

Public Abstract

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Title:STEPPING OUT OF THE CLOAK OF VOICELESS-NESS: A POST COLONIAL AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE BLACK FEMALE VOICE IN THE AFRO-HISPANIC NARRATIVE.

My dissertation focuses on the articulation of the black female voice in the literary traditions that have emerged in the Equatoguinean and Afro- Costa Rican socio-cultural contexts in the contemporary period. It interrogates especially the representations of this female minority voice in the narrative works of, Ekomo written by, Maria Nsue Angue and *Shadows of your black memory* (Tinieblas de tu memoria negra), by Donato Ndongo, both writers of Equatorial Guinea. Additionally, this treatment extends to include the Afro-Costa Rican narrative works of *Limón Blues* written by Ana Cristina Rossi and *The four mirrors* (Los Cuatro Espejos) by Quince Duncan.

This treatment therefore, examines the renditions of the black female voice in the her(s)tory, as well as the his(s)tory created by the female and male writers who are situated within the Afro-Hispanic literary traditions of the Post- Colonial period. It attempts to probe and explore the foundational elements in the construction of the female voice, to determine whether the female is able to articulate a voice in the narrative, or whether she is voiceless or silenced. Accordingly, it considers the differences that appear in the constructions of the female voice that appear in the works created by female writers, in comparison with those that are created by the male writers. It further interprets the significance of these representations where firstly, the female subject is considered as articulating a voice of her own, or on the other hand, as being voiceless in the discourse. Finally, it considers how the act of "giving a voice to the voiceless" which is achieved by the female writers under examination, can have implications for the expansion of the characterizations of the female subject not only in the literary context, but also in the society as a whole. It therefore considers the possibilities for the effective assumption of a voice by the female not only in the literary context, but as well in the context of the communities in which women live.

My dissertation initiates an investigation on whether the female subject possesses her voice and is able to express it in the literary context, or on the other hand, whether she is a voiceless character who is unable to step out of the cloak of silence. In the discussion I consider exactly how female self-expression is demonstrated or manifested in the narratives. For as the critic Judith Butler contends that even though total representation of the female voice is perhaps not possible due to the restricting forces of patriarchy and imperialism, nevertheless the most important thing is that the project of interrogation of the exclusions continue and that we respond to the call of democratic debate.(53) Therefore, conscious of the influence of these constraints on the complete articulation of the black female voice the her(s)stories included in the corpus of my dissertation illustrate that there are instances where the black female voice is able to achieve artistic and critical un-silencing in the discourse. Thus, they have proven that the female voice when constructed along alternate and nontraditional modes can shatter the chains of silence to make valid contributions to the conversations which focus on issues of gender, identity, race and nation which represent critical aspects of the social realities of the Post- Colonial society.

The research questions that have guided this investigation include the following: (1) To what extent is the female voice is unsilenced or silenced in the narratives of her(s)tory in comparison to that of his(s)tory? (2) How is the female voice positioned, structured or utilized in the development of the narrative plot in comparison with that of the male voice, (3) and how does the female voice vary in both narratives with regard to its articulation of the issues of gender, cultural identity, race and nationhood? (4) How far do the writers of her(s)tory and his(s)tory overcome the constraints of the norms and traditions of hegemonic

discourses to affect a liberation of the female voice?

The research design and methodology of this proposal features a comparative reading and evaluation of the representation of the female voice in the narratives of Ekomo, *Shadows of my black memory*, *Limón Blues* and *The Four Mirrors*. In order to facilitate the in depth examination of the discursive material the critical theories of Post-Colonial Feminism, African and Third World feminisms, the tenets of the Womanist theories, as well sociological, anthropological concepts and premises have been utilized to provide a theoretical framework which is capable of providing multiple perspectives and tools for analyzing and interpreting the manifestations of the female voice in both narratives

According to the claims made by many post-colonial feminists the black female voice in the literary discourse has undergone conditions of repression and subordination even worse than her male counterpart. As such, the level of displacement and dislocation of the female voice in the discourse reaches even more critical proportions than that of the male. In her reflection on the conditions of female subordination and voiceless-ness, the critic Gayatri Spivak contends that, “ Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of ‘Other’, marginalized and in a metaphorical sense, ‘colonized’...” ( Ashcroft et al, 173) Thus, the critic is inferring that women and especially, black women are therefore subjected to multiple marginalization, since they do not share the same rights and privileges as those who exert exclusive control over them.

Thus, Spivak, in her accounts of the double subjugation of colonized women and her discussion of the silencing of the muted native subject, in the form of the ‘subaltern’ woman, has testified to the fact that ‘There is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak. (Spivak 1985 c:122) She alludes to the fact that the devalued female has no space where she can express herself and is therefore rendered as incapable of speech, she has no voice. Spivak also continues her argument when she states that, “By implication the silencing of the subaltern woman extends to the whole of the colonial world, and to the silencing and muting of all natives, male and female.”(Ashcroft, 175)

Although, the narratives of these two groups of novelists focus on the privileging of the minority voice in the Post- Colonial discourse, yet when compared together their treatments of the female voice seem to reveal distinct divergent patterns. Whereas, the male voice occupies the central position in Ndongo’s and Duncan’s narrative works, on the contrary, that of Nsue and Rossi seem to have deviated from the traditional voiceless-ness of the female subject that is generally encountered in the his(s)stories. By contrast, the female voices that appear in Nsue’s and Rossi’s narratives seem to occupy the privileged spaces and have achieved a greater level of inclusion in the discourse. In order to achieve this movement from the margins to the center of the discourse the female authors seemed to have employed to a great degree an inversion and intentional manipulation of the normative patterns of representation by which the black female voice is usually portrayed as the “other”. Therefore, they seem to represent the female voice from alternative platforms which result in the creation of a female voice which reflects a significant degree of fluidity, dynamism and agency in the discourse.