



Scan to know paper details and  
author's profile

# De-narrativising the Meta-Narrative of Patriarchy in Gender Politics in African Drama: The Case of Bole Butake and Osonye Tess Onwueme

*Henry K. Jick, Andrew T. Ngeh & Etame A. Mesang*

*University of Bamenda*

## ABSTRACT

Gender is the state of being male or female, but in most cases, it is defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Gender is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men; it is rather constructed socially and culturally. This socio-cultural construct has submerged and suppressed the female folk in all spheres of life. Their literary history is conceived and perceived as subterranean or undercurrent, characterized by the vocabulary of silence, absence and hiding views with one of revelation, uncovering and discovery. The birth of female consciousness has interrogated the place of patriarchy in African society. Patriarchy has created an imbalance situation in African socio-cultural and political system, and this, as presented in African creative works, has disrupted the harmony between the two sexes. This essay argues that, with the polemics and advocacy of women's right, there has been a shift in paradigm in the representation and presentation of female characters in African contemporary works by both male and female authors. The exclusivity of the dominant tradition established by the male folk has raised a plethora of questions regarding the social and cultural construction of women in African literary works. No longer silent or hidden, female characters and female authors take on life and energy and are conceived as heroic, revolutionary, radical, passionate and subversive.

*Keywords:* de-narrativizing, meta-narrative, gender, politics and patriarchy.

*Classification:* FOR Code: 750699p

*Language:* English



London  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573342  
Print ISSN: 2515-5784  
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 19 | Issue 5 | Compilation 1.0



© 2019, Henry K. Jick, Andrew T. Ngeh & Etame A. Mesang. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), permitting all noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



# De-narrativising the Meta-Narrative of Patriarchy in Gender Politics in African Drama: The Case of Bole Butake and Osonye Tess Onwueme

Henry K. Jick<sup>α</sup>, Andrew T. Ngeh<sup>σ</sup> & Etame A. Mesang<sup>ρ</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Gender is the state of being male or female, but in most cases, it is defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Gender is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men; it is rather constructed socially and culturally. This socio-cultural construct has submerged and suppressed the female folk in all spheres of life. Their literary history is conceived and perceived as subterranean or undercurrent, characterized by the vocabulary of silence, absence and hiding views with one of revelation, uncovering and discovery. The birth of female consciousness has interrogated the place of patriarchy in African society. Patriarchy has created an imbalance situation in African socio-cultural and political system, and this, as presented in African creative works, has disrupted the harmony between the two sexes. This essay argues that, with the polemics and advocacy of women's right, there has been a shift in paradigm in the representation and presentation of female characters in African contemporary works by both male and female authors. The exclusivity of the dominant tradition established by the male folk has raised a plethora of questions regarding the social and cultural construction of women in African literary works. No longer silent or hidden, female characters and female authors take on life and energy and are conceived as heroic, revolutionary, radical, passionate and subversive. Analyzing Bole Butake's *Lake God* (1986) and Osonye Tess Onwueme's *Then She**

*Said It* (2002) from the feminist and deconstructionist standpoints, this essay revealed that, the deconstruction of the discourses of gender politics against androcentrism has placed some African contemporary dramatic texts within the gynocentric perspective. Thus, this study de-narrativizes the meta-narrative of patriarchy and gender politics that represents women as inadequate and irrelevant. Consequently, the two plays unfold certain astute anxieties regarding gender and sex in the various shades of a culture unable to adjust to the swiftly changing socio-political and cultural calculus of the worlds of *Lake God* and *Then She Said It*.

**Keywords:** de-narrativizing, meta-narrative, gender, politics and patriarchy.

**Authorα:** Henry K. Jick University of Bamenda  
Andrew T. Ngeh, Etame A. Mesang.

**σρ:** University of Buea.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As humans, we need to identify ourselves and others in broad and exclusionary or inclusionary terms. The female/ male binary is constructed as a natural occurrence and presumed to be unchangeable. The consequence of this binary opposition has resulted in the social and cultural construct of the woman. And as Kathy E. Ferguson explains; "Having been excluded, historically, from public life, and still occupying largely peripheral and powerless positions when they do enter that realm, women have developed a different voice, a submerged discourse". (23)

This social construct of the woman has sharpened her consciousness to question patriarchy.

A major concern of this essay is to ascertain the fundamental role played by women in African contemporary society with regard to socio-cultural and political change, and by so doing, it attempts to de-narrativize the meta-narrative of patriarchy which has silenced and rendered the woman voiceless. Historically, women have always been excluded from public affairs, thereby giving them only a marginal role. This study, therefore, contends that since the African politician, nationalist and the intellectual who were/ are predominantly men have failed in bringing about the long-awaited change, the women who have been both physically and psychologically alienated can do this. The women in Butake and Onwueme's dramatic works have developed a different voice, and an alternative socialist vision. Their marginalization constitutes a moral force and, their protest and revolutionary rhetoric provide a political voice as will be seen in the two texts studied in this essay.

Reading Butake's *Lake God (1986)* and Onwueme's *Then She Said It, (2002)*, from the feminist and deconstructionist standpoints, this essay revealed that the women in these texts constitute a veritable force to reckon with, with regard to social change in their respective societies. Their radical stands and revolutionary rhetoric constitute a counter-discourse to the meta-narrative of patriarchy. In fact, their actions proffer a moral force in the socio-political sclerosis in both the Cameroonian and Nigerian societies as they take the lead in the fight against neo-colonialism and bad governance

Greed and evil, lust and deceit result in a depraved human society where the strong dominate the weak and the rich manipulate the poor. lords rule over peasants; males rule over females. In Cameroon like in Nigeria, this societal imbalance has disrupted the harmonious co-existence between the men and women because of the patriarchal set up in these countries. Consequently, disappointment, despair,

depravity and deterioration amongst the women have become their hallmarks. All these have ignited a fresh fire and renewed impetus in the oppressed women to rise and protest against their peripheral and marginal existence. They have made demands which are justifiable; they want to have a say in both private and public affairs. Defeat, intimidation, fear and discouragement as will be seen in the analysis that follows, have been overcome by these assertive women.

The social and cultural construct of the woman has always been a source of stimulation, confirmation, insight, self-affirmation, doubt, questioning and reappraisal: it has the potential to alter the perception both sexes see themselves and the world. The radicalism exhibited by the female characters in the two dramatic texts studied in this work as will be seen in the analysis, underscores the reorientation of women's perception of their social and cultural construct, and has also enriched these researchers' potentialities of feminist inquiry.

In Cameroon like in Nigeria which is patriarchal in perception and execution, women live in the shadow of men and are subjected to all forms of oppression and repression. They are perceived and treated by the menfolk as objects which must be used in fostering their activities. Ferguson's contention above is an exemplification of this phenomenon. The two playwrights in their respective dramatic works have crafted and created female characters and entrusted them with the responsibility of championing the socio-political change in their societies. These female characters create an awareness of a counter-narrative and proffer an alternative socio-cultural and political vision in their respective societies. In fact, there is an increasing focus on women as dangerous, passionate, subversive, and as a cause of personal disaster to dictators and bad leaders in their societies.

The attainment of political independence in most African countries has not produced the desired socio-political and economic changes. The euphoria of independence has come to naught.

There is a feeling and consensus amongst the intelligentsia in Cameroon and Nigeria that the independence of Cameroon and Nigeria like the independence of most African countries is a sham because the politicians who were/are predominantly men, have failed to address the problems of the ruled. They have betrayed the indigenous trust given to them by the people. Instead of identifying with the very people who have legitimized their powers, they have rather aligned with their erstwhile masters with the sole intention of impoverishing the masses. This new form of colonialism (neocolonialism) which is perceived as the last stage of imperialism has never been a panacea to any nation; it has never developed any nation. Those who hold the reins of political power (majority of them are men) have failed the populace. From this perspective, playwrights like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Bate Besong, Bole Butake, Loney Monono and Osonye Tess Onwueme in their dramatic works have placed women at the forefront of social change in their respective societies. Women have been ascribed a very fundamental role with regard to social change in their creative imagination.

The study, therefore, establishes as one of its central contentions that unless the peripheralised and inferiorised female gender start devising strategies to create greater spaces, they will forever remain in their impoverished spaces. These occupants of the periphery and the margin are being summoned to a kind of Hegelian immanent critique which will, in Frederick Jameson's words, help society to 'lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps'. Jameson's notion of resistance is encapsulated and encompassed in his ideologeme, understood as the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes. The inherent prescription here is that African society must learn to pull itself up and out of the civilizational quagmire by its own homegrown ingenuity. The woman who was represented as lost, hidden or victimized, the woman who was silent or who had to be kept silent until her

consciousness was suitably raised; the woman who was angry and deranged has now burst forth in unstoppable volcanic force as demonstrated in Butake and Onwueme's dramatic works.

A socio-historical investigation into African Drama as a genre reveals that African playwrights are disappointed with the attitude of the men towards social change. The men are selfish, self-centred and egocentric. Even though the women have a numerical advantage over the men, they only live in the shadows of men. Seen from this perspective, African contemporary playwrights have created a new woman who is assertive and has a revolutionary vision in their dramaturgy.

The women have a more revolutionary and radical vision with regard to social change than the menfolk. On 27<sup>th</sup> of August, 2012 for example, as reported over BBC, women in Togo declared a one-week sex strike as a means to prevail on the political leadership to either resign or put things right.

In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, (1975), it is a woman, Iyaloja who is at the vanguard of both social and cultural change in that society after Elesin Oba fails to fulfill the ritual after the unfortunate intervention of the District Officer, Pilkings. Elesin's failure to fulfill the ritual means the end of the life of that community. His burial with the king would have meant cultural continuity.

In Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), it is Woman, an anonymous character, representing all the Kenyan women who call for Boy and Girl to educate them about the problem of their society. Boy and Girl would eventually enter the courtroom and disrupt the trial of the iconoclastic revolutionary leader of the Mau Mau, Dedan Kimathi. Boy and Girl are dense metaphorical symbols representing the position of the youths in the decolonization process in African.

In Bate Besong's *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, (1992), Woman, Student, Leader of Market Women who symbolize the victims of Agidigidi's exploitation and oppression are very vocal against these social ills. They would constitute themselves into a powerful resistant force and finally dismantle the repressive system personified by Agidigidi. From this panoramic view of some of the major plays in Africa, it is crystal clear that women constitute both a moral force and a political voice in contemporary African politics as represented and presented in African drama contrary to the meta-narrative of patriarchy.

The major aim of this study is to highlight the significant role women play in bringing about socio-cultural and political change in African contemporary society. Hence, the debate in this essay gains greater relevance and contemporariness when gender and patriarchy are placed side by side in this discourse. In characteristic and fully gainful gynocentric stand, the study underscores the important role women play to bring down the prison gates of mental and social incarceration. Frontline female feminist writers turn away from western feminism and root their own brand of the concept in African reality and their own lived experience. Onwueme, for her part, uses her drama, notably *Then She Said It*, to re-define and re-order gender relations in her society. Butake chimes in with the male perspective by admonishing that the duty to achieve freedom and a meaningful future depends on the resolve of the downtrodden and oppressed women to educate society on the imperiousness of self-dependence and self-defense.

Secondly, the study sets out to excavate the elements of the periphery and the margin in a patriarchal setting; that is, the women as part of the subaltern suffer double subjugation. At home they are seen and not heard; at the political level they are marginally represented. Thirdly, this study argues that women in Africa are not inferior in nature but are inferiorized by culture. The fourth objective of this essay is to ascertain the effectiveness of the dramaturgical devices

employed by the two playwrights to enhance their thematic preoccupations.

The ultimate objective of this study is to explore the postmodernist theoretical fantasies of utopia and dystopia, both generally and with respect to androcentrism and gynocentrism in particular, and has argued that, text-based anonymity presents new exciting opportunities for gender dialectics and subjectivity. Rebellious from the social and cultural construct ascribed to them by the man as a result of the established tradition, the women move to response of protest and demand for autonomy with the intentions of breaking free from acquiescence of the social stigma.

For this study to be clearly comprehended and understood, certain key terms are worth defining. This is in keeping with Bernard Fonlon's submission in "The Idea of Literature" that the first principle of any scientific discourse is the definition of one's terms or concepts so as to know "clearly and precisely right from the start" what these terms or concepts mean (179). These terms are "Deconstruction", "Discourse" and "Gender".

According to <https://www.britannica.com>, deconstruction aims to disturb in order to discover. By deconstructing a text, you have to learn to read beyond a text's straightforward content and uncover new meaning and truths. Deconstruction is a form of philosophical and literary analysis, derived from work begun in the 1960s by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or "oppositions", in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophy. Discourse on the other hand refers to communication of thought by words, talk, conversation etc.

Finally, gender is a noun that refers to either of the sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. These definitions will be used in this study as our working definitions.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the past, women were relegated to the background in socio-political and cultural issues because they were considered the weaker sex. The recognition of the social and cultural construction of gender and its coercive nature, gendered subjectivities has been at the centre of feminist literary criticism, enabling it as a discourse to challenge humanist assumption about gender, identity, nature and progress. This has helped to scrutinize the potent mythical formations of femininity and masculinity. Across the centuries, the woman has been the subject of innumerable reconfigurations and with every reinscription comes the necessity of re-reading. In this study, the woman is redefined, reconstructed, and defended as the flawed misogynistic construction of women in general in a male dominant established tradition. As a consequence, this paper deconstructs and debunks this misconception and misrepresentation of the woman and argues that women play an important role in the socio-political transformation of the African society considering their numerical advantage over the men. This leads to the following foundational and fundamental questions: What is the link between women's sexual organs and politics? Can women bring the desired change in the African society? What is the role of women in contemporary African politics? Are women inferior in nature or they are inferiorized by culture? What is the relationship between sexuality and gender? Are women more revolutionary and radical than men? What is the place of violent rhetoric in African contemporary politics?

## III. HYPOTHESIS

Based on the problem and the above questions, the main thrust of the argument of this article is that women in Africa have the potentials to effect the desired change in the socio-political systems. As a consequence, this study sets out to demonstrate the crucial role women play in the socio-political transformation of their society. The

cultural changes that have taken place in both the Nigerian and Cameroonian societies from imperialism, neocolonialism to globalization have affected the ideas about sexual orientation and identity. Women are increasingly conscious politically and culturally. They understand that they are not inferior in nature, but are inferiorized and peripherised by certain cultural and societal practices that must be destroyed. Thus, the radical and revolutionary stands taken by the women in the two dramatic texts studied in this paper are not an accident of history, but an inevitable consequence of it. The men have failed in delivering the goods and the only option is for the womenfolk to intervene. This argument actually forms the kernel of the debate of gender and sexuality in feminist discourse. This debate is relevant given that Cameroon and Nigeria are patriarchal in nature wherein women are excluded from major socio-political and cultural decisions.

## IV. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In interpreting and evaluating Butake and Onwueme's dramatic texts, the feminist and deconstructionist critical theories were adopted. In other words, the analyses of these two texts are informed by the feminist and deconstructionist theories. Critical theories to literary analysis generally expound on either the intrinsic or extrinsic factors of a literary work. Feminist and deconstructionist criticisms have been chosen here because they integrate both. Great works of art are best appreciated when there is a dialectical reconciliation between the two.

The feminist literary criticism is the direct product of the women movement of the 1960s. This movement was, in important ways, literary from the start in the sense that it realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority and their coherence. (Barry, 121) Thus, in feminist criticism in the 1970s, the major effort went into exposing what might be called mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural mind-set in men and women which

perpetuated sexual inequality. Particular attention was given to books written by male writers in which influential or typical images of women were constructed. By this, this study exposes the exclusivity of the dominant tradition and raises questions about the construction of literary history and the aesthetic values that have always seemed to find women's writing lacking. That explains why in this study the authors have chosen one male playwright to see his presentation and representation of women in his text.

Pascal Newbourn E. Nwale (2002) clarifies the tenets of feminism thus:

Feminist ideology purports to create its own better ideas, beliefs, or attitudes. In other words, feminist ideology creates its own counter-consciousness, and eventually its own counterculture. This counterculture comprises a new set of beliefs and a new style of life that is intended or hoped to challenge and eventually expose the inadequacy of the prevailing culture. Only when the ideological core of the prevailing culture is removed and replaced by a new ideological core can lasting and effective change occur, any change less than that involving the ideological core is superficial or transitory. In a nutshell, feminism challenges the prevailing *status quo* and develops a counter-ideology that questions the prevailing *status quo* and then attempts to modify it. Feminism advocates change rather than order. It criticizes the regime in power and existing social and economic arrangements. It advances schemes for restructuring and reordering society. It generates political movements in the form of women's movements in order to gain enough power and influence to effect the changes it advocates. Feminism is an ideology of action for it motivates people to demand changes in their lifestyles and to modify the existing social, religious, political, and economic relations. It also mobilizes its followers and adherents to preserve what they value. (114-137)

Feminist criticism undertook a combative and polemical tone. Again, it questioned the patriarchal society that relegated the women to the background and reduced them to objects of the society.

Deconstruction aims to disturb in order to discover. By deconstructing a text, one has to learn to read beyond a text's straight forward content and uncover new meanings and truths. Deconstruction is a form of philosophical and literary analysis, derived from work begun in the 1960s by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or "oppositions", in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophy. Derrida, who coined the term deconstruction, says that in Western culture, people tend to think and express their thoughts in binary oppositions. Something is white but not black, masculine not feminine, a cause rather than an effect. Through deconstruction, Derrida aims to erase the boundary between binary oppositions and to do so in such a way that the hierarchy implied by the oppositions is thrown to question. Using deconstruction in literature involves the close reading of texts in order to demonstrate that any given text has irreconcilably contradictory meanings, rather than being a unified, logical whole. It thus involves giving new meaning, re-fashioning, re-thinking and re-capturing the dynamics of meaning in a literary text. Analyzing a text from the deconstructionist point of view as DiYani (2000) maintains, demands that we look at the following: (1) the opposite terms that exist in the work and which of the two is the privileged or more powerful term, (2) we look at the textual elements that suggest contradictions or alternative to the privileged or more powerful term, (3) we look at the prevailing ideologies and cultural assumptions in the work and the gaps, inconsistency or contradictions that are revealed in the text.

The feminist theory is necessary in this study because the study deals with sexuality and gender



which are both social and cultural constructs that is greatly influenced by gender, class and politics. Deconstruction on the other hand is relevant in this study because it is used as a constructive dismantling of established traditional concepts of gender, patriarchy and sexuality.

The analysis of this study will be done under two thematic clusters, namely, 'Deconstructing Gender and Sexuality', and 'Gender and Politics'.

## V. DECONSTRUCTING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN LAKE GOD

Bole Butake's *Lake God* was provoked by the Lake Nyos gas disaster that occurred in Nyos in the North West Region of Cameroon in 1986. In fact, this disaster constitutes the pre-text of this text. This was one of the worst disasters in Cameroon history that claimed more than two thousand lives. Given that Literature is the fictionalization of concrete historical evidence, Butake employs this historical reality in his dramaturgy to establish the symbiotic and symbolic relationship that exists between literature and history. Bate Besong has argued that a writer without a sense of history is like a toothless lion when he posits: "A writer who has no sense of history is like a sparrow without wings, for the writer must be the visionary of living truth. In fact, a writer without a sense of history is the Aesopian lion devoid of claws and teeth". (15). Ngugi also reinforces this view in *Writers in Politics: The Politics of Canon* when he argues that "Literature as a creative process and also as an end is conditioned by historical and social forces" (20). And still, Shadrack A. Ambanasom in his *Education of the Deprived* adds that, a literary work is a demonstration of the fact that a people's history and culture are reflected in their literature (2003). Therefore, literature transforms the resources of history as a creative inspiration. Thus, history and fantasy combine to make Butake's play authentic and credible.

This section attempts to deconstruct the pressure to conform to stereotype on gender and sexuality such as: women are docile, passive and are concerned primarily for making of babies. The,

first part of this article argues that the female sexual organs transcend their reproductive function as they are also a political weapon that can be used to effect positive change in the society.

Butake's *Lake God* unfolds certain astute anxieties regarding gender and sex in the various shades of a culture unable to adjust to the swiftly changing socio-cultural calculus of the world. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships and as The World Health Organization (2002) presents, it is 'a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction'. Aspects of sexuality include issues pertaining to biological sex, body image, personality, sexual orientation, values and attitudes, gender identity and roles. Ikpe cited by Adepoju (2005) argues:

Sexuality defines the very essence of one's humanity including one's self-image, being male or female, physical looks and reproductive capacity; that is, sexuality is a natural part of life. It is about the way we are made, how we feel about ourselves, what roles we play in the society and how we procreate. ([http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/adepoju\\_sexed.pdf](http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/adepoju_sexed.pdf)).

Butake in most of his plays always brings in women who use either their sexual organs or their physical body as potent political weapons to threaten the powers- that -be. In *Lake God* the paramount Fon, Joseph disregards the way of his people because of the overwhelming influence Reverend Father Leo has on him. Both Fon Joseph and Father Leo are symbolic representatives of two different institutions. Fon Joseph represents the cultural institution of his people, while Father Leo represents Western culture. However, the Fon ignores the way of his people and the consequences are disastrous; he refuses to perform the rites and sacrifice at the lake and the result is the explosion of the lake

claiming thousands of lives. On the other hand, Father Leo ensures that the imperial culture take precedence over the African culture. The overwhelming impact of cultural imperialism perpetrated and perpetuated by Rev. Father Leo reflects the role of the white man in Africa. He starts by converting the Fon into Christianity since the white man came with the Bible first, and this was followed by the gun. Although Queen Angela, the Fon's wife is rejected by the community, she still advises the Fon to be careful with his esoteric religious fanaticism. It is due to his religious fanaticism that the Fon neglects his traditional and cultural responsibility and the end result is disastrous. The only person who seems to be adamant to this conversion is the "mad" Shey. Hear Father Leo:

*I have converted most of the pagans in this village excerpt the*

*the mad Shey. He is always talking about sacrificing to his lake god. (10)*

Father Leo and Fon Joseph are metaphors of patriarchy in the fictional world of *Lake God*. These two men constitute a dense symbol with metaphorical possibilities. While Father Leo symbolizes colonialism with its patriarchal attributes, Fon Joseph personifies patriarchy in a typical African set-up where the woman is seen and not heard. That is why he ignores the cautionary note from Angela, his wife. When the women in *Lake God* rise against Fon Joseph because of the destruction of their crops by Dewa's and the Fon's cattle, Angela, the Fon's wife intervenes and cautions him to always listen to his people, but Fon Joseph ignores her because she is just a woman. Dewa, the mbororo man who takes care of the cattle deliberately allows the cattle to destroy the women's crops in Ngangba. In spite of complaints and protests from these women, neither the Fon nor Dewa is willing to provide a lasting solution to this problem. Dewa challenges the men to build fences around their farms. Kimbong confirms this "He challenged our men to make fences around our farms or the cattle rearers will take no responsibility for their laziness and poverty". The,

men ignored this challenge posed by Dewa which would cost them their sexual pleasures. (15) Even when Dewa is tied up by the women and taken to the palace, the Fon takes sides with Dewa:

*Fon: Yensi, tell me what crime did this man commit that you bound him hand and foot?*

*Yensi: This is not the first time that the women have brought Dewa and other cattle rearers before the Fon.*

*Chorus: It is not.*

*Fon: But why Dewa today?*

*Nkfusai: All the women who have farms in Ngangba will starve this year. Dewa's cattle have ruined all the corn. The Fon knows that harvest is very near. (14-15)*

Fon Joseph initially ignores the radical orientation of these women which has enriched their potentialities. He considers the destruction of their crops by the cattle as a very trivial issue that two thousand francs could be used as payments for each of the women whose farm has been destroyed. Hear the Fon "...I am afraid. What they demand is not done. I have asked Dewa to pay you people compensation of two thousand francs each..." (18). The women had resolved that Dewa and his cattle must leave the land, but Dewa is being protected by the Fon because the cattle belong to the two of them. This action of the Fon and Dewa would push the women to take very drastic measures that would not only affect the Fon and Dewa, but their husbands as well. The irate women have girded themselves both with the political courage to challenge patriarchy so as to shake off patriarchal servitude and slavery, and the emotional will to discover and uncover new horizons of feeling and being. That vocabulary of silence, absence and hiding vies with one of revelation. To be sure that none of them plays the role of a traitor, an oath of sealed lips is taken by all the women.

## VI. OATH AND SEX AS POLITICAL WEAPONS

The woman's sexual organ can be an instrument of torture and torment. Men like women have biological assignments to fulfill; hence, sexual intercourse becomes a powerful medium through which these emotional needs and expectations are satisfied. Once the urge for sexual intercourse has been rekindled in one, and is not attended to, the qualities, capabilities, self-image, potentials and interests of individuals are frustrated and jeopardized, and concentration and focus are lost. The empowered and conscientised woman is conscious of these phenomena and uses this sexual starvation as a potent political weapon to her advantage to bring the man into the mainstream of the political struggle in her society, and this is exactly what happens in Butake's *Lake God*.

Angered by the decision of the Fon and Dewa, the women organize themselves and take an oath of sealed-lips to starve their husbands sexually and otherwise. Administering this oath under the canopy of the "Fibuen", a female secret cult, Yensi warns and cautions all the women present that they should not succumb to the idle threats of their husbands and fear of being beaten. She advises that those who are chicken-hearted could go to the sanctuary of the Fibuen where they will be empowered to face any eventuality. She says: "They are still others who will easily succumb to threats and the fear of being beaten. You all know where we have built the sanctuary of the Fibuen. We have taken it away from that place which I don't want to call by name. The sanctuary is the refuge for those without a heart. Go there if you cannot look your man in the face and tell him to go and eat shit. (24) Empowered and encouraged by these words, the women resolved as follows: (a) not to give food to their husbands (b) not to have any sexual intercourse with their husbands. The latter is more devastating as almost all the men in the land start complaining because emotional starvation is more dangerous than refusing one ordinary/physical food.

By transcending stereotypical barriers and overcoming inherent contradictions on gender and sexuality, the women have resolved to challenge patriarchy, redefine both their social and cultural construct and defend themselves. The conversation amongst some of the male characters attests their frustrations and helplessness in the wake of this socio-political consciousness and awareness:

*Forgwei: If I tell you that I have not eaten for four days now will you believe? That is the truth. I know it is a shameful act to admit....*

*Maimo: It just happens that my own wife has not given me food in the four last days.*

*Fisiy: My case is a lot more serious; then. Since the day cattle destroyed farms in Ngangba, Yensi has not placed a dish of foo-foo in front of me.*

*Lagham: There is something going on in this land that will deliver an indescribable monster. According to Lagham, if it was only the physical food that they are deprived of, that will not be a problem but they are also refused the food of the loins:*

*Lagham: If it were only hunger of the stomach, a man can browse here and there like cattle. For almost a week now, I have lived on palm wine and roasted cocoyam or plantains. That is not food, but it is something. But it looks like they are also making use of the other weapon, hunger of the loins. (28) (Our emphasis)*

This action by the women raises the men's consciousness and brings them into the mainstream of the struggle to chase away Dewa and his cattle out of their land. The men, for the first time are vocal and outspoken. Sexual starvation has awakened 'the man in them', and they are ready to take action. Listen to Tanto, Bolung, Munjei and Kibow when they approach the Fon. These men are confrontational and uncompromising. They can no longer be intimidated, frightened or manipulated by Fon Joseph's masquerading maneuvers and deception. They are determined to face it:

*Tanto: There is trouble in the land.*

*The cattle are destroying farms.*

*The women are starving their husbands.*

*The Fon must do something. (42)*

*Fon: What do you expect me to do? The land is there for both cattle and crops....*

*Bolung: This is an emergency.*

*Have you seen any of us here?*

*Ever since your betrayal of Kwifon? (42)*

The Fon threatens to call the police for their arrest. "I will call the police! I will send for the gendarmes! This time, all of you will be shot in public. By firing squad". (42)

This action of the women makes the men to start asking the Fon to restore the Kwifon which the Fon had banned. The Kwifon is that traditional regulatory authority that checks the excesses of the Fon; but Fon Joseph had banned it upon ascending the throne because he considers it barbaric and pagan. As if asking for the restoration of this sacred institution is not enough, these men forcefully asked him to go to the lake and perform the rites in order to appease the gods. It is the deprivation of their sexual pleasures that has removed the scales from their eyes; they can now have a clearer political and cultural vision. This sexual starvation forces the men folk to join the struggle.

It could be said that since this action of the women has galvanized the socio-political consciousness of the men and has brought them into the mainstream of the struggle, the women have played a crucial and fundamental role in the text as they proffer an alternative socio-political vision. The men who had hitherto been passive suddenly become very active in socio-political and cultural affairs. With the unbearable pressure mounted on the Fon by both the women and men, and the resuscitation of the Kwifon, the Fon is carried away by the very Kwifon he had, banned,

He is taken toward the lake god. But before they could reach there, there is an explosive sound, and Father Leo and Queen Angela are heard coughing and suddenly crumble to the ground. The lake had exploded because of the Fon's negligence; he had refused to address the burning issues raised by the women. The lake in the text can be perceived as a dense symbol with metaphorical possibilities, as its explosion is a synonym for a political upheaval when political leaders do not heed the calls of the governed. The nation explodes because of the leadership's failure to attend to the need of the governed. What Butake insinuates here is that if women are not consulted in the management of African socio-political and cultural affairs, Africa is doomed because the women have what it takes to bring down a government to its knees. For a society to be liberated, the women must first be liberated from the servitude and shackles of patriarchy and the exclusivity policy championed by the men. The collective participation of both men and women in the liberation of the women means the development of the African society.

In *The Survivors* which is a sequel to *Lake God*, Butake creates a revolutionary woman who uses her body to seduce a police officer and kills him in the process before being arrested. She uses her sexual organ as a bait/trap to eliminate the police officer who is a symbolical and metaphorical representation of patriarchy, dictatorship and oppression. When *Lake God* ends after the explosion, the characters we see are: Woman, Boy, Girl and Man. These are the survivors of the disaster after the explosion in *Lake God*. Woman in *Lake God* is Mboysi in *The Survivors* which is a sequel to *Lake God*.

The women in Onwueme's dramaturgy are politically conscious, assertive, aggressive and uncompromising. Like Butake's women, they are in the vanguard of social change in their society. Onwueme, therefore, also attempts to de-narrativize the meta-narrative of patriarchy. The cultural and social constructs of the woman have been deconstructed as will be seen in the analysis that follows.

## VII. GENDER AND POLITICS IN ONWUEME'S THEN SHE SAID IT

Gender is practically linked to pleasure, power, politics, violence, war, language, social roles, identity and even creativity. As humans, we always have a need to identify ourselves and others in broad and exclusionary or inclusionary terms. The female/ male binary is constructed as a natural occurrence and presumed to be unchangeable. In Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, this binary opposition is broken as the men join the female folk in the fight against bad governance just as it happens in Butake's *Lake God*. Although in Butake's case it is because of sexual starvation that forcefully brings in the men, in Onwueme's case there is an understanding between both genders to free their community from both imperialism and neocolonialism, hence, bodies are degendered and minds are re-gendered. In the Preface to Andrew Ngeh and Etame A. Mesang's book titled, *Drama and Commitment: Degendered Bodies and Re-gendered Minds*, G.D. Nyamndi commenting on Onwueme's text corroborates this point:

This power tussle, this empowerment game, is played out on the field of Frederick Jameson's *ideologeme*, understood as "the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes." This ideologeme, in the case of African societal discourses, is encapsulated in gender equality, patriarchy, race affirmation, the ethical values of hard work and honesty, and in scientific and technological know-how. De-gendering and re-gendering thus become concurrent enterprises intended to imagine and fashion a new social being; one capable of transmuting society and thrusting it in the mainstream of global relevance. (iv)

This "new social being" referred to above is the 'new woman' born out of the socio-political and cultural realities in Africa. This is the rebellious, revolutionary and radical woman. This particular woman has redefined her perspectives, refashioned her world view and rebranded her

ideology. She is no longer the passive, docile, silent, hidden, and voiceless woman; she is assertive, aggressive, militant, vocal and uncompromising. The result of her activism in a political context has placed her in the vanguard of political liberation in Africa. She is no longer silent and passive, but heroic, assertive, passionate and subversive. On 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, it was a woman, 22 years old Alaa Salah, a student of Engineering and Architecture that was at the forefront of the popular uprising in Sudan that exerted pressure on Omar Al-Bashir to bow out of the political scene after thirty years of oppression and repression. In Algeria, another woman, Djamilia Bourhired, the 83-year guerrilla fighter who had fought against French imperialism in Algeria from 1954 to 1962 championed the 'Algeria New Uprising' that forced Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign in March 2019.

Onwueme's *Then She Said It* captures a similar scenario with women acting as the main force behind this societal transformation. This incredible artistic piece presents a fictional Hungarian society, a metaphorical state for Nigeria, ruled through the influence of derogatory or coercive power exerted by both local and foreign authorities: Atlantic, the Foreign Oil Director, Ethiopie, the local Chief and Kainji, the local Government Official. Social contradictions in power are fuelled by the inept activities of the ruling class and multinationals known to have emerged from the mismanagement of the outstanding yield (income) derived from the sales of petroleum products. Uzoechi Nwagbara in "Political Power and Intellectual Activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*", provides an insight into the genealogy of Nigeria's socio-political contradictions when he submits: "The socio-political contradictions in Nigeria are more pronounced in the Niger delta region, the oil producing area, where the nation's wealth is deposited" (3). According to a leading Nigerian professor of sociology, Inya Eteng, "The fundamental contradiction is indeed most pronounced in the oil-bearing communities of the Niger delta minority enclave from where the

country's oil wealth is generated. This fact is well known and highly acknowledged by the appropriating Nigerian state in power, the expropriating multinational oil companies and the expropriated oil bearing communities". (1997: 4) That notwithstanding, in spite of this natural endowment, poverty, environmental degradation, under scholarisation and lack of basic necessities are the hallmarks of the Hungarian society, which is a metaphor for the modern Nigerian society.

In Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, there is evidence of female characters who can think, act, love or exert power. This section debunks the representation and presentation of women as lost, hidden or victimized; the woman who had been silent or who had to be kept silent until her consciousness is suitably raised to an unstoppable volcanic force is now in full control as will be seen in the analysis that follows.

To attain this stage, conscientisation becomes a fundamental ingredient that has ignited fresh fire and renewed impetus in this 'new woman.' According to Liu Keqi in *Conscientisation and the Cultivation of Conscience*, the original word for conscientisation is 'conscientizacao' which has a Portuguese origin, and which is translated in English as "conscious raising". (2014:44). Conscientisation, therefore, provides the stimulus to better understand the root causes of human suffering, dehumanization – the loss of humanity – and how humanization – restoring of humanity – might take place. This helps in building and instilling some critical awareness and consciousness in the oppressed masses; and in this case, the women.

Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, dramatizes the predicament of the masses, especially female characters (like Oshun, Obida, Niger, Benue and Koko) that are more oppressed than the male folk. In this play, Onwueme presents a metaphoric state, Hungaria, in which the masses are under siege from the corruption of its political, civil, and traditional leadership who literally give the inhabitants away for one item: oil rights granted to the westerner called Atlantic. In a bid to free

themselves from their entrapped spaces, the disgruntled and oppressed masses take the centre-stage to air their grievances and project their cause to the international community in an effort to subvert the international forces, and the so-called leaders, who have deprived them of enjoying better societal benefits. The fundamental question the masses ask is simple: "how long can a people whose land produces the richest oil and gas resources, which control local, national and foreign interests, continue to exist in silence, abject poverty and hunger, fuel, water and electricity shortages? (2002: vii) Uzoечи Nwagbara is of the opinion that "the socio-historical dynamics of this fictive work is redolent with the obnoxious practices of the Nigerian local and multinational state authorities in postcolonial Nigeria – of which the Niger Delta is microcosm – where oil is at the root of all unacceptable practices" (2008: 234).

Female characters like Oshun, Obida, Niger, Benue and Koko are those who take the lead in this socio-political struggle in the fictional world of *Then She Said It*. In this labyrinth of human disillusionment and despair, people desperately need to be focused and have adirection in life. Oshun, Obida, Benue, Niger and Koko are there to provide this searchlight. Iniobong Uko in a seminar presentation on the works of Osonye Tess Onwueme argues that, *Then She Said It* is a scathing critique of the oppressive, exploitative and corrupt trends in the devastated land of the imaginary Hungarian socio – economic system. It should be clear to many that Hungaria is a metaphor for the post independent Nigeria. *Then She Said It*, therefore, dramatizes the need for the imperative of protest, resistance and activism on the part of the oppressed, deprived, exploited and marginalized people of Nigeria. (2004: 163)

It is the contention of this study that for any society to be liberated, women must first be liberated because they have a crucial role to play in the socio-political and cultural transformation of their society. Secondly, their numerical advantage constitutes a formidable force that can

move the society forward. In the *Foreword* of their book titled *Drama and Commitment: Degendered Bodies and Re-gendered Minds*, Andrew Ngeh commenting on the fundamental role the female characters in Onwueme's text play contends:

..., essentially, the dramatic actions in both plays are propelled by the paradigmatic and asymmetric power dialectics in postcolonial African politics. On the one hand, there is the ruling class which holds the rein of power, and on the other hand, we have the masses whose argument is that power belongs to the people. The vast majority of the women who constitute the subalternity category experience double subjugation and oppression from which the men must rescue them. Ama Ata Aidoo in *The African Woman Today* ascribes a different interpretation to what African feminism is. She believes in the collective participation of both men and women in liberating the female folk; that is, men and women should collectively engage in liberating the woman because women's liberation means the development of the society. She is of the opinion that African women need not be in competition with men, rather, augmentation of social statuses and liberation from societal norms that stifle their potentials should be a priority. (vii-viii)

Onwueme's duty as a conscientiser is seen in her female characters in the text such as, Oshun, Obida, Niger, Benue and Koko whose endless efforts in arousing critical consciousness cannot be undermined. Not only are they concerned with children's upbringing, they are active participants in societal development. Onwueme's women have assumed the responsibility to conscientise the Hungarian populace of the shortcomings of the neocolonial administration in Hungaria, namely, exploitation, pollution, embezzlement, unemployment, marginalization, rape among others. All these social vices are perpetrated and perpetuated by both the foreign and local authorities symbolized by Atlantic, the Foreign Oil Director, Kainji (The Government Official) and Chief Ethiope, the local authorities. Through the

efforts of Oshun, Obida, Niger, Benue and Koko, the socio-political and economic consciousness of the other women, men and youths is galvanized, and their energy harnessed to confront the parasitic and imperialistic system put in place in Hungaria. They must stand up and fight against bad governance. These women school each other as regard societal happenings; they discuss among themselves prominent societal ills such as embezzlement, exploitation, water and land pollution maneuvered by greedy and callous multinational and local authorities.

In trying to bring out these themes, Onwueme exploits two important dramaturgical devices, namely, dialogue and symbolism. Dialogue is an important dramatic technique that is used to enhance Onwueme's thematic preoccupations. The dialogue that ensues amongst the major female characters who are in the vanguard of the struggle demonstrates their level of critical consciousness and their analytical abilities. Hear them:

*Obida:* Did you hear how much the so-called leaders spent renovating their mansions in the capital city? Billions! Enough to feed this nation.

*Niger:* And here we are

*Benue:* Begging

*Obida:* Just to be able to survive. And look around you. See? They're not even killing us alone. The trees too!

*Niger:* Our farm lands!

*Benue:* And Rivers!

*Niger:* The environment

*Benue:* Polluting

*Niger:* Polluting the land, the rivers, our entire environment

*Women:* All polluted! (2002 :15)

First, this dialogue encapsulates their world-view and their self-concept with regard to their exploitative and deteriorating socio-political conditions. Secondly, it exposes and espouses the

heightened exploitative tendencies of both the local and multinational authorities who pursue private interests at the expense of the masses' social welfare. By exposing ills such as exploitation, environmental degradation and pollution, the playwright raises the critical thinking and consciousness among these women as can be seen above. Apart from being informed of their plight, the perpetrators of this plight are revealed (the leaders): "Did you hear how much the so-called leaders spent renovating their mansions in the capital city? Billions! enough to feed this nation". Hungarian multinational and local authorities (Atlantic, Ethiope, and Kanji) have deprived the masses of life's essentials such as potable water, land, and a healthy environment. The masses suffer because of the leaders' self-centredness; that is the desire to accumulate wealth and power. The sovereign wealth is siphoned and stashed in foreign private accounts abroad. Besides land expropriation (Voice: They took my Land (2002 :66) they engage in draining, drilling and smuggling of oil on the black market for bloated sales, of which the money is carted abroad and kept in private accounts, while the masses suffer from spillage, pollution and lack of kerosene and fuel to quench their immediate desires. However, it did not take long for the discussion above to be translated into concrete action. The critical consciousness demonstrated in the dialogue above is made manifest leading the society to nurse enough outrage against these leaders:

*Obida:* Are they selling?

*Benue:* Tomorrow... (Niger looking at the placard, see? No fuel! No Kerosene! Go away)

*Niger:* You know when they do that?

*Benue:* means there is fuel

*Obida:* scares tactics (14)

Women suffer the most as they are in dire need of such basic necessities like kerosene and firewood for daily use. Exploitation and corruption are resonant in Onwueme's dramaturgy as underscored by Obida: "Fuel it's there (*pause.*) Always deceiving us. Send us away so they can sell at bloated prices to their friends loaded..." (16).

This incident gives rise to a paradoxical situation on the precept that citizens in this petroleum producing region are deprived of basic necessities like petrol and kerosene, while their foreign counterparts are the major beneficiaries.

In addition, women are raped and killed on a daily basis by their leaders, who have accentuated the women's plight. The presence of Atlantic, the neocolonialist and the local authorities, Ethiope and Kanji has been heavily felt in Hungaria with persistent cries of women:

Women: They raped and killed women

Benue: Across the sea

Women: they raped and kill women

Niger: In the land

Women: They raped ...tore up..aaah

Benue: And Still (30)

Women: They're raping, selling and killing us.

Capitalism has become a major concern in the Hungarian society to the extent that women have been transformed into commercial commodities. A case in point is when Obida and Koko are sold by their uncle, chief Ethiope to Atlantic in exchange of money and flashy cars. The above supports Ihayer's view that women were the most victimized during the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria. They suffered violence in all its forms; they were sexually abused and physically assaulted and battered (2014:15). The above reaffirms the realities in the fictional Hungarian state. This rich fictional oil producing state, Hungaria, has become an eye sore with protein deficient women, as fish get fried in the polluted river due to oil spillage. The contrast here is so glaring that one cannot pretend to be blind. Whereas one section of the society (the ruling class) lives in affluence, the other section (the masses) languish in squalor, complete want and neglect. Contrast is used as a literary device to enhance the gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

However, it did not take long for the discussion above to be translated into concrete action. The



critical consciousness demonstrated in the dialogue above is made manifest leading the society to nurse enough outrage against these leaders:

bida: Yes, mother we must stand up for our

Oji/Old Man: (joining them) Rights in this country.

Yes you're not alone, my sister! (2002:15-16)

This is the consequence of a conscious ideological conviction, which holds that the writer is able, through her/his art, to raise mass awareness to the point where the people see the need to fight for an alternative society. For Onwueme, it seems freedom is only possible on the basis of a strong educational foundation. She is of the opinion that, education enlightens, and on the basis of that enlightenment, individuals can decipher what is good and best for them. It is against this backdrop that she encourages the oppressed to stand up and create better opportunities for themselves. Conscientisation can therefore unlock the key to the peoples' potentials, and this is necessary for the liberation struggle. It also reveals post-independence drama as a trajectory of thought based on the idea that conscientisation, as a form of education, is a fundamental instrument that can be used to open wider socio-political and economic societal spaces.

These foreign companies in conjunction with the local authorities are sucking and milking Hungaria dry while children are dropping out of school. An under scholarised society cannot advance in any way. Koko's experience is a pathetic one: Koko: Five years out of school. Robbed of life. Robbed of destiny. And what have I become? A petit trader...look if this is our land who rules it? (*Screams*) Foreigners! Stranger! who controls it?... How can we be in our own homes and be so afraid? Are we not the strangers? strangers in our own land? (2002 :31)

She instills and inculcates revolutionary ideas in the masses against neocolonialists such as Atlantic, whose influence in the society renders

the masses useless and irrelevant, and complete strangers. She raises a kind of critical consciousness that bespeaks of societal contradictions: "How can we be in our homes and so afraid? Are we not the strangers?" These are critical questions that express the revolutionary spirit of the marginalized and peripherised. This question encourages the oppressed to overcome and conquer the culture of fear in them. It does not take very long for Koko's sensitization to have an effect on the oppressed women. Rebellion begins to brew:

Women: Must be stopped!

Obida: The killing...

Women: Must be stopped!

Obida: The profiteering ...

Women: Must be stopped!

Obida: The corruption...

Women: Must be stopped!

Benue: Women. This is our fight...

Niger: Together! This is our fight! (2002:33)

Tension builds up and culminates in the kidnap of the Oil Director (Atlantic) and the setting ablaze of the zone 'A' oil pipeline, a lucrative pipeline used in extracting petroleum products from the people's farm lands to the sales point. It is a pipeline used in smuggling underground minerals on the black market for bloated sales. This only increases the level of poverty of the masses and increases the riches of the capitalists in the fictional Hungarian society. All these result in the protest against the sub-standardization of the collective existence of the Hungarian people with its devastating consequences on both the local and foreign exploiters of the people.

Symbolization is one of the artistic devices by which meaning is conveyed in its ideological essence. The names of the major female characters, the name of the fictional country and the names of both local and foreign directors are symbolic representations of certain ideologies in the text. At the level of the characters' names, we have names like, Niger and Benue. These names symbolize some important rivers in Nigeria. Nigeria got her name from River Niger. River

Benue is also an important river in Nigeria. These two rivers indicate that Nigeria as an independent state rejects cultural imperialism. The two rivers raise consciousness and bring out their cultural identity as Nigerians and not foreigners. Niger and Benue represent the cultural identity of an independent Nigerian state. It is from this perspective that Onwueme places these characters at the forefront of the struggle. Jeremiah S. S. Methuselah in "Engendering Women in Onwueme's Drama: *Then She Said It* Discussed" corroborates this as he says: "*Then She Said It* is set in the oil rich Niger Delta where environmental degradation and misuse of the ecosystem by oil companies deal a heavy blow on the economic activities of the people living there ..." (2010:117). Following this, most of the names like Niger, Benue, and Atlantic, are actual names of rivers, thus construing the play as potentially committed, as it bears semblance with contemporary Nigerian realities.

Hungaria as both a symbol and paradox is reflected in the text in the sense that, Hungaria is from the adjective hungry, yet it is replete and endowed with natural resources, but the people live in abject poverty. The natural resources are exploited without any meaningful developments. In other words, in Hungaria, there is enough for every one's need, but the greed of the local government officials and the multinational companies have rendered this land wretched.

A society with limited income generating resources is bound to be enclosed in societal contradictions, especially when a particular group of people turn to claim full ownership of the country's wealth. This has always resulted in tussles, as one section of the society, the marginalized and peripherised majority, jostles to participate in the sharing of the nation's wealth, while the privileged minority, the ruling class, struggles to maintain its positions as "ordained" benefactors of this wealth. This explains why the oppressive system in this oil producing region, the Niger Delta region, usually provokes conflicts and political violence due to the abuse of power. Umeh

Affiah throws more light on the controversies in Nigerian oil and petroleum companies of the Niger Delta region known to have been responsible for the tensions, conflicts and confusion in post independent Nigeria, when he argues, "The level of poverty, squalor and degradation to which the Niger Delta is subjected, has been ascribed to this historical crisis" (2012: 285). This is further captured in the words of Ray Ekpu when he bemoans: "The story of the Niger Delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives on the banks of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on the farm and die of famine." (2004:10)

This is a fact that Onwueme has used social realities in the Nigerian society in her creative ingenuity, *Then She Said It* to bring out the potentials possessed by women in African contemporary society to bring about the desired socio-political change.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reading Butake's *Lake God* (1986) and Onwueme's *The She Said It* (2002) against the backdrop of the feminist and deconstructionist critical perspectives have revealed the potentials of the very women who have been socially and culturally constructed as voiceless, silent and irrelevant. The alternative vision proffered by the women has brought a radical transformation in both the worlds of *Lake God* and *Then She Said It*. Brought together as they are here in this study, the dramatic texts treated revealed a singularity living unity in terms of their thematic realism as revealed in the analysis in this study. These texts under reference mark the successive stages of a single combat which develops and broadens, but the objective and the means of which had been seen and determined from the beginning. The two playwrights have initiated a new revolutionary approach and radical vision to the socio-political reality in Africa where the women are at the vanguard of the socio-political transformation of their society. To present the question of the

colonized and to solve it, the playwrights are in a privileged position: their consciousness of it, the clarity of their vision, strengthens the firmness of their commitments as has been demonstrated in this analysis.

It can be said that Butake and Onwueme in their respective dramatic plays, *Lake God* and, *Then She Said It*, have demonstrated that women are relevant and vibrant in the socio-political dynamics of their communities. They have used the power of their physiognomy, sex and their sexual organs, and their political awareness to intimidate and scare both traditional and government officials who have reduced their people to objects and sub-humans. The role played by the women in these two texts proffers an alternative socialist consciousness; their marginalization provides a moral force and their protest proffers a political voice in African contemporary politics. Both the cultural and political undertones of the two texts not only signify the declaration of political and cultural space for women, private and public, but the intrusion of women into spaces previously considered only to be the spheres of men.

This study has strongly suggested the power of textual representations and the deconstruction of women because the differences between the two sexes do not matter if there is degendering of the bodies and regendering of the minds in order to confront the real enemies of the state and the people.

Finally, Butake and Onwueme's dramatic texts serve as a living testimony to the women's yearnings, fears, potentials, hopes and aspirations in a radically evolving world, a world dominated by the very assertive and vocal women. The two plays unfold certain astute anxieties regarding gender and sex in the various shades of a culture unable to adjust to the swiftly changing socio-political and cultural calculus of the world,

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

1. Butake, Bole. *Lake God and Other Plays*. Yaoundé: Editions CLE, 1999.

2. Onwueme, Osonye T. *Then She Said It*. Lagos: African Heritage Press, 2002.

### Secondary Sources

3. Adepoju, Adunola. 2005. 'Sexuality Education in Nigeria: Evolution, Challenges and Prospects' in *Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series 3*, March 24, 2005, <http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhss/adepo-jusexed.pdf>
  4. Amadiume, Ifi. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books.
- ### Africa News.com
5. Aidoo, Ama Ata. "Interview with Maxine McGregor" In *African Writers Talking*. Eds. Dennis Duerden and Cosmos Piertse. London: Heinemann, 1972.
  6. Ambanasom, Shadrach A. *Education of the Deprived*. Yaoundé: Yaounde University Press, 2003.
  7. Ambe, N. Hilarious. *Change Aesthetics in Anglophone Cameroon Drama and Theatre*. Bayreuth: Pia Thiemann and Eckhard Breitingner, 2007.
  8. Anderson, Clinton W. Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation ([www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/publications/](http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/publications/))
  9. Aniekwu, Nkolika Ijeoma. 2006. *Converging Constructions: A Historical Perspective on Sexuality and Feminism in Post-Colonial Africa* *African Sociological Review*, 10, (1), 2006, pp. 143-160.
  10. Aoki, Keith.. *Space Invaders: Critical Geography, the "Third World" in International*, 2000
  11. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
  12. Bottomore, T.B.. *Elites and Society*. New York: Penguin Books, 1964.

13. D'Boi, Fire Eye. 2010. *African News.com*. Gender Queer: Beyond the Binaries: homosexuality in pre-colonial Africa. 22 February, 2011.
14. DiYanni, Robert.. *Drama: An Introduction*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
15. Ekpu, Ray. The ND Conundrum (2), 25<sup>th</sup> October 2004. (p.10).
16. Epie, Alobwed. "The Concept of Anglophone Literature". In Lyonga et al (eds) *Anglophone Cameroon Writing*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth University, 1993. (p.51)
17. Ferguson, Kathy. E. *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.
18. Fonlon, Bernard. "Idea of Literature". *Abbia*. (ed) Bernard Fonlon. Yaoundé: CEPER, 1982.
19. Foucault, Michael. *The History of Sexuality*<http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/sia/mar04/mar04.pdf>,1976-1984.
20. FUH, Divine' *Quand La Femme Se Fache'*: Popular Music and Constructions of Male Identity in Cameroon, paper presented at The Institute of Social Anthropology/Centre for African Studies, University of Basel, Switzerland
21. Frantz, Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Group, 1967.
22. Freire, Paulo. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1970.
23. Ikpe, E. B, "Human Sexuality in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective" in AFSRC, *Human Sexuality in Nigeria: Understanding Human Sexuality Seminar Series No. 1*, Lagos: African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre. *Law and Critical Race Theory*, 45 VILL. L. REV. 913, 925,2004.
24. Keqi, L. D. *Conscientisation and the Cultivation of Conscience* (Vol. 3). Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2014.
25. Little, William and Fowler, H .W *The Oxford Universal Dictionary*. London: Clarendon Press, 1961.
26. Longwood, Merle. 'Male Sexuality: Moving Beyond the Myths' Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.[www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org). April 13, p. 363,1988.
27. Lorde, A.."Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Zami/Sister Outsider/under song*,1982.
28. Madunagu, E.Bene. Sexuality in Africa Regional Perspective paper *Presentation at the DAWN Panel on "Africa Regional Integration and Women" at the World Social Forum (WSF) Nairobi, Kenya. January 22,2007*.
29. Makuchi, Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Methuselah, Jeremiah. (2010): "Engendering Women in Onwueme's Drama : *Then She Said It Discussed*." In *Nigerian Theater Journal* 112-128, 1997.
30. McFadden, Patricia. 'Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice' in *Feminist Africa: Changing Cultures*. Issue 2,2003.
31. Methuselah, Jeremiah. "Engendering Women in Onwueme's Drama: *Then She Said It Discussed*." In *Nigerian Theater Journal* 112-128,2010.
32. Mwale , Pascal Newbourn. 'Where is the Foundation of African Gender? The Case of Malawi' in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 11(1):114-137, *University of Malawi, Malawi*,2002.
33. Ngeh, Andrew T "The Alternative Socialist Consciousness in Anglophone Cameroonian Drama: Bole Butake's Dramatic Vision." In Pradip Lahiri (ed) *Literary Miscellany*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications Pp.32-53,.2013.
34. "Socialist Realism and the Dialectics of Violence in Anglophone Cameroonian Drama: Bate Besong and Bole Butake's Dramatic Vision." In Harpreet Bahri et al (eds) *Creative Forum*. New Delhi: Bahri Publications. Pp.103,2013.
35. Ngeh, Andrew and Mesang, A. Etame. *Drama and Commitment: Degendered Bodies and R-gendered Minds*. Mauritius: Scholars' Press, 2019.
36. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Mugo G. Micere. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. London: Heinemann, 1976.

37. Nwagbara, Uzoechi. "Political Power and Intellectual Activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*." In *Nebula* 5.4, 246-247, (Retrieved December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008) [www.nobleworld.biz/images/Nwagbara.pdf/](http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Nwagbara.pdf)
38. Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the King's Horse Man*. London: Heinemann, 1975.
39. Meredith, Moore. Private vs. Public: Female Sexuality in Victorian Culture. Victorians, Brown University (<http://www.victoriaweb.org/courses>)
40. Merle Longwood in 'Male Sexuality: Moving Beyond the Myths' [www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org).
41. Tamale, Sylvia. 'Eroticism, Sensuality and "Women's Secrets" among the Baganda: A Critical Analysis' in *Feminist Africa*, Issue 5, 2005.

*This page is intentionally left blank*