home. A few days pass, and Isabelle realises she must take the pilot to the Resistance headquarters, to discover a way to help him. She is received with some animosity, as other members understand that it was an incredibly risky move, that could have exposed them all. Lévy, however, sees the growing number of stranded pilots as a source of great concern, and plans begin to be prepared to transport the pilots across the Pyrenees into Spain. Isabelle volunteers to be the one to make the crossing, arguing that “a woman could move easily across the checkpoints. Especially a young woman. No one would suspect a pretty girl” (TN 193). In this sentence, it is possible to confirm that Isabelle is aware of the power in weaponizing her femininity against the Germans. The other members urge Isabelle to consider the danger and the costs involved in taking charge of this operation, but she is determined. It is during this meeting that Gaët and Isabelle finally meet again – “He looked at her as if they were the only two in the room. In an instant, it was all undone. The feelings she’d discounted, tried to bury, ignore, came flooding back. One look at him and she could barely breathe” (TN 193). Following the meeting, Gaët follows her and the two talk about the night he disappeared. Here, the reader discovers that it had been Gaët, from the beginning, who informed the Resistance about Isabelle, and that he had been watching over her in the shadows. When Isabelle asks him why he had to leave, he “touched her face with a gentleness that made her want to cry; it felt like a good-bye, that touch, and she knew good-bye” (TN 196). Their relationship is marked by the sad knowledge that what awaited them was not a happy ending – in that moment,

he simply says, “Be careful, Iz” (TN 196), and it would be months before they see each other again.

At home, Isabelle is confronted by her father. Julien finds the evidence that Isabelle had been hiding the pilot in the house, and he confesses to her that he knew exactly what she was doing. Just as Isabelle had used the cover of a silly girl to evade her father’s suspicion, her father had used the cover of a traitor to be able to work at the Nazi Command and have access to identification papers to procure the false identities needed for the Resistance. When he received Isabelle’s photograph and found the evidence of the pilot’s presence in the house, he made the connection that Isabelle was working for the Resistance, just as he was. Julien was the main forger for the Resistance, and the one responsible for giving Isabelle a new identity. Julien hands Isabelle her new identification papers – Juliette Gervaise – and offers her a bleak warning:

You know that your life changes right now. You will have to live underground – not here with me, not with anyone. You will not be able to spend more than a few nights in any one place. You will trust absolutely no one. And you will not be Isabelle Rossignol at all anymore. You will be Juliette Gervaise. The Nazis and the collaborators will always be searching for you, and if they find you... (TN 198)

Isabelle’s new identity is symbolic, as it represents the culmination of her desire to join the fight and the opportunity to live her life on her own terms. Instead of always disappointing her father and sister, and being labelled a rebel and an immature girl, now she could feel confident in her own strength and commitment. Seeing her father, the man she had resented for so long and who she saw as a failure, both as a parent and a man, joining in the same fight, made her feel “a connection that had never existed before” (TN 198). Their past and their individual failings no longer mattered – all that was important now was making sure that Isabelle was successful in her endeavour. Julien orients Isabelle to search for Madame Babineau, an old friend of Isabelle’s mother who might assist her during the crossing. Shortly after this episode, Isabelle sees an official poster saying that men found helping airmen will be shot on the spot, and women will be taken to concentration camps. She wondered, then, “how was it that the Germans hadn’t noticed by now – October 1941 – that France had become a country of women?” (TN 200). Throughout the course of her trajectory in the Resistance, Isabelle would also take on two other identities: her codename, the Nightingale, and her identification at the concentration camp, F-5491. These different identities represent meaningful steps in Isabelle’s journey, and in each of them she had learned something important about herself and about others.

As Isabelle prepares for her first crossing, she not only subverts the Germans' notions of femininity, but also that of the Allied forces. Isabelle's first crossing is extremely brutal, even with the help of Eduardo, her guide, and Madame Babineau's expertise. One way that Isabelle finds to keep morale up is to tell the pilots that, "if a girl can do it, a strapping pilot like you will have no problem at all" (TN 216). The success of the first crossing was a confirmation, for Isabelle, that she had both the spirit and the skill to succeed: "The pride of what she'd accomplished in the Pyrenees had changed her, matured her. For the first time in her life, she knew exactly what she wanted to do" (TN 219). She also realises that "with all the risks they were taking, love was probably the most dangerous choice of all" (TN 221), and that the best way of protecting those she loved was to stay away. In her subsequent crossings, Isabelle grows more confident of her abilities, even if the men were not always accepting of receiving orders from a girl. As the fame around the Nightingale grew and German and Spanish authorities began to increase patrols and surveillance, each new crossing was more dangerous than the last. As Juliette Gervaise and as the Nightingale, Isabelle perhaps saw herself as invincible. Later in the novel, when Julien asks her if someone else can take over the crossings, she questioned if people said those things to men, claiming that "[w]omen were integral to the Resistance" (TM 348). Although Isabelle identified correctly the double standards that were applied to the men and the women of the Resistance, she failed to see that her father's comment came from a place of concern as a parent, not as a fellow member of the Resistance. He feared for her as he knew the chances of being caught and tortured were high, as it is indeed what happens. After she is caught, tortured, and sent to the concentration camp, Isabelle received a new identity (that she had not chosen herself): the tattoo which spelled out F-5491. There, she reconnects with other political prisoners, like Madame Babineau and Anouk. Despite Isabelle's comment years before that the Germans had not realised France had become a country of women, she still benefitted from their policies to not execute female prisoners. That did not mean, however, that she did not suffer at their hands. Living under terrible conditions, Isabelle turns outwards for the first time, looking for comfort and intimacy in others, rather than simply relying on herself. Through humility, love, and tenderness towards the other prisoners, she finds a source of strength: "In the camp, she fought back the only way she knew how – by caring for her fellow prisoners and helping them to stay strong" (TN 401).

Parallel to Isabelle's journey with the Resistance, Vianne is also facing her own struggles. Isabelle's absence initially brings great relief to Vianne and considerable peace to the household. Beck starts eating supper in the house, bringing extra food, and overall being pleasant towards

Vianne and Sophie. Life settles into a routine, but dullness allows intrusive thoughts to dominate Vianne's mind. Whilst Vianne at first fulfils the societal expectation of being a mother and raising a family, soon she is placed at a more dangerous territory between being a *collaboratrice* or a *résistante*. Beck, symbolically, replaces the role of Antoine as the provider for the family; indeed, performing the role of the husband is what attracts Vianne to him. The relationship between the two is never consummated, but against their better wishes (and the fact that they are both married) they grow closer. Despite his kindness and the fact that he does not treat Vianne cruelly or viciously, he begins to test Vianne in numerous and insidious ways – in the first stage, he asks her for a list of “undesirables”, such as communists, Jews, freemasons, and others. Hesitantly, she gives him the list, but leaves out the name of her best friend, Rachel de Champlain, who had been her friend for years, had two small children, Sarah and Ari, who were friends with Sophie, and was also a fellow teacher at the local school. Beck, who knows exactly whose name is missing from the list, asks her to complete the list, which she complies. Sophie, as rebellious as her aunt Isabelle, is horrified that her mother collaborated: “Tante Isabelle says it's better to be bold than meek. She says if you jump off a cliff at least you'll fly before you fall” (TN 120). Sophie's rebellious streak, mirroring her aunt Isabelle's autonomy and rebellion, becomes a minor source of conflict between mother and daughter. When Vianne confesses to Rachel what she had done, Rachel initially feels angry and betrayed. However, she soon forgives Vianne, claiming that the entire town knew exactly that she was Jewish, and he had not actually needed her to give him the information – it was merely a test to ensure her compliance to his wishes.

One day, Gestapo officers arrive at the school and dismiss the undesirable teachers, including a Mr. Paul Paretsky, accused of distributing illegal newspapers in town. When Vianne interferes and asks the officer why they are arresting her colleague, she is told by the Gestapo officer that she should not have interfered and that she was terminated from her position. This was Vianne's first sign of rebellion against the regime, which came with its own set of troubles, including increased financial difficulty and drawing the wrong kind of attention to herself. Vianne survives the following years by selling off the family's valuables and relying on the help of Captain Beck. When the Jewish population of Carriveau begins facing a series of prohibitions, including being dismissed from their jobs and shops, and this time Vianne says nothing. Sophie is furious, saying that “Tante Isabelle would do something. You're just afraid!” (TN 163). Indeed, Vianne's fear instigates her to turn a blind eye to the injustices that were happening. Carriveau became an “island of despair” (TN 221). Sophie and Vianne survive basically at the discretion of Captain Beck. Apart from burning everything made of wood and selling their valuables, including

the heirloom pearls which belonged to her grandmother, they were still struggling. Captain Beck's absences were hard on them – there was less food and no wood in the house. Vianne skipped meals so Sophie could eat – that was, after all, “motherhood in war” (TN 226). Although she felt bad for depending on a Nazi, she wondered if she was “supposed to let Sophie starve to prove her loyalty to France?” (TN 222), highlighting the struggle that many women faced during the war in order to survive. At one point, after being away for three weeks, Beck returns to find Vianne collapsed outside her home, in the snow. He takes her inside with the help of Rachel and Sophie, and brings her “a cup of steaming café au lait and a wedge of blue cheese and a piece of ham and a chunk of bread” (TN 227). This shows that poverty and scarcity were limited to the French and the non-collaborators, whereas the Nazi soldiers enjoyed a high standard of living and many comforts.

As life in Cariveau continues to get harder, Jews face even more restrictions. In addition to wearing the yellow star of David, they are also forced to adhere to strict curfews and banned from certain parts of the village during the day. As a result, they struggled to gain access to what little food was available at the shops. Sophie wants to show solidarity with her best friend, Sarah, and wear a star too, but with a heavy heart Vianne tells her “this is one thing you and your best friend can't do together” (TN 234). Despite her own difficulties, Vianne equally shares her food with Rachel and her children. The treatment of the Jews during the Nazi occupation of France is represented in the microcosm of Vianne and Rachel's lives. Vianne is a witness to the worsening of conditions and violence, and although not as outspoken and radical as Isabelle, she does take steps to help her friend. Nitsa Dori, in “The Rescue of French Jews during the Second World War as Reflected in Two Novels: *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah and *The Velvet Hours* by Alyson Richman” (2018), citing the work of Mordecai Paldiel (1998), focuses on the different ways French Jews were rescued during WWII: “a hiding place, impersonating a non-Jew, escape, and helping children” (Dori 2). Dori argues how Vianne accomplished all of those things in the novel: first, she tries to help Rachel escape with her children, after Captain Beck's warning that foreign Jews were soon going to be deported. However, they are discovered by guards and Sarah is shot multiple times in the chest. As Rachel and Vianne cradle Sarah's dying, fragile body, Vianne urges Rachel to hide in the barn. Despite Rachel's devastation, she must go and hide with Ari, or they will face the same fate as Sarah. When Rachel says she cannot leave her daughter alone, Vianne reassures her that their deceased mothers would be there with her to keep Sarah company. After making sure Ari and Rachel are well hidden, Vianne gives Sarah a proper burial:

Vianne shut the door on them and replaced the car and then went to the lilac bush her mother had planted thirty years ago. It had spread tall and wide along the wall. Beneath it, almost lost amid the summer greenery, were three small white crosses. Two for the miscarriages she'd suffered and one for the son who'd lived less than a week. Rachel had stood there beside her as each of her boys was buried. Now Vianne was here to bury her best friend's daughter. Her daughter's best friend. What kind of benevolent God would allow such a thing? (TN 260-261)

It is extremely relevant here that Sarah will be buried with Vianne's deceased children, and that the reader discovers that Rachel had been with Vianne at the burial of their children. It links the two women in a powerful, meaningful bond. Rachel is, perhaps more than Isabelle, Vianne's chosen sister in life, and this tomb represents their shared grief and connection. Additionally, the fact that Vianne's stillbirths were boys is also relevant. After the war is finished, Vianne discovers she is pregnant with a boy, and having a son may symbolise, finally, the beginning of a healing process, not just of the sons she lost, but the family that was taken from her. The next morning – the day that Captain Beck had warned about the deportations – no one came to Le Jardin, and Vianne made the mistake of thinking that perhaps they were now safe. Rachel and Ari left the barn, and a few hours later she was stopped by the Gestapo and deported. In her last words to her friend, Vianne promised to take care of Ari. In perhaps one of his few redeeming moments, Captain Beck warns Vianne that soon French Jews would also be deported, and he gives false papers to Vianne, identifying Ari as her adoptive son Daniel. Here, by erasing his Jewish identity, she is able to secure his safety, as impersonating a non-Jew was one of the most common strategies to evade capture during Nazi occupation. Beck's help is also instrumental in ensuring that they would not be found out. However, their relationship soon turns sour when an enemy pilot crashes near Carriveau and goes missing, aided by Isabelle and other members of the Resistance, who unbeknownst to Vianne were in the area. As Beck takes his soldiers and searches the woods for the man, Vianne returns to the barn hoping to find Rachel. Instead, she finds Isabelle and a dead airman in the cellar. Furious, Vianne tells her: "How could you bring this danger into my house?... You'll get us all killed. Be gone by tomorrow morning, and don't come back" (TN 287). Vianne noted that Isabelle "had the nerve to look wounded" (TN 287), to which she continued:

Don't. I'm done making excuses for you. I was mean to you as a girl, Maman died, Papa is a drunk, Madame Dumas treated you badly. All of it is the truth, and I have longed to be a better sister to you, but that stops here. You are as thoughtless and reckless as always, only now you will get

people killed. I can't let you endanger Sophie. Do not come back, you are not welcome here. If you return, I will turn you in myself. (TN 287)

Beck suspects Vianne might be involved in the deception, as he knew she had sheltered Rachel and Ari. Beck then decides to search the barn, and Vianne follows him. Despite her anger at her sister, before he can open the trap door, she hits him with a shovel, at the same time Isabelle shoots from inside the cellar – both killing him instantly. However, Beck's gun fires and Isabelle is also shot. Despite their argument, Vianne dresses Isabelle's wound and is protective of her, accompanying her outside of occupied territory alongside Gaetan before eventually returning to Carriveau. When Isabelle wakes up four days after the incident, she is in a safe house with Gaët. She is in love with him, and desperate to consummate their love, but there is much fear in it: "All she really knew was that in this terrible, frightening world, she had stumbled into something unexpected" (TN 313). Some days later, as she is still recovering, Isabelle tells him that "[i]f times were different, I'd make you chase me. I would have made you jump through hoops to get me naked. But we don't have time, do we?" (TN 317). Gaët, who had been so resistant, finally gives in, and the two share an entire week of bliss, with "long conversations by candlelight, and holding hands, and stroking skin; nights of awaking into an aching desire and making love and falling into sleep again" (TN 319). Still, Isabelle knows in her heart that their happiness is fleeting and unconventional:

This had been the truth between them from the beginning; they had no time. They couldn't court and fall in love and get married and have babies. They might not even have tomorrow. She hated that her first time would be bathed in sorrow, steeped in a sense of having already lost what they'd just found, but that was the world now. One thing she knew for sure: She wanted him to be the first man in her bed. She wanted to remember him for as long as forever was. (TN 317)

In Carriveau, Vianne becomes a suspect for Beck's disappearance and is questioned by the SS. However, she employs the same technique as Isabelle has throughout the novel: by downplaying her own intelligence, and playing the role of a submissive housewife and mother, she is able to get away with what she had done. The new officer billeting at her house, Sturmbannführer Von Richter, represents the real horror that Vianne had been able to escape thus far – he is cruel, dangerous, and evil. Vianne had much to lose now: if Von Richter suspected she was hiding Jewish children all of their lives would be at stake. Warning Sophie to stay out of his way, Vianne understands they can no longer rely on a Nazi's kindness as they had done with

Beck. Although Beck is actively involved in a series of horrific events throughout the novel, Vianne still considers him a good man because of the compassion and mercy he shows them. Von Richter, however, is entirely different:

The Nazi had billeted here for several days already, and each of those mornings had smelled of rich, bitter roasted coffee – and Von Richter made sure she smelled it too, and wanted it. But she couldn't have so much as a sip, he made sure of that, too... He was a man who had stumbled into a little bit of power and seized it with both hands. (TN 314)

Vianne must endure Von Richter's reign of terror to protect not just Ari and Sophie, but also her secret work with Mother Superior, who ran the local orphanage. Together, they were able to rescue and hide Jewish children and pass them off as Catholic orphans. Taking this in consideration, even though Isabelle is more closely associated with the image of the *résistante*, Vianne is far from being a *collaboratrice* or just a submissive housewife. Vianne goes to Henri Navarre, Isabelle's Resistance contact, and asks him for identification papers. He helps her but informs her that she must create the falsifications herself, as he is too busy. Navarre tells her she reminds him of her sister, and that "your sister would be proud of you" (TN 337). At this point in the novel, Vianne and Isabelle begin to be portrayed more in relation to their similarities and strength than their differences. Vianne keeps a detailed record containing the children's real names, their new Christian names, and where they were hidden, in order to reunite them with their families after the war. Vianne's journey highlights that not all the women who defied the regime were necessarily part of the organised Resistance. There were other ways in which women could exert choice over their own actions and choose to fight injustice. According to Thurlow,

[o]utside of the organized Resistance networks, women made small gestures of Resistance to make their voices heard. While adhering to the image of the self-sacrificing woman, these women too risked everything to help the Resistance cause. They sheltered individuals who were hiding and in many instances saved their lives. (70)

Whilst Vianne begins the narrative believing "we have to keep our heads down until our men come home" (TN 75), her traumatic experience transforms her. In the eight months since she started helping Jewish children, Vianne had hidden thirteen children. In that time, Mother-Superior connected with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and more desperate women started appearing on Vianne's doorstep: she "never turned anyone away, but she was

always terrified” (TN 352). After Henri Navarre is discovered and arrested, Vianne is taken in for questioning by Von Richter. As he threatens her and the children, Vianne desperately begs him not to hurt them. At that moment, she is able to see that his “breathing accelerated. And there it was, as plain as the blue in his eyes: arousal... She had revealed her weakness, and he had seen it. He knew how to hurt her now” (TN 354). This was a man who revelled in hurting and subjugating women he found vulnerable to him – Vianne, in order to protect her children, gives in to his torture. By discovering that Ari (Daniel) is not her son and casting doubt over his ethnicity (by suggesting he might be a Jew), he finally acquires the leverage he needed: if he can have her, he will let Ari (Daniel) stay. Von Richter rapes her brutally and demands that she look at him, and Vianne “gritted her teeth as he yanked down his pants and shoved her legs farther apart and violated both her body and her soul. She did not make a single sound. Nor did she look away” (TN 370). The rapes continue over the course of the next months. In order to save her family, Vianne sacrifices her body and her soul. She “had learned about pain and shame and degradation. She knew about survival, too” (TN 384). Asked by Sophie how she can endure going to him, Vianne simply replies: “That’s my war” (TN 386). According to Dori,

When France utterly changes, and everything is full of the terror of war, the two sisters’ paths separate. From now onwards, each will need to fight her own war of survival. In her own way, and in light of the events she experiences, quiet Vianne is revealed as strong and courageous. And in her own way, she participates in the civilian struggle and is involved with rescuing children whose parents were deported, murdered, or didn’t survive. (5)

Throughout the novel, the sisters take different paths and have polarly opposite views, and their strained relationship is a central element to the narrative. Just like Kainene and Olanna, Isabelle and Vianne also find reconciliation and forgiveness towards the end of the narrative. Vianne discovers that she is pregnant: for years she had hoped for another child, and now she cursed God. The end of the war is near, and the German forces begin to withdraw from France. As Von Richter prepares to leave Carriveau, he tells Vianne “I’ll forget you. I wonder if you can say the same” (TN 390), his last words to her being the final proof of his monstrosity. Even though Vianne wished she could say what was in her heart, she just wanted him gone and the children safe, and she would not have jeopardised that with an explosion of words. Despite the difficulties suffered, Vianne ensures her survival and the survival of her children, at a great personal cost. In fact, both sisters suffer greatly. Isabelle experiences the rude awakening of the real cost of her bravery – before, the idea of getting caught was merely a distant reminder: “This was the risk

everyone had warned her about, the terrible truth of what she'd been doing. How had it seemed like an adventure?" (TN 361). When wondering if two days had already passed, she could not even keep track of time - she was naked, battered, and bruised, tied to a chair inside a refrigerator. In this moment, her immediate thoughts were with her sister: "Vianne, she thought. Only that. The name. Part prayer, part regret, part good-bye" (TN 363). Isabelle had reached her breaking point: "She started to cry and her tears froze, turning to icicles on her cheeks" (TN 363). Their father goes to Carriveau, to meet Vianne and tell her of Isabelle's imprisonment. Despite not being a fatherly figure throughout the sisters' lives, in this moment he will make a final sacrifice to spare Isabelle's life. When Vianne asks him what he will do, instinctively feeling he came there to say goodbye, he simply replies: "What would you do to save Sophie?" (TN 367), and she replies "Anything" (TN 367). In this sentence, they share the understanding that only parents can have: that they would gladly lay down their own lives to save their children. Julien's sacrifice will be to turn himself in and take responsibility for being the Nightingale, for which he will be shot and hanged. Vianne's sacrifice comes in a different form: she endured the rapes and abuses by Von Richter to protect both Sophie and Ari (Daniel).

At the Girot prison, Julien arrives to confess to the crime, and Isabelle tries to intervene by confessing that she is the Nightingale. The guards do not believe that a girl could be the "infamous Nightingale" (TN 373), and that is what ultimately spares her from being shot and killed at that moment. Her father's confession made more sense: first, he was a man; second, they shared the same last name, Rossignol - which translated from French to English means Nightingale - and as her father, Julien can simply claim that Isabelle was following his orders, as it was expected that daughters should obey their fathers. With his confession, he exempts Isabelle from any responsibility, and she is not executed, but transferred to a prison camp. At that moment, Isabelle understands that "[h]e was trying to make it up to her, asking for forgiveness and seeking redemption all at once, sacrificing himself for her" (TN 373) and wonders "how often had she imagined a new beginning for her and Papa, for all of them? They would come together after the war, Isabelle and Vianne and Papa, learn to laugh and talk and be a family again" (TN 374). Their family would never be reunited in life again. Julien is executed by firing squad, and his body is hanged as an example. Although Vianne goes in search for her sister, Isabelle is already at Ravensbrück camp. There, she sees "saw hundreds - thousands - of women who looked like ghosts moving together through a surreal landscape of gray, their bodies emaciated, their eyes sunken and dead looking in gray faces, their hair shorn" (TN 381). As part of the political prisoners, she is not gassed immediately upon arrival, unlike the Jewish women. At the camp,

Isabelle's health deteriorates irreparably, but she finds ways to remain strong by caring for her fellow prisoners. Despite the violence suffered and the lack of control over her circumstances at the end, throughout the novel Isabelle was shown to be a remarkable woman with the power to wield her own destiny. War removes the possibility of certainty, but even at the toughest of times, she exercised the incredible strength to love and care for others.

Following the end of the war, Vianne resumes her search for her sister. Sometime later, Antoine returns home. Their reunion, however, is not what either of them expected. After nearly six years, they were foreigners to each other, on top of all the horrors they had experienced. Vianne remarks that "the man at her dinner table was a stranger" (TN 393). Vianne travels to Paris in search for Isabelle and observes that "Parisians were like moles, coming out into the sunshine after years in the dark" (TN 406). Although the war is then officially over, many deprivations remained: lack of food, long lines, poverty. She goes to her father's apartment and discovers it is empty, and has been since the day he visited her. At the Red Cross centre, Vianne joins the hundreds of people searching for any information regarding their missing loved ones. There, she discovers that Rachel died within a month of being sent to the concentration camp, and she delivers the list with the names of the nineteen Jewish children she had saved over the course of the war – the man at the counter looked at her in wonder, "as if she were a heroine instead of a scared survivor" (TN 408). Vianne cannot see herself as brave and heroic, even though she had saved innocent children who would have otherwise died with their parents. She cannot find a record of Isabelle anywhere, as Isabelle was indeed arrested under the name of Juliette Gervaise. Months later, after her camp is liberated by American troops, Isabelle finally arrives at Carriveau to be reunited with her sister. Isabelle is not the same – in her own words, she is "past tense" (TN 420), broken and frail. Upon seeing her, Vianne "kissed Isabelle's cracked, swollen, dry lips" (TN 421), marking the reconciliation between the two sisters. They read Papa's letter together – the knowledge of his love and his own misgivings had come too late for them to reunite in life: "All her life she'd waited for those words – his love – and now all she felt was loss" (TN 426). At Carriveau, Gaetan arrives to visit Isabelle, who is dying. Isabelle is self-conscious of her image, since she saw herself as "a bald, eyebrowless skeleton with some of her teeth gone and most of her fingernails missing" (TN 427). Isabelle, who throughout the war used her beauty as a weapon against the Germans, now felt incomplete by her frailty and perceived "ugliness". Nevertheless, Gaët tells her that she was as beautiful as he remembered, and "she actually laughed, and then she cried" (TN 427). Nearly six years after they met for the first time, he finally confesses his love to her:

Love. It was the beginning and end of everything, the foundation and the ceiling and the air in between. It didn't matter that she was broken and ugly and sick. He loved her and she loved him... She looked past Gaetan to her sister, the other half of her. She remembered Maman telling them that someday they would be best friends, that time would stitch their lives together. Vianne nodded, crying now too, her hand on her extended belly. (TN 428)

Some months after Isabelle's death, two men from OSE – the French Jewish humanitarian organisation which helped reunite Jewish refugee children to their families – Nathaniel Lerner and Phillippe Horowitz, arrive to take Ari (Daniel) to Boston, to be reunited with his mother's first cousin. Although Ari does not remember Rachel or Sarah, and has grown to believe Vianne is his mother and Sophie is his sister, the men defend that "it is time for Ari to return to his family. To his people" (TN 414). This departure is incredibly painful for all involved – the men from OSE, as kind as they were to Vianne, were also firm in resisting her pleas to allow Ari to stay: "I am here because of the heartbreak of my people... An entire generation is gone. We need to band together now, those few of us who are left, we need to rebuild. One boy with no memory of who he was may seem a small thing to lose, but to us, he is the future" (TN 415). Despite her heartbreak, Vianne understands the collective and unspeakable trauma suffered by the Jewish people, and knows that her personal grief cannot stand in the way of their efforts to regroup and heal. Vianne sends Ari away, and gives him a picture of a young Vianne and Rachel, some twelve years before the war – the same picture that, fifty years later, a middle-aged Ari shows her at the celebration of the 50 years of the end of the war, in Paris. Throughout the novel, Vianne was shown to be incredibly resilient and strong, continually choosing to fight injustices and to fight for those she loved. Although she could not control the events of the war or the cruelty and violence of the Nazis, ultimately she was able to wield some degree of agency over her destiny and to persevere even at the toughest of times.

For Vianne, the end of the war brought the realisation that she could never reunite with her lost family members in life. Just as Ari must be reconnected to his family in order to grieve and heal, Vianne also finds in family the strength to carry on: her newborn son Julien, named after her father, will bring Antoine, Vianne and Sophie together once again. By moving to the United States, the family is also given the opportunity of a new beginning. However, leaving the war completely behind was not possible to anyone who had suffered and lost so much – the trauma left its deep scars in an entire generation of people. Fifty years later, an older Vianne is one of the few keepers of the memories of the war. By sharing her own story and her sister's story, she

honours not only her memories and those of Isabelle, but also Julien, Rachel, Sarah, Antoine, and Sophie. By bringing her son Julien along, she introduces him to a meaningful part of his history he had no access to before that point. Vianne also reconnects to Gaetan and to Ari, other living testaments to their shared past. Although the novel ends before Vianne's death (and we do not know when exactly that will happen), the indication is that she is close to death, and feels finally at peace. The final scene symbolises the final reunion of Vianne's loved ones and a cathartic and powerful moment of acceptance.

Conclusion

One year ago, when I embarked on my own journey in researching women's stories and perspectives in works of war fiction, I had expected that the road ahead would be straightforward and linear; that I would be able to move at a steady pace and simply connect the relevant dots, finding in the stories of Ana, Liesel, Olanna, Kainene, Vianne and Isabelle a common thread which could tie together their traumatic experiences and provide a cohesive narrative on these women's experiences in war. Instead, I found myself becoming immersed in their private lives, struggles and losses, finding in each of them something remarkable, unique, and special. Despite all the similarities that exist in these protagonists' personal narratives, it would have been misguided to try to generalise their stories into one universal female experience. With this in mind, I have sought to consider each of the protagonist's own journeys during the wars and their quest to control their lives and assert their autonomy even in the toughest of situations. Nevertheless, during the course of my research, it was saddening and disheartening to realise that a recurrent theme does exist between these narratives, and also amongst countless other tragic stories which focus on the female perspective of war: that a woman's experience of war is almost inevitably linked with an increased risk of vulnerability and the pervasive threat of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation – in addition to the discussions around motherhood, marriage, gender roles, femininity, agency and freedom. The novels here analysed also present other recurrent themes present in war literature, such as fear, loss, death, destruction, poverty, and struggle for survival.

Astonishingly, many stories concerning women's experience of war remained hidden and silenced for centuries, as the war literature genre has been historically focused on men's perspectives of war and the experience of the male soldier. Women's stories have been disproportionately absent from the genre, despite women also suffering from the immediate aftermath and long-lasting consequences of war. Contemporary works of war fiction have, then, brought women's stories to the centre of the narrative, with many similar stories emerging in growing numbers. This portrayal of the female experience of war is, in a way, a rescuing of real stories that could not have been told in the past, and perhaps also a tribute to the struggles and sacrifices faced by women across different times, countries, cultures and religions – considering not only their personal struggles and traumas, but also the ones shared collectively in their communities. Throughout the course of this thesis, then, I have sought to understand the

individual journeys of the female protagonists in *Girl at War*, *The Book Thief*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Nightingale*, not only in relation to their hardships and traumas, but also to their power of resilience and the ability to persevere. As women suffer and become victims of war, their individual stories, interests, desires, and relationships, including their goals, hopes and dreams, are an integral part to understanding their experience. My goal has been not to simply characterise them as victims of violence and trauma, but rather to understand them as complex human beings who, despite overwhelming odds and circumstances, find ways to bring meaning and purpose into their lives.

In Chapter 1, I discussed Ana Jurić and Liesel Meminger's coming-of-age journeys in *Girl at War* and *The Book Thief*, focusing on the perspectives of young girls who must grow up during war. Because the protagonists suffered devastating losses at such young ages and had to endure the tough reality of war – including the constant threat of air raids and destruction, the increase of poverty and deaths of friends and family – their traumatic experiences had an overwhelming impact on the establishment of their identities and their personal development. As the survivors of the deaths of their families, they are tasked with remembering the dead and keeping their memories alive. For these girls, reaching maturation symbolised overcoming their trauma and creating a personal narrative which allowed them to organise their traumatic experience, identifying important people and places which were meaningful to them, and establishing their own identities as well. In both novels, literature and storytelling are used as important influences which empower Liesel and Ana and provide them with the tools to become confident and autonomous. With these tools, they are able to construct their own personal narratives and achieve cathartic healing, which symbolises their coming-of-age and acceptance of their traumatic losses in war. In Ana's case, she is able to reach maturation by reconnecting with her experience of the war, the memory of her deceased parents and the important sites of memory which she had left behind in Croatia, including Zagreb, the Zid Boli, the site of her parents' murder, the Safe House, and the house in Tiska. She also reconnects with Luka, her best friend and her only lasting connection to the war. Ana also successfully incorporates her Croatian and American identities, finding a positive coexistence between the different cultures and influences, understanding how she could not claim allegiance to one or the other, but rather combine them to create her own identity. As an adult, Ana is a literature student, and it is only through books that she allows herself to think of her experience during the war – as a child, her father had read to her every night, which cemented her love for literature and the special place it had in her upbringing and learning. In her trip through Croatia, Ana takes a series of photographs which create a visual story

that enables her to remember the experience and bring new meaning to the past. At the end, when she finds her family's handprints engraved in the concrete, she is symbolically reunited with her family and is able to feel at peace with her story, essentially concluding her journey of maturation.

For Liesel, coming-of-age is achievable by conquering books and empowering herself as the author of her own life, and also by gaining confidence and believing in her self-worth. At the beginning of the novel, Liesel is barely able to read or write. She undergoes an important journey of self-empowerment, which will be made possible through her access to education. In this journey, she has three important mentors: Papa, who taught her how to read in the basement and read books to her, after her night terrors; Max, who wrote several stories for Liesel and fostered a deep and meaningful friendship with the girl, the two having been united by their shared trauma and feelings as outsiders; and Ilse Hermann, who provided Liesel with the means to access knowledge, something she would never have been able to do without Ilse's money and privilege. Towards the end, she has successfully mastered her craft and has been able to organise her experience into a personal narrative, by writing her own book. Liesel is physically and symbolically saved by the act of writing – she had been in the basement revising her book when the Allied forces bombed Himmel Street, and was the only survivor. In addition to this, the book has an important healing effect for Liesel and is symbolic of her reaching adulthood and autonomy.

In Chapter 2, I focused on the perspectives of adult women in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Nightingale* to understand their experience of war and explore the relationship of sisters Olanna and Kainene and Vianne and Isabelle. One recurring theme of both novels is the gendered threat that women face during war: how women are more at risk of suffering sexual violence during war, and how rape has been used throughout history as a weapon of war and a means to silence and shame the enemy. Girls, as well as adult women, are under threat of rape, objectification, and exploitation. A woman's freedom to choose her own path is largely determined by her class and education. At the beginning of the narratives, it is also clear that the protagonists lived comfortably before the war and had access to schooling as well as sufficient means to make a living. Their access to education enables them to make certain choices regarding meaningful employment: becoming a teacher (Olanna and Vianne), a businesswoman (Kainene), and fighting in the Resistance (Isabelle). It also allows them the possibility and the privilege of *choosing* motherhood and marriage, rather than being forced into them, something not available to the thousands of young, poor, vulnerable girls around the world. The novels tackle not only gender injustice, but also a host of other injustices, including those of class, religion, ethnicity, and

racism. Throughout the chapter, I explored the sisters' opposing personalities and how they related to different roles women held in society. Olanna and Vianne, for instance, occupy the roles of mother and wife, and this directly affects them during the war – because of their position of responsibility and duty of care to their children, they are tasked with ensuring the survival of their children and are characterised as the more conservative and cautious of the sisters. Kainene and Isabelle, on the other hand, are the more transgressive and assertive of the sisters, who are able to occupy traditionally male environments and excel at them, disregarding concerns conventionally associated with the feminine, such as marriage and children. Their trajectories, despite being freer and more autonomous, also incur a degree of danger and risk. In fact, Kainene and Isabelle never survive the wars, whereas their sisters do – but none will escape the war unscathed and without her share of trauma and suffering. Additionally, in both novels, the sisters' strained relationship is a recurrent source of pain, and the reunion of the sisters towards the end of the narratives symbolises the ending of an important cycle of forgiveness and unity. In order to heal from the traumas suffered in war and find acceptance, the sisters must make amends and heal their broken bonds.

In conclusion, then, what the protagonists of *The Book Thief*, *Girl at War*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and *The Nightingale* have in common, despite their different journeys, ages, and conditions, is that, although they experience traumas and lose so much during war, their personal stories outline their instinct for survival and their search for healing, for acceptance, for control over their circumstances, and for protecting those they love. In essence, although these are works of war fiction, they are less about war itself and more about the human condition: cruelty, love, violence, kindness, family, forgiveness, loss, and belonging. By learning of the events of the wars by witnessing the protagonists' personal lives, their relationships, and struggles, we can then accompany the female protagonists in their quests to control their own destinies. What Ana, Liesel, Olanna, Kainene, Isabelle and Vianne's stories show is that all can be affected by the effects of war: young girls, who must grow up in increasingly dangerous and uncertain situations; mothers who stay at home, sacrificing much to ensure the survival of the family; and also those who dare to cross into enemy lines and live bold, dangerous lives. More importantly than bombs, guns or battlefields, the narratives focus on the experience of the civilian women who fight on and persevere in order to survive, fight injustice, and protect the ones they love.

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