

African Research Review

An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 9(4), Serial No. 39, September, 2015: 206-220

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v9i4.16>

Voice Construction in the Postcolonial Text: Spivakian Subaltern Theory in Nigerian Drama

Binebai, Benedict

Department of Theatre Arts

Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island Amassoma,

Bayelsa state, Nigeria

Phone: +2348038718720

E-mail: ebimotimi7263@gmail.com

Abstract

The subaltern post-colonial theory responds to the question of subjugation and silencing of the oppressed and marginalised people in post-colonial societies. Thus the theory is principally designed to examine the voice of the subaltern subject. Spivak, a postcolonial scholar holds the view that subalterns cease to be subalterns when they speak. She further argues that the subalterns cannot be represented by privileged people; they are subjects who should speak for themselves (1988). A lot of plays have been written in Africa that deal with voice or voicelessness of the oppressed but these works have not been analysed along the Spivakian concept of the subaltern postcolonial theory. Against this background, the research appropriates the literary method of investigation based on textual analysis, using the Spivakian logic to access these text: *Hard Ground* by Ahmed Yerima, *Dance on his Grave* by Barclays Ayakoroma and *Sweet Revenge* by Irene Salam. It is evident that the texts expressed voice and also failed to speak for the subaltern. The paper contributes to the subaltern postcolonial discourse on the question of voice construction. The utilization of the

Spivakian postcolonial theory in literary scholarship could expand the frontiers of literary creativity and criticism and further create the resource base for literary criticism.

Key words: construction, criticism, postcolonial subaltern, theory, Voice.

Introduction

Subaltern postcolonial studies have provided various ways with which subalterns/subjugated and subordinated people can be identified. Scholars like Benita Perry, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Boaventura De Sousa Sonta Chakrabarty, Dipesh and others have made their inputs to the definition of the Subaltern and how the subaltern can earn their voice or be effectively represented. Homi Bhabha, a foremost theorist in post-colonial thought, highlights the importance of social power relation in his working definition of subaltern groups as “an oppressed minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority groups. The subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.” (1996:191). This position of Bhabha was also expressed by Boaventura Sousa Santos in *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* when he declared that subaltern can be seen within the context of counter hegemonic practices, movements, resistances, and struggles against particular social exclusion. The subaltern theory takes the perspective of the “other” as one who has had no voice because of race, class or gender. It establishes the fact that norms are established by those in power and imposed on the “other” (2002:458). Gramsci, writing from a Marxist perspective, uses the term ‘subaltern classes’ to describe those groups ‘subordinated by hegemony and excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power’ (Holden 2002: 202). For Gramsci, in order for a particular social group to gain (and maintain) power they must establish ‘a form of social and political “control” which combines physical force or *coercion* with intellectual, moral and cultural persuasion or *consent*’ (Ransome 1992: 135).

The subaltern classes are those individuals or groups that are subjugated by hegemony, subordinated by the dominant world-view, and excluded from having any meaningful position from which to speak. The term ‘subaltern’ was used by Gramsci to refer specifically to workers. In postcolonial studies the term has been used to refer to those individuals or groups dominated or oppressed by a more powerful ‘other’, within a colonised society (Moretona 2008: 8) in this subaltern discourse, Spivak a third world post-colonial theorist will have her views on the subaltern subject given good attention as her postulations will form the framework that will be used as conceptual tools in the diagnosis of the Subaltern representation in the post-colonial literary text. Considering the fact that the Niger Delta is an area of ethnic nationalities that has become a central subject in the construction of post-colonial narratives, the Spivakian angle to the subaltern theoretical postulate will be used. It is therefore

significant to make progress by unearthing Spivak's view of the subaltern theory before its application to the selected text.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument in her post-colonial theory of the subaltern is fundamentally predicated on the margin which she refers to as the silenced centre. Her argument is contained in a seminal essay christened, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). In this essay Spivak views the fate of the subaltern subject and how it can be marred by the politics of representation. Since representation can be made by only the privileged people in the society effective representation of the subaltern subject can be a futile venture. This will always keep the subaltern in the terrain of margin, the silent centre, the centre of voicelessness. Spivak is of the view that when the Subaltern speaks it no longer remains as subaltern, so subalterns are marginalised people who have no voice, people who find it difficult to speak. The nitty-gritty of Spivak's argument is that the subalterns are not people who can be represented by privileged people. They are subjects who should speak for themselves. They should be inventors and masters of their own voices. It is only when the subaltern speaks for themselves that they can cease to be subaltern subjects. This is an emphasis on the self-reflexivity of the subaltern. Spivak an excellent deconstructivist, post-colonial critic, opined strongly that the post-colonial text is sometimes written by the privileged class, who cannot unlearn their privileged position. This means that a privileged representative of the subaltern faces the hazard of not having knowledge of the other and their views. Spivak quoted by Landry and Maclean express the point that

Unlearning ones privilege by considering it as one's loss constitute a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of other knowledge; not simply information that we have yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand the reason of our social position (1999, p. 25)

For the privileged class who must speak for the subaltern, there is the need for the fulfilment of an ethical task. The task of establishing a strong and positive moral relationship with those at the margins. This is the only way occupiers of privileged positions can speak for the subaltern subject. Spivak is therefore of the view that there must be an interaction between privileged class and the subaltern subject to ennoble and enable subaltern representation by the privileged class. In this paper we shall turn our attention to the question of how the Nigerian playwright and his/ her text have been able to effectively represent the subaltern subject.

The Situation of Post-colonial Playwriting

Post-colonial dramaturgy apart from its aesthetic function has strongly taken part in discussing the African socio- political, economic and cultural issues. Critics of African literature are concerned about how these issues are packaged and presented in literary creativity, which stands to gain from these creative works. This makes every writer to take position in his work. It is either you are writing for the less privileged and oppressed people or you write just to please yourself as either an oppressor or an oppressed or even pour scorn on the subjugated people of the society. Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Micere Mugo must be heeded. Their comment on the preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, reflects strongly on the protest function of literature

We believe that Kenyan Literature - indeed all African Literature and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence. We are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism. African Literature and African Writers are either fighting with the people or aiding imperialism and the class enemies of the people. We believe that good theatre is that which is on the side of the people. That which, without making mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation (1976, p. iv)

Some writers write to problematise and offer solution others write to problematise without solutions. But every writing goes in favour of or against existing literary theories. The critical scholar does his or her analysis based on the most appropriate theory in relation to the work. How the literary text serves as an agent of oppression and suppression of voice depends on the plotting vision of the playwright. The playwright is a privileged member of his society, he is sometimes referred to as God in his universe of creativity; he decides what character, setting, language and themes to create. He plots or orders the play to either achieve a tragic or happy end, he has power and choice to give voice to the oppressed or deny the oppressed the ability to speak. He can decide to kill a freedom fighter, a whole community in search of liberty and allow the tyrant to triumph. Every play or literary text is a conscious creation of its author. The text is entirely his idea, whether it is original, Intertextual or and adapted work, in every literary work, the author is responsible for its creation. An author may smoke the society to death or give strength to the oppressed; it is all the design of the author.

The art of playwriting is the art of plotting; it is not only the plot that is plotted in a literary composition. Every part of the dramatic anatomy is in the plotting art. Although playwriting is a subjective art, I dare say that even at that there should be objectivity in subjectivity. Otherwise, when a work of art is created and its subjectivity

falls short of objectivity and lack of human interest there is every tendency that the masses represented in your work will not sing along with you. Osofisan states that

The artist's song will gain wide acceptance only when the community sings along with him; it is when the other citizens add their voices that the song, born out of the artist's solitary genius can turn finally into a communal property, and becomes collectively regenerating (1998:36)

Osofisan's idea of the effectiveness of a work of art is very apt and instructing. I must add unmistakably here that the song of the artist becomes more paramount and useful particularly when those who sing with him are the oppressed people. I make this observation because in Africa particularly in Nigeria there are artists who sing and are supported by the oppressors and oppressive institutions. An artist who sings and whose song gains acceptance of the subjugators is not the artist of Osofisan's imagination, not of my fancy not even the writer of today and posterity whose vision is to reconstruct the society. African dictators create a source of literary inspiration, a kind of ecology that procreates strong protest drama. Because the true African dramatist fights against dictatorship, he applies the principle of negation of the negation in which a violent act of oppression is responded to by a protest literature of the dislocation paradigm (Binebai 2011: 103)

The playwright is a self-appointed representative of the society, he falls amongst the category of people who are well positioned to speak for the other and he even stands a better chance than any other representative because he does not have to go to the legislative house of politics to speak in the midst of other contending voices. He is not forced to write against his will and opinion. Writing is an inner light, an inner propulsion expressed outwardly by the writer through his creative furnace but a writer and his text fall into the line of oppression and secures dishonour of being a subaltern voice when his or her creativity is suppressed, twisted and conditioned to please the powers that make and impose rules for the construction and perpetuation of subalternity. To own voice is to speak. To speak means voicing to be heard and taken seriously by the listener who perhaps is the oppressor. To pull down the subaltern wall there must be a positive and fruitful interaction between the colonised and the coloniser such that the colonised status of voicelessness will be changed to produce voice and liberties demanded. The voice that is useful makes an impact on the human heart and brains not ears. From the post-colonial text in African there exist texts that are creatively driven to fight against or at least suppress voices of the other and there are also post-colonial texts and playwrights who have adopted the Spivakian spirit of effective representation by studying the subaltern subject and giving voice. This is what interests this investigation.

The Spivakian Logic of Voice in Nigerian Drama

In *Hard Ground* (2006), the subaltern status of the subjugated Niger Delta people is maintained. The construction of the play produced the big picture of the area as a centre of darkness and silence. The literary text which ought to represent and speak for the other could not speak. The playwright who ought to be a privileged representative of the other did not make the subaltern speak to free them from their subalternity. *Hard Ground* presents the Niger Delta as a place of troubles, suffering and grief, a place of exploitation and resistance, a play where the people who clamour for change become a treat to themselves and their existence, a play where every family is psychologically arrested and devastated by the activities of militants and their leaders. *Hard ground* is a human habitat of misery, nightmare, aborted dreams, and a place where human choices, hopes and expectations are scuttled and ridiculed by negative but domineering choices, hopes and aspirations of the conqueror. It is a land where visions of hope and prolonged struggles of repression and resistance by reactionary and revolutionary forces are constantly at daggers drawn. *Hard ground* is one of such human environments held down in a calamitous way by ideological cruelty and corporate violence, betrayals and institutional intimidation (Binebai 2012:2)

Nimi a militant activist whose involvement in the struggle to recover voice for the region brings trouble to his family. From the plotting of the play, Nimi is made to kill the dreaded leader of the militant's camp who is later discovered to be his weak father who leaves with him at home. There are glaring interpretations that can be given to this literary text of Ahmed Yerima. First he wrote a play about the Niger Delta to capture the condition of the area; secondly the play implies that the real problem of the Niger Delta is the Niger Delta people particularly the leaders. Consequently, Niger Delta Militants should kill those leaders who bring danger to the region. Nimi's murder of Baba is the case of a son killing his father. The play suggests that the militant leader is dangerous and therefore should be killed and ended its plot there.

Hard Ground as a post-colonial text succeeded in showing the misery and difficulty of the Niger delta without a solution. Both the text and its author failed to speak for the region. The playwright's capacity to represent as a privileged member of the society was not appropriated. In this text the other's experience is unlearned by the playwright. The subaltern subject could not be moved from the margin to the centre. The oppressed and exploited Niger Delta is left at the silenced centre. The implication is that post-colonial playwrights also participate in further extending the colonial tentacles and agenda of voicelessness drawn for the subordinated people. Spivak is strongly of the opinion that if the subaltern speaks it no longer remains as subaltern because the subalterns are people who lack voice and agency. But in Yerima's *Hard Ground*, the subaltern could neither speak directly nor be represented by the post-colonial text nor by the post-colonial dramatist. The playwright as the conscience of

the society, as the voice of vision, as a practical literary ambassador of the less privileged and the society is ideally saddled with the task of constructing plays that speak for the subaltern subject, the moment he shies away from singing the song that the people who seek voice sing, he or she fails to be a genuine representative of the subordinated. He stands disqualified as a subaltern voice by Spivakian judgement. According to Landry and Maclean who quote Spivak, to unlearn our privileges means on the one hand, to do our homework, to work hard at gaining some knowledge of the other who occupies those spaces most closed to our privileged views. On the other hand, it means attempting to speak to those others in such a way that they might take seriously and, and most important of all, and be able to answer back (1998:5). *Hard Ground* lost the Spivakian ethical relationship between the privileged representative position and the subordinated. Ogaga Okuyade citing Sylvia Wynter in his foreword to the book *Creating a Speaking Space: The Dimean Paradigm of Nationalism in Post-Colonial Nigeria* notes that the iconic images of hunger, dead rivers, poverty, disease, misery, roofless trees, flares, oil spillages, migrants who cannot move, and a vanishing landscape continue to dominate both local and international media outputs. These images are not attempts by the media to exaggerate the Niger Delta predicament; they only accentuate an annoying reality which foregrounds the fact that the people who negotiate their existence in these areas represent the extreme form of the “‘subaltern other’ to *Man* and as the bottom-most world” (Binebai 2013:26).the foregoing subaltern condition captured by Ogaga and Sylvia Wynter is embedded in other existing popular dramatic/counter narratives of the Niger Delta.

In most of these texts. Both the playwrights and their texts speak for the exploited Niger Delta. In Ambakederemo’s *Isaac Boro*, perhaps the oldest revolutionary drama on the Niger with the charm of symbolic interactionism in dramatic creativity on the Niger Delta question, the playwright and the play text raise and present the voice of the Marginalised and oppressed Niger Delta people. The play is about the Boro freedom struggle. Because the playwright is from the Niger Delta and the burning issues of the region were presented in proper light it can be deduced that the Spivakian logic of the subaltern subject to speak directly for itself is honoured. Such crucial issues as energy sovereignty, resource control and separatism nationalism are given voice. The play which is an historical drama with the critical realist temper ends with the death of the eponymous hero, Isaac Boro. But this hero is resurrected in *Drums of the Delta*(2010) where his philosophy, ideology and psychology is appropriated to fight and demand for social justice, political power and complete resource control by the present generation of Boro’s soldiers. In speaking directly from the silent centre of the subaltern, the play and its author predict the emergence of a national president from the region which manifested in 2011 with president Goodluck Jonathan democratically elected as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

This Spivakian verdict of the subaltern speaking directly for themselves is reflected in Adesi's *Agadagba Warriors* (2008). In this text the Ijaw ethnicity is presented as the Niger Delta Subaltern. The play tersely narrates the prolonged exploitation and oppression of the oil producing ethnic nations of the Niger Delta and agitates for a reversal of the revenue derivation formula in Nigeria from 13 percent to 87 percent for the oil bearing region which was achieved at the resolution of the plays conflict. *Agadagba Warriors* laments regional and rural poverty in a modern economy where youths and people of the area are unable to gain employments and perpetually sheltered in the succession of poverty. In this Play written with the logic, temper and style of Marxist literature the subaltern subject speaks directly and lost their subaltern status by gaining voice. In *Isaac Boro* (1978), *Drums of the Delta* (2010) and *Agadagba Warriors*, the subalterns are not robbed of their voices unlike Yerima's *Hard Ground* which did and legitimised the class structure and the privileged class in its consistence vision of dominance of the subaltern. These plays imaginatively captures the contributions of ordinary men and women to the struggle for voice and social reconstruction in Nigeria.

The examination of the Spivakian subaltern deconstructionism will further be treated in Nigerian dramas that deal with women as subaltern subjects. Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on his Grave* (2005) will be investigated along with Clarks *The Wives Revolt* (1991) and Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge* (2004). *Dance on His Grave* is set in the Ijaw speaking area of Bayelsa West Senatorial District. The conflict of the play which is situated between women and men, between the voiceless who try to speak and men the listeners is further extended to wife and husband- king Olotu and Queen Alaere. The play presents a big picture of patriarchal dominance with women organising themselves in a struggle to gain voice in the public affairs of the kingdom. The patriarchal men plan to declare war against a neighbouring community over a case of adoption of one of their daughters. The women are against the declaration because it is senseless; they reason that a mere case of adoption is not enough for the declaration of war. *Dance on His Grave* dramatises the conflict between men and women on the feminist question.

The Amananaarau of Toru-ama Alaere, queen and royal spouse of Olotu gathers the women of the community. She educates and conscientizes them on why women should have a place in the community. The women there and then unanimously resolve to fight for their liberation under the command of Alaere. They are to deny men sex and abandon domestic responsibilities. The women decide to fight for their liberation from the patriarchal dominance of men. They are also kicking against the pronouncement by the men of Toru-ama to fight war against the people of Agiama whose son abducted a girl from Toru-Ama. The women reasoned that if the men's contemplated war is declared, it is their sons that will suffer and even die not the makers of the decision who are the elders. The women under the command of Alaere succeed

in waging war of denial against the men. All chiefs that matter including the Olotu face and feel the action of the women. The king is firmly of the view that the long-drawn-out sex war planned and executed by the women of Toru-ama be compellingly and brutally put to an end by the tactics of flogging their wives into sexual submission with canes provided by king Olotu himself. He says

Yes... they are canes. I am giving one to each of you. This night we are all going to sleep with our wives by the first cockcrow. If they refuse us entry, the canes will do their work. If we break their will, their unity will be broken... (p. 79)

The women's story in *Dance on his Grave* as well as *The Wives' Revolt* underscores the importance and power of voice in the text context. The women clamour for permanent voices which seek to define them in their own provisos. But this is violently resisted by the patriarchy. Thus, this study views the impact of male dominance and the silencing of women's voices as acts of structural violence. In fact King Olotu's violence against the women is a protection of male terrorism against the female voice of liberation. The act of flogging of women, especially wives is the most horrible kind of domestic violence. Amnesty International report quoted by John R. Warner, Jr. in his paper, 'The Silence of Women, The Voices of Women' (2012) states:

Violence in the home is truly universal. According to World Bank figures at least 20% of women have been physically or sexually assaulted. Official reports in the US say a woman is battered every 15 seconds and 700,000 are raped each year. In India more than 40% of married women reported being kicked, slapped or sexually abused for reasons such as their husbands' dissatisfaction with their cooking or cleaning, jealousy or other motives. In Egypt, 35% of women reported being beaten by their husbands (p. 17)

In *Dance on his Grave* women's attempt to move away from the silenced centre to the centre of speakability is violently scuttled by male chauvinism. The men attempt to define women and the roles of women. Women are abused oppressed and violated in the play. The women experience a predicament in which they are caught in oppressive structures along gender relations. It is evident that the play presents a strong picture of sexism which perpetuates patriarchal tendencies and empowers men to oppress their women. *Dance on his grave* is a fine example of male dominance and female subordination especially in the denial of agency and suppression of voice. Although through feminine logic the arrow head of male oppression King Olotu dies and is succeeded by his female daughter the power of male dominance still eclipse the sky of Toruama. In the play Barclays Ayakoroma opens a speaking space for women, they were as suggested by Spivak presented by the playwright as "questioning

subjects'' in confronting male dominance. This is within the perspective of phallogocentrism. But in their encounter with the domineering male front they lost it.

Dance on his Grave strappingly reveals how traditional Ijaw society subjugates women violently through denial of their right as people capable of making or at least participating in national decisions. The female characters protested but are driven back to the silent centre. The question of giving voice to the other through the instrumentality or representation of the playwright in *Dance on his Grave* is temporary. Because up to the end of the play male dominance does not seem to have faded away. Apodi states that no one should shed crocodile tears, or you'll force me to curse you. You want to have voice. Now you have got the result (2005, p. 89) He blames Alaere, the queen for sending King Olotu to his early grave and requests her to dance on his grave. This implies that the play did not end with a total destruction of male hegemony.

This is likened to the Niger Delta situation where speaking spaces have produced the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. But will the region not fall into the subaltern status again during this Post Jonathan era of political control in Nigeria? While *Dance on his grave* presents an atmosphere of suspicious liberation of the subaltern subject as it affects women, *The Wives Revolt* by JP Clark fully moves the subordinated women to the speaking centre. Clark therefore emerges strongly as postcolonial dramatist who gives recognition to the Spivakian spirit and logic of representation of the 'other'. In the drama, the women of Erhuwaren stand in opposition to the male dominated society for placing them at the margins in the sharing of oil money given to the community. The women protest under Koko wife of Okoro but the men impose sanctions on the women to suppress their voices. The women disagree and go all out for a protest to bring down patriarchal dominance. The women's protest and their denial of sex and domestic services bring hardship upon the men folk. The drama drives to a conclusion in which women are given voice an equal right with men.

The Wives Revolt is a good example of a feminist drama by a male writer in post-colonial Africa that deletes the silent and unspeakable space of the women. Both the author and the play run along the line of speaking for the subordinated women and installing their rights to participate in public affairs of the state. Clark protests in his creative wisdom powered by ideological potency the gendered subaltern as an empty space, a out-of-the-way vacuity. Koko The central character in *The Wives' Revolt* is the leader of the revolting women she is presented as a strong woman from the beginning of the play she refuses to accept the fact that she is silenced'' silenced victim'' and emerges as an agent of voice. In the dialogue between Okoro and Koko the negative effect of the laws of the land leading to the clamour for voice by the women of Erhuwaren is clinically revealed. Koko says:

Koko: We know who has the money has the title in this land. That's why you men are today keeping to yourselves a great part of the money that belongs to everybody.

Okoro: Your mouth will get you into real fire one of these days, and I won't bring you water or sand to save you. There is limit to the protection I can give you in this town if you are going to let your tongue rule your head.

Koko: I'll speak my mind in any place anyday anyway; I am talking in my own house and to my husband unless of course he is going to carry the report outside to his peers (pp. 6 – 7).

Clark gives intellectual political attention to the play by raising the truth about the injustice and marginalisation of women to build a secure peace. The change of thinking and attitude by the men of Erhuwaren about their relationship with women, their wives and the need for both genders to be equally treated is a normative social reconstruction position proposed as an honest contribution to the feminist identity struggle. Okoro in his very last pronouncement in the play says:

...as for the original matter of the oil company money that started all this fire, let it be known here and now that it was not such a big sum of money. Certainly not so big that it was going to change the condition of our lives permanently for better, it has left the poor, poor and the rich perhaps a little richer as our oil continues to flow to enrich other people across the country. But that is another story... (p.62)

The men's acceptance of women as equal partners of progress in the drama is interpreted as recognition of women's position and voice as partners of progress. The play demonstrates true representation of the voiceless through the plotting art. The subaltern women gain voice and cross the subjugated line to shake off their subaltern garment.

Irene salami in *Sweet Revenge* also gave voice to her women. The same themes manifests in *Mulkin Matta, Rebellion of the Bumpy chested*. In these plays the subaltern status of women is liberated. We shall concentrate here on Salami's *Sweet Revenge*. *Sweet Revenge* is also a conflict between male domination and female resistance and clamour for agency. Oronsaye-Salami explores the subjugation of women by the patriarchal system and the attempt of women to subvert it. Critical issues such as motherhood by experience, power, female resistance, diasporatic issues, nationalism, sexism, empowerment, etc are all tackled in the play. In *Sweet Revenge*, Oronsaye-Salami offers a new perspective to womanhood, privileging her, reconfiguring her image and moving her from margin to centre (*Sweet Revenge* blurb). The central woman in the play that controls the logical and graceful flow of the plays plot is Mrs.

Asosa. Male dominance made her lose her well paid job; she suffers marital abandonment, abuse, ridicule and rejection, hated by the very man with whom she gave birth to four children, discarded by way of divorce by the husband who became a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria through her credibility as a good mother. A woman suppressed into the space of silence by patriarchal hegemony. Salami in this text demonstrates clearly as a female feminist who through dramatic construction demonstrates with a good vision of solidarity the reconstruction of the African woman by empowering her away from being a subaltern subject. In an interview with the Sun Newspaper, Salami has this to say

Many people have come to see feminism from a negative perspective. I am an African feminist, in my plays, motherhood is prominent, we see men and women relating and cooperating with one another. I agree that I have strong female characters in my plays because that is the reality of today; women are no longer tied to their traditional roles, but rather, hold important positions in the society. So when I write, I show the world that African women have come a long way (2013, p. 1)

The dramatization of women's voice in Irene Salami's *Sweet Revenge* is totally in tandem with the view advanced by Gaventa that reclaiming knowledge from the dominant system has a number of benefits for the producers of the knowledge: In seeing themselves as capable of producing and defining their own reality they become activated to change it; a greater consciousness and clearer analysis of their situation may develop; and the new knowledge produced can become a resource for challenging the hegemony of the dominant ideas. ((1993: 39).The agenda of producing voice and agency for the subjugated African woman continuous to dominate the rhetoric of Salami's drama. *Sweet Revenge* fully expresses the Spivakian subaltern post-colonial theoretical postulate in which subordinated people directly speak for themselves without representation by the privileged class. The privileged class in this context is the patriarchal world and the male playwright who could not unlearn the other properly to establish an ethical interaction and relationship with the subaltern subject before going for representation. When this ethical link is missed or downplayed in subaltern representation, the result is usually lack and loss of voice of the margins or silent centre. In this text dispossessed women are relocated politically, economically and psychologically in order to re-establish a "voice" or collective locus of agency in postcolonial Africa. Women did not depend on men to speak for them rather they spoke for themselves.

Sweet Revenge is therefore seen as a critical literary intervention to install and restore the long suppressed voice of women in Africa. The narrative offers women the agency of self-representation in the first place. Salami in line with the Spivakian logic

champions the voices and texts of women marginalised by African patriarchal culture. This implies that Salami by way of counter-hegemony steering and contestation, challenges some of the dominant ideas that keep women in the centre of silence. Such ideas include the notion that men are superior to women and should always occupy leadership positions and that women are just mothers of children and managers of the kitchen. The play breaks the silence of woman as a subaltern subject and voice their consciousness. The playwrights and the works investigated, particularly those who wrote with promethean spirit and guilt are persuaded by the fact that voiceless people must secure their voice to gain freedom. They hook up to Malone Karen's view based on the belief that enlightenment is a process of self and social determination. That is, by providing an opportunity for ideology critique, rational self-reflection, and collective autonomy people are able to appreciate their place in history and learn they are the narrators of their own lives—that they can exercise power as self-determining agents of change. This self-determination is a pre-requisite to empowerment and is both the means and product of developing environmental popular knowledge (1999, p. 235).

Conclusion

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern post-colonial theory of voice has been used in this study to examine the post-colonial dramatic texts in Africa with concentration on Nigeria. We investigated the playwrights and the question of voice supply and voice suppression in their texts. This is because in matters of voice and representation of society the playwright is better placed to speak for the silent centre. He has a privileged person who by virtue of his position as the conscience of the society, the cultural ambassador of the society and the voice of vision unlearns the experiences of the other before venturing into writing. The investigation revealed strongly that some playwrights failed to speak for the subaltern, which is the silent centre despite their privileged position as writers who speak for the society. This is because they are privileged doubly as male and as writers from a privileged social background. The suppression of women's voice in *Dance on his Grave* by Barclays Ayakoroma and the voice of the freedom seeking Niger Delta people in Yerima's *Hard Ground* are clear cases of voice suppression. On the other hand the study revealed playwrights who speak for the dark gulf, the subordinated people. This is due to the fact that they are subaltern writers who write to speak directly with demands to the supply centre. Playwrights like Ola Rotimi, Irene Salami, Ben Binebai, and Adesi Akpos fall within this category. Irene Salami, who is a female dramatist, wrote in her text *Sweet Revenge* to restore the dignity of the African woman. She salvaged the Africa woman from patriarchal subjugation, made her overcome her frustrations and trials, gave her a new image and voice which ended her subalternity in a male dominated world. This study has contributed to the subaltern postcolonial discourse by using its theoretical implications to examine the role of the playwright in the production of voice

or voicelessness in his/her work with reference to the subordinated or 'othered' in society.

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