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De/crowning the intellectual: Power, representation, and epistemic shifts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)

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Abstract:
The current study investigates the representation of the intellectual and power dynamics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun *(2006). The novel discusses the repressed history of the Nigerian civil war, which resulted in the insidious genocidal murders of the Igbo minority. Moreover, ideological consciousness is embargoed by evicting intellectuals from their homes as they are a threat to the neo-colonialist strategy to dominate Nigeria politically and economically. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's dialectics of "de/crowning", the study finds that Adichie deconstructs the conventional hierarchy of epistemological power, whereby the traditional intellectual, emblematized in the professor of mathematics and political activist Odenigbo, fails to maintain his status as a public intellectual. Simultaneously, the illiterate servant, Ugwu, emerges as the representative of the voiceless by becoming a novice writer/public intellectual. In a nutshell, the study underscores Adichie's criticism of the elitists for failing to engage in the political calamity that befalls the Igbo group while introducing an unprecedented alternative to the elitist intellectual, characterizing Ugwu as an author whose book universalizes the Biafran crisis and humanizes its victims.*

Introduction

The figure of the intellectual has been widely politicized and discursified by Western as well as postcolonial critics. Often considered synonymous with "the public intellectual", the archetype has come to represent a public figure with significant cultural influence, one who

supports marginalized communities (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 435). The public intellectual intervenes "in the public sphere to take a committed stance regarding topics of a political, social or ethical nature" (Heynders, 2023, p. 6). Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a pioneering figure who connected the figure of the intellectual to the discourse of representation, juxtaposes the traditional intellectual with the organic counterpart in his *Prison Notebooks* (1926–1937). He believes that the former "criticizes the claims of objectivity and performs the role of the spokesperson for a specific social group formulating interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Heynders, 2016, p. 8). Edward Said (1996, p. 23) extends this discourse in his seminal work, *Representations of the Intellectual*, highlighting how the intellectual should pursue a vocation to sustain a perpetual state of vigilance, characterized by an unwavering readiness to challenge partial truths or dogmatic ideologies. In this regard, the current study reengages with the representation of the intellectual in the postcolonial context, particularly in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), wherein the author unequivocally reflects on and deconstructs the conceptualization of the intellectual before and during the Nigerian civil war. To clarify, the objective of the present investigation is to expound upon a shift in roles and power dynamics between the elitist intellectuals and the amateur writer as exemplified through Odenigbo and his servant: while Odenigbo is rendered voiceless, Ugwu endeavours to voice his political views through writing, which subsequently establishes his intellectual stance.

Adichie, a third-generation Nigerian writer, demonstrates contemporary issues of neocolonialism and exile in her fiction. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), she provides a nuanced study of characters during the pernicious civil war that tore Nigeria apart due to regionalist extremists and a colonial scheme of "divide and rule". In narrating the story of individuals ravaged by civil war, the novel employs three perspectives: Olanna, a privileged woman; Richard, a Western expatriate and writer; and Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy. Adichie portrays political awareness and power dynamics in her novel by characterizing Odenigbo, the professor, and Ugwu, his servant before, during, and after the eruption of the Nigerian civil war.

Much has been stated and written about Adichie's novel from different perspectives and views. John Marx's article "Failed-State Fiction" (2008) scrutinizes Adichie's depiction of the failed state of Biafra from a political and social sciences approach. Marx (2008, p. 628) interrogates the qualifications necessary for an expert to effectively analyse the conditions of a failed state, critically evaluating Adichie's choice of experts "to grasp why states fail and thus… how to manage them." Marx's view closely aligns with the arguments presented in this study, highlighting how Adichie's work depicts the "failure" of the postcolonial intellectual in

salvaging the nation and offers a "revised job description" of the figure (Marx, 2008, p. 627). In the same context, Odile Heynders (2023, p. 11) elucidates how a literary work "operates as a stage" through which an intellectual positions him/herself in "a certain cultural, historical or political context." She contends that Adichie is, by extension, a public intellectual, who "provides expert knowledge on events and ideas that fueled the Nigerian-Biafran civil war" (Heynders, 2023, p. 10) through Ugwu, and who helps the reader to fathom the convoluted "position and subjectivities in such discourses on nationalism" (Heynders, 2023, p.9). While Marx succinctly mentions how Adichie's novel hints at the failure of the postcolonial intellectual and meticulously highlights the success of the experts in identifying a failed state, Heynders maintains that Adichie, through the novel, showcases her expertise as a public intellectual in scrutinizing the failure of the Biafran state. Both critics, however, fail to delve into the deconstruction of epistemological power dynamics between the elitist intellectuals, emblematized in Odenigbo and Richard, and the houseboy, Ugwu.

It is noteworthy that the themes of education and representation in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* have been the subject of extensive scholarly discussion and debate. For instance, while Marx (2008, p. 617; pp. 620-21) critiques Adichie's sentimentalization of Ugwu's education, Amy Novak (2008, p. 40) reflects how Ugwu's epistemological journey transforms him from a servant to a "chronicler of trauma," further disrupting the Western "interpretive privilege" (Novak, 2008, p. 42) and the control of narratives (Novak, 2008, p. 40). Susan Strehle (2011, p. 665), however, presents a somewhat controversial statement, claiming, "Richard helps empower Ugwu's creation of the story of a people" torn by a civil war, which implicitly reaffirms the Western agenda of the white man's burden to save the colonized. On the other hand, drawing on Novak's arguments about Ugwu's assertion of authority, Strehle (2011, p. 668) underscores Ugwu's book as an "act of resistance against a triumphant Nigerian nationalism." As per this context, Emmanuel Mzomera Ngwira (2012, p. 43) argues that Adichie ascribes to Ugwu, who "does not fit into the league of educated middle-class men, the 'authorial agency'." To clarify, Ugwu "carries the burden of writing" and documenting the traumatic experiences of other characters, particularly echoing Adichie herself (Ngwira, 2012, p. 43). Such a dialectic is reverberated by Seretha Williams (2017, p. 152), foregrounding Ugwu as an "addressable other", who writes testimonies of the traumatized individuals, such as Olanna's. She aligns with Ngwira's argument that Ugwu serves as "a mirror of Adichie, who writes the oral testimonies of her family and Igbo in the broader sense" (Williams, 2017, p. 141). In fact, Ugwu, according to Ngwira and Williams, is a mirror of Adichie, not from an intellectual level, but as a form of agency to undermine Western hegemonic narratives about

the colonized. The current study argues that Adichie chooses Ugwu, not because he serves as a representative figure of critique directed at the West, but because he embodies a deconstructive challenge to the Western conception of the intellectual, typically associated with the elites, such as the academic, the learned, and the professional writer.

Further, Marx, Ngwira, and Willliams investigate Ugwu's epistemological agency in relation to his surroundings. Marx (2008, p. 618) fleetingly alludes to the assertion of the mentoring model when Ugwu dedicates his book to his master, Odenigbo. This argument is further explored by Ngwira, who asserts the deconstruction of power relations between Ugwu and Odenigbo:

> [T]he mimicry of Odenigbo's phrase – which mimics Crusoe's phrase and reveals Odenigbo's internalization of Western education – also reflects the overturned 'mentor and pupil' power relations regarding the ability to narrate the Biafra trauma. Ugwu's dedication subverts power relations between master and servant and between the 'ordinary' Biafran and the educated middle class. (Ngwira, 2012, p. 52)

While some critics, such as Williams, merely stress the mentor-student relation between Odenigbo and Ugwu, Ngwira provides a meticulous example of how epistemological power is deconstructed and even reversed. He, however, does not elucidate the reason behind such subversion of power roles. The present study scrutinizes the power relation from a carnivalesque approach, demonstrating how the role of the public intellectual is questioned, and the dynamics of epistemological authority are reversed between Ugwu and Odenigbo. Given Ugwu's minimal influence from Western culture and education, the paper asserts that Adichie designates the houseboy as an unconventional public intellectual. Unlike Odenigbo, who, as an upper-class intellectual, has a fragmented relationship with his afflicted community, Ugwu retains close ties with his people.

While existing scholarship offers valuable insights into the reading of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, particularly regarding themes of representation, education, and the notion of the failed state, it does not fully explore the shift in roles and power dynamics between the elitist intellectuals and the novice writer/intellectual as exemplified through the relationship between Odenigbo and his servant, Ugwu. As such, the present paper reconsiders the representation of the intellectual within the postcolonial context, with a particular focus on Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, mainly addressing the reversal of power dynamics and epistemological agency. In so doing, the study hinges on the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (decrowning/crowning) to elucidate

such subversion. The paper proposes that Adichie aims to indicate the failure of the postcolonial intellectual to represent the masses. She also reconsiders a different representation by portraying another intellectual figure as a substitution and a criticism of elitism.

The article is divided into three main sections, the first being the theoretical-methodological section, which serves as a brief overview of the theoretical tool employed in the present research, mainly Bakhtin's "de/crowning". The second section demonstrates the Igbo intellectuals' failure to represent their people's struggle, particularly Odenigbo, who, prior to exile, constantly maintains solid political perceptions. The study also addresses Richard's failure to become a public intellectual in his attempts to portray the calamities of the Nigerian civil war. The third section discusses Ugwu's rise to the status of writer/public intellectual, who contrives a trajectory to articulate the concerns of his community. He becomes the voice through which many testimonies are recounted, particularly Olanna's. The study ends with the main findings of the analysis, asserting Adichie's subversive conceptualization of the intellectual.

II. The Bakhtinian carnivalesque: The "shift-and-renewal" discourse

In order to understand the revised image of the intellectual and power dynamics, one needs to turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's elucidation of the carnivalesque in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963). Bakhtin probes into the structuralist dogma of socio-political views by proposing a carnival life and carnivalesque. His demonstration of the carnivalesque stimulates a rethinking of socio-political structures, language, and literature, which leads to abating systematic dogmatism. He contends that the carnival "possesses a mighty life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 107). The carnival, in effect, has the potency to alter socio-political and ideological conditioning. Bakhtin utilizes the carnival to create a utopian fantasy (Stam 1992; Emerson 1997), wherein hierarchies are questioned and subverted. In a carnival, people are systematically stripped of all political and social obligations while "socio-hierarchical inequality" is deferred (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123). Bakhtin applies the term "carnival" to the centrifugal forces that challenge the official power and ideology (Stam, 1992, p. 122). Consequently, this study mobilizes Bakhtin's conception of "carnival" as a metaphorical discourse rather than a literal designation. By adopting the concept of the "carnivalesque", the study examines the mechanisms through which carnival tropes subvert epistemic hierarchies within historical contexts, such as warfare, for the carnival is "inserted into specific historical moments" (Stam, 1992, p. 96). The carnivalesque is a literary form that "brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123).

For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque indicates the disruption of concepts, meanings, and ideas, undermining conventional hierarchies.

War and Bakhtinian carnival are, de facto, "compatible" (Wickens, 2002, p. 218), for the laughter of the carnival "is a weapon, like fists and sticks" (Emerson, 1997, p. 96). The discourse of the carnival paves the way for Bakhtin's thought to materialize within historical calamities, such as warfare and rebellion (see Stam 1992). The Bakhtinian carnivalesque, understood "as a literary, textual echo of social practice of carnival" (Stam, 1992, p. 96), functions as an exploratory device to treat the literary works in different historical contexts. The essence of the carnivalesque "abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions" (Stam, 1992, p. 86). Regarding Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the Bakhtinian carnivalesque is discernible through social and political subversion during the Nigerian civil war, eventually precipitating exile. Even though exile bears no relation to the festive spirit of the carnival, the established hierarchies, in both cases, are discontinued and even subverted: the intellectual is no longer superior to his servant. The latter becomes a soldier and a novice writer/intellectual. Such subversion creates a temporary sense of liberation from established hierarchical structures. In keeping with this view, Bakhtin (1984, p. 122) states, "Because carnivalistic life is life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent 'life turned inside out,' 'the reverse side of the world'." The Bakhtinian carnivalesque indicates that people free themselves from the conventional and dogmatic shackles of everyday life. People's attitudes change; their social statuses are altered and subverted. The Bakhtinian carnivalesque operates as what Robert Stam (1992, p. 95) terms a "symbolic, anticipatory overthrow of oppressive social structures," fundamentally destabilizing set roles and socio-political statuses. Individual conduct and gesticulation are liberated from socio-political hierarchies that generally define a milieu; in fact, such a carnivalesque life may even be considered abnormal and aberrant from the viewpoint of its counterpart (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123).

Bakhtin's carnivalesque calls attention "to all oppressive hierarchies of power, not only those derived from class but also those generated by gender, race, and age" (Stam, 1992, p. 234). Within the Bakhtinian carnivalesque – whether manifested in warfare or other contexts of social inversion – "the powerful are mocked and ridiculous kings are enthroned and then dethroned" (Stam, 1992, p. 148). Bakhtin (1984, p. 126) introduces "crowning/decrowning" as

a form of subversion that undermines the conventional social statuses of actual life. Bakhtin (1984, p. 124) argues:

> Crowning/decrowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position. Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start. And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester; this act, as it were, opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of carnival.

With every process of crowning, there is a decrowning. While Bakhtin primarily utilizes these terms to scrutinize the dynamics of carnival and the medieval carnival culture, the duality can indeed be applied beyond kings and festive spirits. In Bakhtin's view, crowning refers to elevating a person or a concept to a position of authority or status. This can involve the symbolic act of crowning someone as king, but it can also expand to bestowing social, political or epistemological authority as well as notable prestige in any social context. Decrowning, conversely, involves reversing or removing such authority or prestige.

III. The "decrowned" intellectuals

The concept of the "intellectual" is often interpreted as "'a figure' elevated above the masses and endowed with exceptional skills and abilities in communication" along with a certain degree of "charisma, popularity and fandom" (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 434). Such a paradigmatic image echoes Adichie's depiction of elites in her novel, mainly through Odenigbo, professor Ezeka, Miss Adebayo, Olanna, and Richard as well as the young poet/artist Okeoma. Odenigbo, a mathematics professor, often called a "youthfully capable" figure (Adichie, 2007, p. 5), embodies practical communication skills and pronounced intellectual assertiveness. He publishes works, unreservedly reflecting his political views and demonstrating nuanced political consciousness. More often than not, Odenigbo displays a certain authority and assertiveness in highlighting his anti-colonial views through the prominence of education: "'Education is a priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don't have the tools to understand exploitation?'" (Adichie, 2007, p. 11). Odenigbo understands the dangers and contingencies of ignorance. Subsequently, he motivates his houseboy, Ugwu, to carefully select books, as some are biased in their historical accounts (Adichie, 2007, p. 11). By meticulously outlining and shaping Ugwu's intellectual journey, Odenigbo exercises epistemological and social power over him.

Odenigbo expresses his political views on multiple occasions, notably through his organized intellectual soirées, whereby professor Ezeka, Miss Adebayo, and Okeoma attend to discuss ideological and philosophical issues. Odenigbo involves his houseboy, Ugwu, during these gatherings to foster his critical thinking. The intellectuals mainly debate and discuss the issue of colonialism and Pan-Africanism. On the one hand, some, notably professor Ezeka, argue that tribalism and pan-Igbo dogmatism are a colonial creation and a white man's invention to dominate the colonized Nigeria (Adichie, 2007, p. 20). Odenigbo, on the other hand, strongly opposes such dialectics, claiming that history is distorted and that the pan-Igbo idea is quite pre-colonial, demonstrating his tribalist stance (Adichie, 2007, p. 21). This political debate highlights division in their ideological interpretations of neocolonialism. The discussion further underscores the educated southerners' "alienation from Nigerian nationalism in the early sixties" (Strehle, 2011, p. 657), which, based on Adichie's portrayal, emphasizes the outsiderness of the Igbo intellectuals.

The circumstances, however, change when these intellectuals are evicted from their homes because of the civil war. They become a danger to the British scheme of "divide and rule" due to their acute political consciousness, especially when the Nigerian army, with the support of the neocolonial institutions, burns books and exacerbates southern intellectuals' situation (Adichie, 2007, pp. 416-18). Adichie, through the portrayal of the civil war, highlights not only the internal division of the ethnic groups but also how tribalism undermines "communities while it generates public massacres" (Strehle, 2011, p. 658). She rethinks the status of the intellectual by shedding light on these intellectuals' exilic experience. For instance, Odenigbo is characterized as a politically conscious and outspoken intellectual, who encourages the decolonization of the mind and the cultivation of political awareness. By characterizing Odenigbo amid a national emergency, Adichie investigates whether his epistemological authority can withstand the colonial scheming of "divide and rule", thereby granting him the right to pursue his duties as a representative of his people.

Odenigbo, his partner Olanna, and their child Baby as well as Ugwu are forcibly exiled from their home (Adichie, 2007, pp. 178-79). They find themselves in what Said (1996, p. 59) terms "outside the comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness." In post-exile, the setting is marked by homelessness and alienation, portraying the characters as lost and disconnected. Insecurity and fear dominate their lives (Adichie, 2007, p. 267; pp. 274-75; p. 278). However, Odenigbo and Olanna attempt to create a home by fighting for a new community and a better future: The Republic of Biafra. Odenigbo, thereafter, "acts as the public voice of resistance in the novel" (Williams, 2017, p. 146). Adichie, however, illuminates a different facet of exile that

diminishes the intellectual vocation. The situation evolves into a burden and impediment, thwarting the intellectuals' endeavour to fulfil their national vocation. Inextricably bound to the realities of hunger, exile, and survival, the intellectuals' defiant voices, exceptionally Odenigbo's (Adichie, 2007, p. 285; p. 325; p. 385; p. 389), fade, for "silence [is] thickened by uncertainty" (Adichie, 2007, p. 320). Amid the chaos, these intellectuals, who were used to gathering in Odenigbo's house, are separated and weakened by their pursuit of survival; the war, according to Strehle (2011, p. 662), "scatters the community of intellectuals." The neocolonial strategy of "divide and rule", which incited these conflicts, ultimately instigates the intellectuals' tragic displacement, dispersing them and fostering a sense of insecurity that undermines their defiance and renders them weak and voiceless.

Adichie delineates a community of intellectuals, who fail to fight neocolonial scheming and represent their people. Their authority is diminished as they cannot represent the weak or the voiceless. Such an image can be understood through the Bakhtinian decrowning: "decrowning a king lies the very core of the carnival sense of the *world—the pathos of shifts and changes, of death and renewal.* Carnival is the festival of all-annihilating and all-renewing time" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 124). Decrowning is mainly related to the process of death or loss. In Adichie's novel, the intellectuals are decrowned and stripped of their epistemological power to represent their people and maintain their prestigious status quo. Adichie deconstructs the hierarchical structures, which entails her scepticism toward the function of the traditional or institutionalized intellectual as a public figure during the Nigerian civil war. In so doing, Adichie creates a gap and a need for substitution to resist Western narratives and neocolonial scheming. Thus, the crisis lies not only in the diminishing role of the postcolonial public intellectual but also in the troubling reality that if the intellectual fails to resist and advocate for the voiceless, then who will?

Although Odenigbo attempts to fight for a better future for Biafra, the sense of alienation and the stifling aura of exile cripple him. Due to his silence, Odenigbo fails to maintain the status of the public intellectual; he is, in effect, mitigated into a mere "decrowned" intellectual. Bakhtinian decrowning occurs through Odenigbo's loss of prestige, status, and epistemological power as a shrewd intellectual and eloquent scholar. In exile, he is overwhelmed by sentiments of alienation and grief as he barely maintains his livelihood. His passion for political questioning gradually wanes. Later in the novel, he is portrayed as a peripheral character, entering a state of inertia, compared to his wife and his servant, who both "'…are changing the face of the next generation of Biafrans with their Socratic pedagogy!'" (Adichie, 2007, p. 293). After returning to their hometown, Odenigbo's family is seized by the Nigerian army: "When

Odenigbo climbed out, the officer slapped his face, so violently, so unexpectedly, that Odenigbo fell against the car" (Adichie, 2007, p. 416). In this scene, Odenigbo's inability to retaliate is emblematized through his powerlessness and paralysis. Therefore, Odenigbo's trajectory, predominantly characterized as a vigorous advocate for his views, is reconfigured into that of a decrowned intellectual bereft of any spirit of defiance.

Adichie not only discredits traditional intellectuals but also maintains an image of the failure of postcolonial intellectuals to grasp the problem and retaliate. They fail to use their expertise to diagnose the issue of the civil war. They aim to create an independent government of Biafra, while the problem lies in their tribalist view of the nation. Such a perspective does not only advocate genocide but also paves the way for Western rule over African tribes. The intellectuals, based on Adichie's narrative, fall short in representing the masses, thereby exacerbating the ethnic division. The figure of the intellectual is understood to be public "with considerable cultural capital who sides with oppressed people" (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 435). Odenigbo and his fellow intellectuals attempt to side with people, but they also aggravate the ethnic differences through their tribalist views, which encourage genocide and violence. Being in exile decrowns them from their epistemological power and their title of being "public" intellectuals. They are scattered and silenced by succumbing to alienation, weakness, and fear.

Adichie further questions the Western portrayal of intellectuals and writers. She represents a white character, Richard Churchill, who goes to Nigeria merely because he's fallen in love with the roped pots of ancient Igbo-Ukwu art. He is often introduced as a writer (Adichie, 2007, p. 53). Richard strives for social integration by nurturing his communal networks and particularly establishing a personal relationship with Olanna's sister, Kainene. Despite his effort to curb his prejudice, his latent racism comes to the surface when, following the disappearance of Kainene, he wonders whether Madu touched her with his "filthy black hand" (Adichie, 2007, p. 430). In "The Danger of a Single Story", Adichie (2009) discusses the pitfall of telling a story from one perspective. In particular, she highlights how the Western media and narrative constantly adopt one image of African countries being a maelstrom of systemic failure by giving an example of John Locke's narrative. She (2009, 07:03-07:22) states:

> His writing…represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling, are 'half devil, half child.'

Adichie analyses the implications of permitting Western narratives to dominate the portrayal of Africa from one perspective, correlating this phenomenon with underlying power dynamics. She (2009, 10:02-10:10) argues that "power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." In this context, Adichie attempts to avoid prejudice and bigotry by including Richard's point of view in her narrative. As a Western writer and intellectual, Richard utilizes his privilege to document and publish articles on the events of the Nigerian-Biafran war. He, however, fails to proceed with the task as he undergoes inner turmoil and uncertainty, particularly when he loses Kainene because of the civil war. In conjunction with his identity as a Western intellectual/writer, this uncertainty challenges the authentic representation of the struggle. He relinquishes the agency of narration and subsequently grants it to Ugwu, a commoner and servant. Like Odenigbo, Richard is also decrowned from being the narrator/writer in Africa; he no longer has the power to chronicle and maintain his status as an intellectual and a professional author, due to his latent racism and his inevitable bias.

Adichie deconstructs the image of traditional and Western intellectuals by portraying them before, during, and after the civil war. Odenigbo, for instance, is depicted as an eloquent, passionate politician and an accomplished intellectual, who fails to represent the masses or understand the signs of a failed state. Once in exile, his intellectual authority is questioned and subverted; he spirals into aimlessness and chronic intoxication. Adichie also questions the Western narrative about Africa by stripping Richard of authorial power, a role that is later passed on to Ugwu. In a nutshell, Adichie subverts the power dynamics of the intellectuals by rendering Odenigbo, the native intellectual, and Richard, the Western intellectual, as mere characters with no authority to narrate history; they are decrowned of the privilege of meaning-making. However, the decrowning of Odenigbo and Richard is accompanied by the crowning of Ugwu, a servant, who undergoes a series of trials during the civil war.

IV. Authorship and renewal: A new public intellectual arises from the masses

The process of decrowning, according to Bakhtin (1984, p. 125), is always accompanied by crowning. The emphasis on transition and renewal is central to the Bakhtinian dialectic of decrowning and crowning, which celebrates "the shift itself, the very process of replaceability" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 125). The shift stresses not just the act of change, but the inherent nature of that transformation. The process, however, celebrates mainly the discourse of replaceability or shift and renewal, which paves the way to new possibilities. Moreover, Bakhtin (1984, p. 125) argues,

> From the very beginning, a decrowning glimmers through the crowning. And all carnivalistic symbols are of such a sort: they always include within themselves a perspective of negation (death) or vice versa. Birth is fraught with death, and death with new birth.

With each process of decrowning, metaphorical death, and demise, there is a possibility of crowning in terms of renewal and rebirth. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie foreshadows the potential for a reversal of roles from the beginning, when Odenigbo informs Ugwu: "…'*Sir* is arbitrary. You could be the *sir* tomorrow'" (Adichie, 2007, p. 13). By decrowning Odenigbo and other intellectuals, the possibility of "replaceability" emerges and Ugwu, a house servant, is crowned to morph into an intellectual/writer. The houseboy evolves into an unconventional intellectual in exile, advocating for a cause and upholding a steadfast viewpoint by the novel's conclusion.

Ugwu is introduced as a house servant who mainly seeks a secure life: home and food (Adichie, 2007, p. 7). From the start, one notices his fascination and proclivity for the English language (Adichie, 2007, pp. 3-4). Ugwu's educational journey is encouraged by Odenigbo, his master, who attempts to embed in Ugwu a certain political consciousness: "…'There are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers. I will give you books, excellent books'" (Adichie, 2007, p. 11). Odenigbo attempts to disseminate political awareness by educating his house servant. Accordingly, the latter engages in an autodidactic journey through simple matters like learning to sign forms (Adichie, 2007, p. 13). After the exilic episode and moving between residences, one notices Ugwu's development, who eventually becomes a teacher, educating the children of Biafra (Adichie, 2007, pp. 292-93). The situation, however, changes when Ugwu is press-ganged into the Biafran army (Adichie, 2007, p. 351; p. 357). Because of fear and a sense of insecurity, Ugwu attempts to survive. He is constantly pressured by his fellow soldiers, who initially destroy his copy of *Narrative of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) (Adichie, 2007, p. 364), to sexually assault a bar girl (Adichie, 2007, p. 365). The act of annihilating the book emblematizes Ugwu's break from his intellectual vocation that ends in self-obliteration through raping the girl.

When in hospital being treated for his war injuries, Ugwu becomes obsessed with death and survival; this state is a result of trauma-ridden guilt after the rape incident. Meanwhile, Richard visits him and reveals the title of his project, *The World Was Silent When We Died*, which triggers Ugwu's shame:

> Later, Ugwu murmured the title to himself: The World Was Silent When We Died. It haunted him, filled him with shame. It made him think about that girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor. (Adichie, 2007, p. 396)

Ugwu's sense of guilt becomes highly intense when he returns to his master's place and ostracizes himself from his surroundings. The incident becomes a dream that wavers between his consciousness and unconsciousness. While his body is healed of its physical injuries, his mind "function[s] with permanent lucidity" (Adichie, 2007, p. 397). The rape scene affects him to the extent that he confuses reality with dreams, imagining that his lover is the one being raped.

Guilt isolates and inspires him to seek redemption through writing, and "the more he wrote, the less he dreamed" of the incident (Adichie, 2007, p. 398). To clarify, Ugwu faces a conflict between the unconscious and conscious mind, prompting him to pursue a means of reconciling these opposing spectrums in his psyche. Ugwu's assertive journey starts when his dreams become too persistent and all-consuming, obliging him to devise a method to address the inner turmoil he experiences. Writing becomes a therapeutic process that Ugwu embraces by frequently distancing himself from his surroundings (Adichie, 2007, pp. 399-400). One notices the difference between Ugwu when he is first introduced, who attempts to serve his master's family with utter dedication and admiration, and the Ugwu transformed by war, whose traumatic experiences propel him into self-discovery and a redemptive, therapeutic journey of self-assertion through writing.

Ugwu comprehends the complexity of his predicament and endeavours to persist in writing to document his perspective on the civil war. He, indeed, overcomes the sense of alienation and homelessness through writing and voicing the Biafrans' struggle to surmount their calamities. Ugwu's breakthrough renders him the epitome of a novice intellectual/writer. He further connects with Olanna as they both undergo near-death experiences:

> [S]he described the head itself, the open eyes, the greying skin. Ugwu was writing as she spoke, and his writing, the earnestness of his interest, suddenly made her story important, made it serve a larger purpose that even she was not sure of, and so she told him all she remembered about the train full of people who had cried and shouted and urinated on themselves. (Adichie, 2007, p. 410)

Writing helps Ugwu to express his trauma-induced guilt after the rape scene. He even assists Olanna in overcoming her trauma by listening to her and documenting her story. In fact, "she… speaks not only for herself but also for the silenced voices of her family and other victims' (Williams, 2017, p. 151). Moreover, telling and writing are therapeutic for both Olanna and Ugwu: while Olanna transcends the grip of trauma, Ugwu becomes the crowned intellectual/writer. There is a change in power dynamics in this instance as both characters are primarily silent at the beginning. However, the power of orality and writing render them as important representatives of the silenced and the marginalized.

Said (2003) provides an example of how writing assists an individual in creating a sense of home and security through the example of Theodore Adorno; he (2003, p.184) maintains: "Adorno's reflections are informed by belief that the only home truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing." Ugwu, by extension, succeeds in overcoming his traumatic struggles and focuses on concocting a means of addressing the world through his book, which is eventually bequeathed to him by Richard, entitled *Book: The World Was Silent When We Died*. By keeping the original title, Ugwu seeks to incorporate the outer world within the borders of Nigeria, particularly in the adversities of the civil war. Ugwu also strives to universalize the crisis by documenting the innocent victims' misfortunes proving that such tragedy is not associated with a particular race, class, or gender. Ergo, Ugwu evolves into a prominent public intellectual, dedicated to portraying the marginalized's narratives by chronicling Nigeria's tumultuous political upheaval.

In "The Danger of a Single Story," Adichie (2009) indicates how delineating a person from one perspective can reinforce creating stereotypes. She provides an example of the houseboy whom she met when she was young (Adichie, 2009, 03:08). She maintains that as a child, she mainly knew one side of the houseboy's story, Fide, as told by her mother. Adichie (2009, 03:35-04:05) narrates:

> Then one Saturday we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.

The author reconsiders the aspect of storytelling by underscoring different angles to a single story. By incorporating Ugwu and rendering him as one of the foremost narrators, she provides

a layered narrative to the novel. Adichie, in effect, "troubles the issue of the authorship by ascribing authorial agency to an individual who, being a mere houseboy, does not fit into the league of educated middle-class men usually associated with writing history" (Ngwira, 2012, p. 43). In other words, Adichie gives another angle to the houseboy, Fide, whom she knew as a child through Ugwu, who becomes the spokesperson for the silenced, the victim, and the oppressed in a country that is ravaged by the civil war.

Decrowning/crowning calls for "the creative power of shift-and-renewal" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 126). The conventional hierarchies are subverted through crowning, accompanied by decrowning, for the one "who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 124). Ugwu, a servant, is crowned as the public intellectual in exile, who fights for a cause while the actual intellectuals are either scattered around, killed, or eventually experience a sense of loss and alienation (like Odenigbo and Okeoma). More specifically, Ugwu, at some point in his book, models a poem entitled "Were You Silent when We Died?" inspired by one of Okeoma's poems, depicting the state of Biafrans:

> Did you see photos in sixty-eight
> Of Children with their hair becoming rust:
> Sickly patches nestled on those heads,
> Then falling off, like rotten leaves on dust?
> Imagine children with arms like toothpicks,
> with footballs for bellies and skin stretched thin.
> It was kwashiorkor—difficult word,
> A word that was not quite ugly enough, a sin. (Adichie, 2007, p. 375)

Ugwu characterizes the plight of Biafran children, during the Civil War, as a consequence of the European scheme to divide Nigeria, grant power to the Northerners, and marginalize the Igbo people. He is the new public intellectual, for he does not simply stand in the margin but becomes a novice writer, who represents the victims of the civil war in his book. While the actual writers and poets either die or emigrate (Richard and Okeoma), Ugwu takes it upon himself to morph into the next writer, to tell the truth about the devastating historical event.

Adichie exemplifies another figure of the intellectual/writer, who represents the silenced and the oppressed. She questions the elite group and deconstructs the power dynamics between master and servant in the novel through Odenigbo and Ugwu. Adichie introduces a writer from the masses as a substitute for the elitist intellectuals, who cannot represent the struggle because of their inadequate understanding of their people's lived experiences. Her representation of such

a figure reverberates Antonio Gramsci's organic intellectual "who is a member of a social class, as opposed to a member of the traditional intelligentsia, which regards itself as a class apart from the rest of society" (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 435). In Adichie's novel, the conception of the intellectual is deconstructed, and the power dynamics between servant and master are subverted. The reader witnesses the rise of a new public intellectual – one neither institutionalized nor westernized. Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires (2009) explains that there is a possibility of the rise of a new intellectual from the common populace:

> The dream of democratic mass education has been to make intellectual culture the possession of every citizen, not just of an elite, ending with a culture in which intellectual is still often synonymous with snob or elitist and developments over the last generation seem indeed to have given intellectuality a new respectability. (Pires, 2009, p. 123)

Intellectuality is often associated with elitism. However, the shift towards intellectual masses is visionary and can be part of the future. Adichie expresses such a vision in her novel through Ugwu, who becomes both a representative of the silenced and an unconventional public intellectual, rising from the masses.

Conclusion

To conclude, Adichie provides an account of an intriguing perception of the civil war in Nigeria, wherein fictional and actual events are coalesced. Themes of exile and diaspora dominate this novel since many intellectuals and commoners are driven out of their homes because of the ideological struggle between the North and the South of Nigeria. The stimulating aspect of the novel is how Adichie subverts the concept of the intellectual and power dynamics through Odenigbo, Richard, and Ugwu. Adichie's depiction of the intellectual echoes Bakhtin's discourse of decrowning and crowning, wherein the dialectics of shift and renewal are underway. Such a transition occurs when the characters are exiled: the reader witnesses the downfall of the intelligentsia and the transformative journey Ugwu undergoes, leading to the rise of the unconventional intellectual from the masses. Ugwu experiences a journey of self-assertion, morphing into a writer to represent and universalize the Biafran adversity after the failure of other intellectuals, such as Richard and Odenigbo, to undertake the task. Relying on the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (decrowning/crowning), this study has elucidated how the concept of the conventional intellectual is undermined and decrowned. In a dialectical fashion, Ugwu, the servant, is crowned via his transfiguration into a public intellectual/writer in exile.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie presents a convoluted approximation of what becomes of intellectuals during times of crisis, raising questions regarding their role in the postcolonial context. In subverting the hierarchies, Adichie questions the authenticity of the traditional and Western intellectuals' accounts of the Nigerian history and politics. Rendering Odenigbo a mere silenced individual indicates the failure of the postcolonial intellectual to either manage the situation in the neocolonial Nigeria or eliminate the issue of tribalism. The alternative, however, is generated through paving the way to a houseboy, who slowly, but surely, transforms into a novice writer with authorial voice to represent the oppressed during the Nigerian civil war. Thus, one can safely state that Adichie critiques the elite intellectuals, condemns the biased accounts of Western intellectuals, and suggests a futuristic view of the rise of the intellectual/writer from the masses.

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