

The Postcolonial Cultural Industry: From Consumption to Distinction

SANDRA PONZANESI

ABSTRACT

Drawing from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critical notion of the culture industry, this essay explores how postcolonial texts cater to cosmopolitan audiences who, according to Bourdieu’s idea of “distinction,” thrive on the consumption of global goods with local flare. Taking Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as an example of literary prestige being transformed

into cosmopolitan distinction, the essay discusses how the cultural industry contributes to the marketing and transposition of postcolonial texts, and their rearticulation of race, ethnicity, class, affect, and embodiment from the local to the global context, elaborating on how the creation of celebrity status as a postcolonial spokesperson takes place.

The field of postcolonial studies has been flourishing and booming since the 1990s. It is confronted with the predicament of being, on the one hand, highly institutionalized and canonized, while on the other hand being hijacked by market forces as a new, fashionable commodity. The first aspect refers to the widespread insertion of postcolonial courses, novels, and films in the curriculum, with the associated mushrooming of conferences, professional associations, and specialized centres that propose the divulgation and further promotion of the field. The second aspect deals with the postcolonial object as such, cultural products, artefacts, events, and affects that are exchanged for the purpose of monetary gain with the special distinction of having a postcolonial tint to them.

So we have to think of this field as an area of contestation and political intervention in the operations of empires and their legacy, but also as a field that through its institutionalization and commercialization is part of the very neoliberal model that stems from colonial profit and dependency. It is within this area of conflict and conflation that the notion of the postcolonial cultural industry should be placed, as something that operates within the system of production but also contests and deconstructs this system from within. For this purpose it is important to analyze how cultural productions are not just aesthetic objects, or purely disposable commodities, but practices that engage the local and the global in specific ways.

Drawing from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critical notion of the culture industry, this essay explores how postcolonial texts cater to cosmopolitan audiences who, according to Bourdieu's idea of "distinction," thrive on the consumption of global goods with local flare. The postcolonial cultural industry becomes a site of co-production and conflict between producers and consumers, marketing experts, readers and audiences. Taking Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as an example of literary prestige being transformed into cosmopolitan distinction, the essay discusses how the cultural industry contributes to the marketing and transposition of postcolonial texts, and their rearticulation of race, ethnicity, class, affect and embodiment from the local to the global context, elaborating on how the creation of celebrity status as a postcolonial spokesperson takes place.

The Culture Industry

The term “culture industry” was adopted by Theodor Adorno in the 1920s and later reworked and published by him in collaboration with Max Horkheimer as a chapter in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), titled “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment and Mass Deception.” The term was used to theorize the emerging relationship between art and cultural production, dictated in particular by the advent of new technologies and the serialization of art production. The philosophical practice they created—“cultural theory”—was meant to analyze how oppression operates not just through politics and economics but also through culture. Adorno saw the rise of the entertainment industry as a threat to intellectual autonomy and critical thinking, at the service of forces that increasingly operated in hegemonic forms.

Adorno theorized the culture industry as a persuasive structure that produces cultural commodities for mass audiences while supporting dominant political and economic interests. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the rise of the culture industry has taken such things as books, paintings, and pieces of music and converted them into films, posters, and records in order to make money and entertain audiences by making them stop thinking about their everyday problems. Hence, what used to be the higher ideal of art, aesthetics, and critical thinking has been flattened into pure amusement:

The development of the culture industry has led to the predominance of the effect, the obvious touch, and the technical detail over the work itself—which once expressed an idea, but was liquidated together with the idea. When the detail won its freedom it became rebellious and, in the period from Romanticism to Expressionism, asserted itself as free expression, as a vehicle of protest against the organization [...] The totality of the culture industry has put an end to this. (Adorno and Horkheimer 125–26)

The culture industry has therefore been interpreted as another form of fascist control and indoctrination, aiming at the same repressive form of unification and homologation. The culture industry has taken up the role that was previously played by aristocratic and bourgeois patronage.

The cultural infrastructure now consists of state and local authorities financing crucial sections of the cultural sectors: opera houses, radio, TV, orchestras, theatres, museums, large-scale exhibitions, literary awards, bursaries, and libraries. What has been lost is a degree of autonomy and self-reflection, which should exist independently of the modes of production and evaluation. Art is therefore transformed into a game between numerous bodies of power. Adorno and Horkheimer's lament is that art as a critical tool has been replaced by art as a commodity. This rather dark understanding of the culture industry as expounded by Adorno and Horkheimer reflects their experience in the 1930s and is deeply rooted in a European, and more specifically German, cultural tradition: the rise of Nazism, their exile to the US as Marxists and Jews in the 1940s, trying to make sense of an American society in rapid transformation and very much prey to mass consumption and the rise of popular culture, and their return to Europe during the 1950s and 1960s, to a society that had also drastically changed. Horkheimer and Adorno embody the austerity of European cultural pessimism in a period of considerable turmoil, disorientation, and devastation. They aspired to a high standard for European culture and a model of cultural analysis that is uncompromising and rigorous. It is a good warning against the allure of commercialized art, the purpose of which is quick satisfaction without the fulfilment of desire.

Their critical approach, however, is now considered out of sync with our own time, elitist and orthodox, especially after the advent of television, digital culture, and the new mantra of participatory culture. Yet their work continues to be highly relevant for understanding the interaction between art and the economy, the media and industry, production and participation. Some of the principles postulated by Adorno and Horkheimer are still valid and unchanged, as their theorizing still gives some lasting insights into societies and the mechanisms that generate consumption, entertainment and consent.

Yet we should also take into account the cultural responses and rearticulation of Adorno and Horkheimer's ideas over time. In addition to a consistent critique of their notion of the cultural industry as too monolithic and all-encompassing, theorists in the 1960s and 1970s proposed a complexification of the concept by introducing

the notion of “cultural industries” in the plural, indicating not only the media specificities and the different ways in which they operate (music, television, cinema, the videogame industry) but also including the role of class in the privileged access to consumption and to its distinguishing features. It is therefore important to connect Adorno and Horkheimer’s notion of the cultural industry to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “distinction,” which takes consumption not only as an operation of top-down manipulation but also as a form for social organization and stratification.

Postcolonial Bourdieu: From Consumption to Distinction

Bourdieu was, in fact, also concerned with the theory of culture as a field of contention and control, though not in the same way as Adorno. Bourdieu theorized how culture has been appropriated not so much by mass media but through societal imperatives, constructing fields of distinction between different groups. Bourdieu’s book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984) has been extremely influential. Like Adorno’s culture industry, it proposes a radical revision of the idea of culture as an autonomous field. However, unlike Adorno, Bourdieu does not put the emphasis on economic structures and mass consumption as a form of ideological manipulation. Instead, he sees the operation of cultural consumption as a way of creating social stratification through which class and culture become mutually intertwined.

Bourdieu argues in *Distinction* that institutions have an effect on general social and cultural patterns. He proposes that social strata are created on the basis of individual dispositions and styles of life. But the choice of style is not as independent and autonomous as it looks; it is dictated by group dynamics, patterns of consumption, and appreciation of cultural production that distinguish one group from another. He basically argues that unless we can understand the ways in which the attitudes and actions of individuals reproduce—for themselves and for others—elements of culture and society, we will be forced to continue to think of them as externally existing entities:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (*Distinction* 6)

Bourdieu claims that cultural capital is always unevenly distributed. According to him, several institutions are responsible for consecrating and preserving symbolic goods and creating people able to reproduce such goods: museums, educational institutions such as universities, libraries, foundations, festivals, but also the awards system, made up of juries and evaluating committees.

His theory is therefore highly appropriate for an understanding of how culture is transformed into symbolic capital from a postcolonial perspective because there is an intensified commodification and valuation of what, at the height of modernism, was seen as “primitive art” and in the current global market as “cultural difference.” According to Bourdieu’s theory, cultural capital is represented by cultural goods, material objects such as books, paintings, films, music, instruments, and machines. They can be appropriated both materially, using economic capital, and symbolically, via embodied capital. Cultural capital, in its institutionalized state, provides academic credentials and qualifications that create a “certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to power” (*The Forms of Capital* 248). These academic qualifications can then be used as a rate of conversion between cultural and economic capital.

Throughout his discussion, Bourdieu favours a nurture rather than a nature argument. He states that the ability of an individual is primarily determined by the time and cultural capital invested in them by their surroundings, represented by their family and educational network. According to this model, families with a given cultural capital could only produce offspring with an equal amount of cultural capital, but that cannot be easily acquired without this prerequisite. Following this understanding, we gather that all our actions and behaviours are not as individualistic and autonomous as we presume, and that our

categories of worth and value are often motivated by social pressures and the need to be recognized as part of specific social groups. What is usually considered natural, such as taste, is actually deeply cultural and socialized. According to this understanding, culture is a highly constructed notion not that dissimilar to Adorno's idea of superstructure. Taste is used in the process of evaluation and judgments to create social distinction. This produces visible barriers between different social groups, such as provincials and cosmopolitans, or the lower class and the elite, but here we could add Westerners and non-Westerners. For Bourdieu, culture, language, aesthetics, and literature are explicitly used to create and maintain hierarchies of power and domination, not just for formal and aesthetic purposes. In line with Bourdieu's thinking, all our cultural manifestations, such as our taste in clothing, food, drink, music, and cinema, depend not on us individually, but on our social background.

Such understanding of Bourdieu, I would argue, with its intricate and unacknowledged postcolonial sensibility, is highly relevant to the notion of the postcolonial cultural industry.¹ It helps us to understand how goods, styles, and ideas from the postcolonial world are commodified in the first place, in order to create a sort of cosmopolitan distinction, or to be consumed in their home countries as a form of new Orientalism and Indo-Chic.² To this purpose we can therefore speak of a "postcolonial habitus," which refers to the ways in which communities in the diaspora manage to forge processes of ethno-identification through the consumption of products and goods which are of postcolonial provenance, or labelled as part of a circulation of the re-appropriated exotic and oriental "other" as explained above. The postcolonial habitus therefore also refers to a kind of international stratification of people and groups based on sensibilities, dispositions, and taste linked to the consumption of postcolonial artefacts as a form of cosmopolitan distinction. The postcolonial habitus thus contributes to the positioning

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1. Scholars have recently attempted to re-evaluate the importance and influence of Bourdieu's work for the postcolonial field. The issue of migration, race, and dislocation, in France as well as in Algeria, is present in Bourdieu's work and is relevant for the notions of distinction and cultural habitus in a postcolonial and global context (see Puwar).
 2. See Gayatri Spivak, Elleke Boehmer, Sadia Toor, Bishnupriya Ghosh, and Lisa Lau.

of consumers vis-à-vis the postcolonial products, creating a complex interaction between notions of race, class, and taste.

The Postcolonial Cultural Industry

Through Bourdieu we have therefore moved away from Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of the operation of the culture industry as a totalitarian regime towards an understanding of the dynamic, paradoxical and conflictual workings of the cultural industry, creating a postcolonial habitus and distinction through the way in which culture and cultural goods can be appropriated and given symbolic value. This contradiction is inherent to the dual function of postcolonial culture as a site of struggle between contending regimes of values: postcolonialism as a field of studies that offers a critique of the global condition of postcoloniality, and postcolonialism as an object of exchange within the global marketplace (Huggan). In exploring the mutual implications of these two understandings, my aim is to go beyond the oppositional stance by providing a contrapuntal understanding of the postcolonial cultural industry where paradoxes, tensions, and asymmetries emerge.

The postcolonial field emerges as something that is neither homogenous nor monolithic in its contestation or embrace of the cultural industry. The postcolonial engagement with the cultural industry may lead to cultural products that, despite their hybridity, are not automatically progressive or politically emancipatory. At the same time, however, the fact that postcolonial artefacts are objects of exchange for transnational entertainment corporations does not necessarily imply that they have become a commodity without contestatory value. Art, films, novels, music, opera, and other products that could be defined as postcolonial and emerge from specific traditions operate both in complicity with neocolonial cultural industries and in resistance to them.

And so it is within this area of conflict and conflation that the understanding of the postcolonial cultural industry should be placed, as something that operates within the system of production but also contests and deconstructs this system from within. The postcolonial cultural industry, unlike the culture industry, becomes a field of

interaction and co-shaping, and not merely a top-down ideological imposition (see Ponzanesi). It is important, therefore, to locate the specific dynamics of the “postcolonial” cultural industry as being double-edged: on the one hand exploring how bottom-up participation can change the structure of market forces (Henry Jenkins; Howard Rheingold; Mirko Tobias Schäfer); on the other hand accounting for how cultural difference, so central to postcolonial critique, itself becomes commodified—a phenomenon that has been investigated by critics such as John Hutnyk, Ellis Cashmore, Paul Gilroy, Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, Bishnupriya Ghosh, and Saadia Toor.

In her article “Indo-Chic: The Cultural Politics of Consumption in Post-Liberalization India,” Saadia Toor, for example, analyzes how India has changed from an exporter of Oriental styles and goods into a consumer of its own “exotic” products, generating a kind of neo-Orientalism for its own internal market. Exotica is no longer just for Western cosmopolitan elites (such as the hippies of the 1960s consuming products ranging from yoga to Ayurvedic therapy and Ravi Shankar music), but also for a new generation of Indians, who are highly upwardly mobile. This is a cosmopolitan group of young people, hip and urban, living in the diaspora but also in India’s major cities such as Bombay, New Delhi, and Bangalore, who participate in the postcolonial culture of distinction by re-assimilating products that in theory have originated in India, but which have received added symbolic value through their appreciation and consumption in the West, making them cosmopolitan commodities of distinction.

Toor explains how these new forms of consumption still retain the vestige of older Orientalist representations of India as the exotic other. Yet she points to the fact that India is now a major player in the global marketplace, and a growing economic power. This is important for understanding how these new forms of Orientalism are actually not just a form of consumption by the West but a new way of identifying emerging urban classes in India, in which the relationship between class habitus and taste is explained in the construction of a new aesthetic within and by this class. So the relationship between the postcolonial field and the cultural industry is not only one of cannibalism but also of connivance and transformation. Through the

redistribution of “postcolonial products” by new postcolonial upper and middle classes—which are demographically young and urban in location, but cosmopolitan in tastes and orientation—we have a reconfiguration of the patterns of consumption and distinction.

Cosmopolitan Distinction

These products are hence being consumed by postcolonial cosmopolitan audiences that incorporate otherness not just as a mere exoticism but as a sign of distinction and worldliness, satisfying their taste for difference without changing their lifestyle or political attitudes, making therefore a strategic use of “otherness” and “cultural difference.” This could bring Bourdieu’s notion of distinction into discussion, moving from a class argument at the national level, in his case France, to a reordering of class issues now intermingled with questions of ethnicity and race at the transnational level. This calls for a realignment of the notion of “difference” as not just pertaining to the local, but as a prestige object of global exchange. But who has access to which goods? Who can afford the right literacy and capital to appreciate these new global products? What kind of awareness of the specific systems for the distribution of knowledge and critical references is demanded? How to avoid simple neoliberal and racist appropriation?

New, glamorous, and highly successful postcolonial icons such as the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie or the British-Caribbean writer Zadie Smith, the Ghanaian Taiye Selasi or the Zimbabwean NoViolet Bulawayo, the Indian Neel Mukherjee or the Nigerian-American Teju Cole serve as spokespeople for the Third World, the promotion of multiculturalism, and diasporic identities. They also, however, cater to a wide transnational taste for cosmopolitan flare, offering a dip into the postcolonial that is easily digestible and understandable, without dealing with the harshness of war or ethnic clashes. These writers have become brand names, contributing to a cosmopolitan culture of distinction, through which the consumption/reading of their novels/personae is not just a sign of exoticism but also of worldliness and intercultural sophistication. Obviously many new cultural intermediaries are implicated between

the production and consumption of their works, such as agents, publishers, booksellers, juries, filmmakers, producers, and reviewers (see English). The question is whether the new, increased visibility of certain postcolonial authors manages to impact positively on societal transformation or not (see Ellis Cashmore)³; and whether they reactive neocolonial dynamics that privilege the use of English and the celebration of styles and genres that respond to Western demands and discourses.. Yet, as Sadia Toor has demonstrated, patterns of consumption and distribution have become much more diffused and intertwined, and postcolonial cosmopolitan distinction is not just a prerogative of the West anymore, but also of newly emerging global groups. This is obvious in the case of emerging writers such as the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose stellar trajectory from African writer to global icon helps to unpack some of the mechanisms at work in the postcolonial cultural industry.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The Danger of a Single Icon

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria in 1977. Although she had studied medicine at the University of Nigeria, she decided to move to the United States at the age of 19 to study communication and political science. She graduated summa cum laude with a BA from Eastern Connecticut University, and continued with a Master's in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. She also earned an additional Master's in African Studies from Yale in 2008, which forms the background of her latest novel *Americanah*. After reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Adichie was inspired by seeing her own life represented in those pages. Using that inspiration, she has been writing about the Nigerian experience throughout her career. She is the author of three successful novels: *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), which won

3. As Cashmore writes in his book *The Black Cultural Industry*, the visibility of black culture in the entertainment industry might prove to be far from emancipatory given that power relations remain, in the end, essentially intact. If alterity is remade by Western market forces against the backdrop of escalating racism, xenophobia, and restrictive immigration policies, then something has gone awry in the "postcolonial" turn of cultural studies and a new critical awareness needs to be raised.

the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), winner of the Orange Prize, a women's prize for fiction, and *Americanah* (2013), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and named one of the *New York Times* Ten Best Books of the Year. She is also the author of a short-story collection, *The Things Around Your Neck* (2009). In 2008 she received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, nicknamed the "genius award."

Adichie offers a good example of a literary writer being transformed into a cosmopolitan icon, but who still gets appropriated by different constituencies according to the appeal made to her public. Therefore, this section is entitled "the danger of a single icon" in order to echo her famous TED talk in which she warns against too one-sided and monolithic an understanding and interpretation of "difference" and cultural origin. She has managed to avoid this thanks to her ability to successfully operate at different levels, skyrocketing from regional writer to international star, resisting the monolithic labelling of "Nigerian writer."

The following list of activities and merits is offered not only to show her achievements, but also the variety of different media and publics that she has managed to master in order to become not just an object but also a subject of postcolonial distinction. She has acquired celebrity status thanks also to her video appearances, with an impressive number of online views, making her a "viral" public figure both inside and outside the traditional boundaries of postcolonial academic discourse (Guarracino n. pag.). As a promoter of the postcolonial and feminist cause, she has been extremely influential through her successful TED talks (see "The Danger of a Single Story" and "We Should All be Feminists"). It is no coincidence therefore that she was listed among the 100 most influential people by *Time* in April 2015 (Jones, n. pag.).⁴ Her multiple performances allow her to escape the danger of a single icon, as she manages to reinvent herself, through different appearances and media outlets. She has also been a player in the fashion industry, appearing in a special feature article in *Vogue*, in the April 2015 issue, showcasing different attires and accessories and being interviewed by Erica Wagner. Her involvement with

4. Jones wrote in her article that Adichie is a "conjurer of character" (n. pag.).

the film and music industry is also something that contributes to a life beyond the literary, reaching out to multiple and diversified audiences. All her novels have been or will be adapted into a movie: *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been adapted into the most expensive Nollywood production ever made, and *Americanah* is going to appear soon in a production by Brad Pitt, starring Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o in the role of Ifemelu. Moreover Adichie has also become an intermedial star whose text from "We Should All be Feminists" has been included in the lyrics of mega hip-hop star Beyoncé.

However, the highlights of her career come in the first place from her literary achievements, and in particular her highly praised and breakthrough novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. This novel in itself already contains some of the issues related to the postcolonial cultural industry, showcasing what belongs to whom, in terms of stories and authority but also in terms of memory and its commodification. For that purpose I will offer a brief account of the narrative structure and plotline. The novel focuses on the Biafran War,⁵ which took place between 1967 and 1970, narrating also the events that led to the secession and the escalation of violence. Told from different points of view—that of Olanna, a young woman returning to a liberated Nigeria after having finished her expensive British education; Richard, a white British man enamoured with Nigeria; and Ugwu, the houseboy who in the end moves out of the subaltern role to become the narrating voice of Nigeria—it offers a kaleidoscopic vision of the multiple narratives that construct history as a complex quilt. Showing the hopes of the decolonization movements and the failure of the nation, the novel is a public history seen through the perspective of the defeated, recreating a collective memory that belonged

5. The Biafran War (6 July 1967–13 January 1970) was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria. Created as a colonial entity by the British, Nigeria was divided between a mainly Muslim North and a mainly Christian and animist South. Following independence in 1960, three provinces were formed along tribal lines, the Hausa and Fulani (North), Yoruba (Southwest), and Igbo or Ibo (Southeast). Tribal tensions increased after a military coup in 1966 by an Igbo general, which was followed by a Northern led counter-coup, which unleashed reprisals against the Igbo. The war of Biafra refers to the political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the Southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic. The Nigerian regime blocked food and supplies from entering Biafra, causing one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies since the Second World War, leading to almost two million civilian deaths by starvation and producing famous media images that travelled globally, generating compassion for the plight of the Biafran. Biafra surrendered in 1970.

to the family of Adichie, whose grandfather died in the events. It is an attempt to reclaim her history, bring it back into the spotlight, not as a tribal, primitive, brutal, and violent history, but as something complex and nuanced. Adichie manages to do just that, countering the famous pictures of starving kids, pot bellies, and toothpick legs, which received worldwide media attention at the time. Adding the many different subjective and emotional viewpoints is necessary in order to avoid the “danger of the single story,” which plagues Africa and its history. And so the novel weaves personal and individual perspectives into the thread of history, sometimes fictionalizing events and geographical locations, but never mixing up or getting the true events wrong.

“Fiction is the soul of history,” Adichie states, and the scope of fiction is to create “emotional truth” (“Truth and Lies,” n. pag.). This complex tapestry of love in the time of war, intertwined with betrayal, friendship, and violence, summons up the complexity of memory, how to swing from the individual to the collective, and make a generation that was still to come (as Adichie was born after the war ended, in 1977) part of the generation that inherited the trauma and identity of a wounded nation, according to the principle of “postmemory” theorized by Marianne Hirsch. The title of the novel itself refers to the symbol on the new Republic of Biafra’s flag—a sign of optimism and hope for a rebirth where equality and justice could triumph. Of course, like many of the postcolonial dreams, it was badly shattered and the damage done was colossal. So the novel is also a reflection on the birth of the nation and the failure of nationalism against the backdrop of discussion about pan-Africanism, and debates on whether blacks are “all one race” as a concept fundamentally shaped by a European viewpoint. As Susan Strehle writes:

Adichie’s novel depicts the inevitable failure of the nation created by British colonialism and grounded in the Western myth of the nation as a single family of those born (*natio*) to a homogenous clan. The violations of the social contract in Nigeria, made vivid in the sanctioned genocidal murder of the Igbo minority, fracture the nation, and the doomed war for the Biafran independence strips the novel’s protagonists-witnesses of their status as citizens

and propels them into diaspora. In the first days of the war they lose homes; by the war's end, they lose homeland—not simply because Biafra is defeated, but also because their experiences have shaped them as permanent outsiders. The loss of Biafra renders these figures spectral in their powerlessness and foreign in their alienation from the triumphant nation. (652–653)

Yet the novel is hopeful and proposes a kind of reconciliation, both with colonialism and for the internal civil fracture. Ugwu will become the author of *The World Was Silent When We Died* and not Richard as we had assumed all along. As Palmberg and Holst Peterson write, the very last words of the novel, in which the houseboy writes a dedication in the book under construction—“for Master, my good man” (433)—suggest that he is in fact the writer of the excerpts which the reader has assumed were Richard's. This point of reversal is given in a brief exchange between the two when Ugwu asks whether Richard is still writing his book. The answer is “no” but Ugwu persists:

“*The World Was Silent When We Died*. It is a good title.”

“Yes it is. It came from something the colonel Madi said once.”

Richard paused. “The war isn't my story really.”

Ugwu nodded. He had never thought it was. (425)

The point here is that Biafrans, Nigerians and Africans should write their own stories, constructing visions and imaginaries that would be befitting of their experiences, losses, and desires (Palmberg and Holst Peterson 99).

In 2013 *Half of a Yellow Sun* was adapted into a movie directed by Biyi Bandele, a Nigerian dramaturg living in London who made his debut with this film. This adaptation, based on Adichie's novel, has the difficult task of straightening the many flashbacks and flashforwards into a chronological narrative, and reducing the multiple perspectives into a main omniscient one, in which the spectator participates.⁶ The

6. This is also a strategy used for Michael Ondaatje's adaptation of *The English Patient* by Anthony Minghella, which transposed a postmodern novel with multiple perspectives into a Hollywood mainstream narrative (see Ponzanesi).

film is the biggest and most expensive film ever made in Nigeria, with an exceptional cast, including Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Thandie Newton. It premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and was well received by the Nigerian community and Adichie's fans, which contributed to the diversification of Adichie's appeal among transnational audiences, from readers to film viewers and cultural critics. By playing multiple public roles, ranging from highbrow to lowbrow and the more popular, Adichie avoids becoming a single icon, subverting ethnic straightjackets that would solely view her as a Nigerian writer, Nigerian-American writer or public persona. She manages to switch between the different roles imposed on her by actively seeking out how the celebrity status can be used and exploited to fight for the right cause, such as putting a forgotten national history into the spotlight through her books and subsequent film adaptations, or actively promoting feminism—a message that has been remediated and popularized by high-profile celebrities like Beyoncé.

Cosmopolitan Consumption

This discussion of how a writer has turned into a star personality is relevant for the discussion about the postcolonial cultural industry. We are talking about an author who has managed to play the game to her advantage, keeping the focus and interest on the relevance of literature in its multiple sources and purposes, connecting Americans to Nigerian representations and hybridized identities, while going through the carousel of media, TED talks, interviews, TV shows, press coverage, and social networks. In this way she does not circulate as an appropriated object at the service of the culture industry as envisaged by Adorno and Horkheimer. She offers complex books that stimulate reflection while simultaneously agreeing to commodified adaptations. She is appropriated by the media world for the sake of increasing revenues and fomenting a capitalist regime but this does not necessarily undermine autonomy and critical reflection. Her participation in the cultural industry is that of a conscious agent who actively partakes in the shaping and distribution of her image.

It is remarkable that she also has the capability to attract the more popular segment of readers and excite both critical and fashionable

audiences. Her appearance in *Vogue* as a fashionista with a taste for local ethnic styles, colours, and fabrics is blended with a catwalk model style, highly accessorized, with matching hair styles and is also in keeping with her highly stylized public persona. In a way, she is in full control of her increasing visibility and the message she sends across for herself and many writers of her generation, succeeding in standing out, while making sure not to become a pure exotic fetish of otherness in African attire. As such, she also contradicts Bourdieu's idea of class determinism, appealing to a much more nuanced and interlaced transnational flow of gender and ethnic identification. It connects somehow to the paradoxes of being an African woman, an intellectual, and a feminist, and how supposedly discrepant associations could actually be combined and accommodated, as her famous talk "We Should All be Feminists" tries to do: "Happy African Feminist who does not hate men and who likes lip gloss and who wears high heels for herself but not for men."

So this is a persona who is already in line for the Nobel Prize, though she is obviously still relatively young, part of the so-called third generation of Nigerian writers. But the question is what standards we should use to evaluate the trajectories of these writers and their value. Does Adichie play a smart game with the postcolonial cultural industry by implicating herself with the Western market place in search of cosmopolitan icons that can provide local taste with global reach? To what extent are her persona and literary style coached and crafted by media concerns such as Alfred Knopf, her publishing house, and to what extent is she capable of dictating her own rules due to her tremendous success and quick achievements? To what extent is she able to pave the way for a new generation of young and upcoming writers from Nigeria, Africa, and the rest of the non-Western world having benefitted herself, as a third-generation postcolonial writer, from the successes and hard-fought achievements of the very first generation including Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola, who received far fewer accolades and less media exposure than Adichie did?

There is an obvious transition from Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of the cultural industry to the current cultural studies approach, fostered by the Birmingham School in the 1970s and 1980s, which saw the publics, the participants, and the consumers as active agents in the

process of meaning making, and which accounts for the circulation of objects as a system of power differentials. As Lash and Lury write:

Indeed we think that theories of both domination through, and resistance to, the cultural industry were right. We think, however, that—since the time of critical theory *and* since the emergence of the Birmingham tradition in the middle 1970s—things have changed. We think that culture has taken on another, a different logic with the transition from cultural industry to *global* cultural industry; that globalization has given culture industry a fundamentally different mode of operation. (3)

This implies that Adichie functions as an object of exchange and consumption for cosmopolitan audiences but that the value and modality of that consumption and appropriation are neither fixed nor stable. The artist herself greatly contributes to this circulation of meaning-making by strategically playing the cultural industry game, making herself available for different media platforms and audiences with the aim of enforcing her critical agenda in the name of postcolonial values, feminism or minority rights. To accuse her of skillfully playing by the rules of the marketplace would mean to ignore that there is no outside the market place, a bit in line with Derrida's famous phrase "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" ("there is no outside-text"), referring to the system of representation that cannot escape the linguistic sign (158). The cultural industry is not a field of tyranny and delusion as forecast by Adorno and Horkheimer, but a field of contention, where the postcolonial consciousness and awareness can help to maintain a political agenda in the midst of dominant consumerism.

Conclusions

Adichie's parable needs a multi-sited reading, as audiences react creatively to the origin of the published literature and the global trajectories it has taken. Postcolonial cosmopolitan readers are obviously equipped with a specific literacy that enables them to decode the subversive or cultural acquiescence of new postcolonial novels. Yet

these new novels and novelists cater to a global sensibility in search of forgotten pasts and neglected presents, told from new points of views, through voices that are familiar yet manage to be discordant and stand out from the mainstream literary pantheon. The question remains what happens to these radical differences once they get absorbed into the global system and diluted. As Toor has described, cosmopolitan urban readers often reappropriate their own “exotic” culture after having received the blessing and seal of approval of the global market place. Or, as Erica Wagner writes in her *Vogue* article:

Adichie’s novels and stories, for those who have yet to discover them, strike a delicate balance. Yes, they deal with pressing political issues of gender and race. But they are voluptuously, deliciously readable, too, and charming and funny and smart. And they are part of a wave of remarkable writing from the African continent: work by authors such as NoViolet Bulawayo, Dinaw Mengestu, Taiye Selasi, Teju Cole and many others is creating a truly global literature. But it’s recognition in Europe and America that brings such authors real success, and some have argued that this is, in itself, a new expression of colonialism. Adichie dismisses this: “We can either have a conversation about making ‘Africa’ some exclusive, bad space, or we can have a larger conversation about the publishing world. It’s just a question of power and money and infrastructure, rather than one of Africans being self-hating or something.” (n. pag.)

Adichie’s response is telling, showing also the frustration of “postcolonial writers” having always to justify their success as something dubious or coming at a price. Her international success does not mean that Adichie has been co-opted by the global industry without offering resistance or insights into radical identities. Most of her work shows her deep awareness of the mechanisms and processes of the cultural industry while still participating in it. Endorsing the system does not mean being unable to critique it from within, but proposing a contrapuntal attitude that balances anticolonial practices with postcolonial marketability. Adichie’s novels feed into the cosmopolitan

distinction required by cosmopolitan readers positioned worldwide who are responsible readers and equipped with the postcolonial literacies and competencies needed to untangle the many implications of literature, travelling through many circuits of interests. Cosmopolitan readers, in other words, are interpellated into offering a multi-sited reading of texts which varies not only across space and time but also according to the postcolonial literacies entailed in the decoding of postcolonial textualities (Ponzanesi 47).

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BIOGRAPHY

Sandra Ponzanesi is Professor of Gender and Postcolonial Studies at the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University, Head of Humanities at University College Utrecht, and the founder of the Postcolonial Studies Initiative (PCI) at Utrecht University. She is the author of *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* (SUNY P, 2004) and *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* (Palgrave, 2014).