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Subaltern Voices: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Beatrice in Purple Hibiscus

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Abstract

“Can the Subaltern Speak?” is a central issue in Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory and a broader question awaiting exploration. In postcolonial Nigeria, the subaltern women suffered dual oppression from British colonial culture and indigenous patriarchal structures. This paper adopts Spivak's postcolonial feminist perspective to analyze Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, focusing on the female character Beatrice. It delves into the oppression and resistance of subaltern women as depicted in the novel, highlighting the plight of Third World subaltern women and their inability to speak. The study argues that, in the face of this voicelessness, Adichie assumes the role of a spokesperson for the subaltern, actively engaging in dialogue with history. Through her work, she seeks to re-present the voices of subaltern women, showcasing her efforts to advocate for the Third World women.

Keywords: Postcolonial Feminism, The Subaltern, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Purple Hibiscus.

Introduction

The theme of gender issues is a prominent aspect of Purple Hibiscus. In the novel, Adichie distinctly demonstrates her firm stance on gender issues, presenting the double marginalization faced by Third World women represented by Beatrice. The narrative depicts the oppression they endure and their subsequent resistance. Additionally, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie sets the story in the late twentieth century, over 30 years after the Nigerian Civil War, yet the legacies of the war and colonial occupation remain evident. The plight of Nigerian women is closely tied to their postcolonial historical context. As Lin Shuming argues, “Patriarchy is not the only culprit oppressing women; gender issues should be examined within the context of factors such as nation, race, geographical boundaries, imperialism, transnational corporations, and the dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized” (15). This is precisely the focus of postcolonial feminism.

As a representative of postcolonial feminist theorists, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak focuses particularly on the condition of Third World women, specifically the “gendered subaltern.” Actually, Spivak's criticism integrates aspects of deconstruction, Marxism, and feminism, leading her to be commonly referred to as a "feminist Marxist

deconstructionist" (Spivak ix). As a deconstructionist critic, Spivak's skepticism of identity and universality, along with her advocacy for plurality and heterogeneity, leads her to critique Western liberal feminism. In her essay "French Feminism in the International Frame," she challenges prominent Western feminist figures like Julia Kristeva, rejecting the idea of a universal feminism with global applicability. (184) Spivak advocates for examining gender discrimination through the lens of its historical determinants and emphasizes analyzing the political and economic factors influencing the condition of Third World women. In essence, Spivak focuses on the internal differences among women that are often overlooked by traditional feminism. She argues that these internal differences may sometimes be greater than those between women and men. And she further advocates for the contextualization of gender, emphasizing the importance of analyzing gender issues within specific cultural and historical contexts (Cao 24). Purple Hibiscus is set in postcolonial Nigeria, and when discussing the oppression and resistance of female characters such as Kambili, Beatrice, Aunty Ifeoma, and Amaka, one must consider the historical and cultural factors of the time. Moreover, the novel's author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is herself a feminist. In her feminist manifesto We Should All Be Feminists, Adichie describes herself as a "Happy African Feminist" (10). This perspective also aligns closely with Spivak's principles of postcolonial feminism, which indicates a strong compatibility between the theory and the text.

Using Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory, this study examines Purple Hibiscus with a particular focus on the oppression and resistance experienced by Beatrice. The paper argues that Beatrice, as a typical "subaltern", endures dual marginalization, suffering multifaceted oppression from both colonialism and patriarchy in postcolonial Nigeria. Despite her resistance and the heavy price she pays, Beatrice's ultimate act of killing Eugene remains unacknowledged, underscoring the subaltern's dilemma of being unable to speak. Within this framework, the role of the spokesperson becomes critical. A true spokesperson must not only "represent" the subaltern but also actively "re-present" them. This is precisely the endeavor Adichie undertakes in Purple Hibiscus. By focusing on the lives of subaltern women, she seeks to uncover stories of their resistance against dominant narratives, thereby highlighting their living conditions and gradually paving the way for these women to reclaim their voices.

1. The Subaltern and Double Marginalization: Beatrice's Plight

In Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988) Gayatri Spivak raised the question of voice, in which she analyses the relations between the discourses of the West and the possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman (271). Spivak argues that the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy erases the voices of subaltern women. In Purple Hibiscus, Beatrice serves as a poignant embodiment of a woman ensnared by such dual oppression, marking her as a quintessential subaltern figure.

The term "subaltern" was first introduced by Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci, referring to marginalized or subordinate social groups within European society, typically the proletariat or rural laborers (Moore-Gilbert et al. 28). From its inception, the concept carried an implicit notion of voicelessness. Building on Gramsci's foundation, Spivak and the Subaltern Studies Group, led by Ranajit Guha, expanded the term to encompass those excluded from dominant political discourse. While subaltern groups may belong to varied social classes, they share a collective experience of marginalization. Spivak underscores the adaptability of the term "subaltern," arguing that its definition can be contextualized as needed. Her analysis focuses particularly on the plight of subaltern women, whom she portrays as doubly marginalized—regardless of her specific location—due to both relative economic

disadvantage and gender subordination (Moore-Gilbert et al. 28). Describing the female subaltern as "the Other of the Other", Spivak considers the female subaltern to be the most severe victim. In Purple Hibiscus, Beatrice exemplifies such a female subaltern, facing dual oppression from racial discrimination and gender subjugation.

In Purple Hibiscus, the racial oppression faced by Beatrice is primarily manifested through the spiritual control exerted by Catholicism and education. As Azumurana points out that "internalized family problems are usually inextricably connected with public actions" (137). Despite Nigeria's independence from Britain for 30 years, the lingering effects of colonialism have infiltrated and eroded every aspect of society, particularly affecting women. Eugene, educated by Western missionaries from an early age, embodies the values of colonial culture. As a devout Catholic and staunch Eurocentric believer, he embraces western values and European religion and seeks to impose these values onto his family. He demands strict adherence to Catholic rituals, requiring his wife and children to conform to religious norms without question. Any disobedience from his wife is met with brutal beatings and abuse. Because whipping among the Chimborazo community was not perceived as 'punishment, but rather as a purification of sin and a means of transforming one's internal moral disposition. (Lyons 97) Eugene justifies his violent actions as a form of redemption for them. This explains why Eugene frequently resorts to violence against Beatrice, Kambili, and Jaja. As illustrated in the second section, Speaking with Our Spirits, Beatrice, feeling unwell, says to Eugene, "Let me stay in the car and wait, biko," Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. "I feel vomit in my throat" (Adichie 22 Hereafter cited in the text with only numbers). Eugene, insisting on family tradition, refuses her request to forgo visiting Father Benedict after Mass. Despite Beatrice's compliance, she suffers a severe beating, resulting in a miscarriage. Upon returning from the hospital, Beatrice downplays the incident, telling her children, "There was an accident, the baby is gone." Her silence in the face of domestic violence epitomizes the subaltern's inability to voice her oppression. Eugene uses religion as a means to strictly control Beatrice's physical actions. As Oyěwùmí observes in The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses, "I treat the process of Christianization as an integral part of the colonial process" (123). This observation highlights how religion, exemplified in Eugene's actions, becomes a mechanism of control in the postcolonial era. From above, we can say Eugene uses religion as his weapon to enact another form of so-called "colonial oppression" against African women.

Additionally, Eugene also manifests colonization in subtle ways. For example, in the first part of the novel, Breaking Gods, it is noted that "he hardly spoke Igbo…he did not like us to speak it in public. We had to sound civilized in public, he told us; we had to speak English" (13). Furthermore, Eugene also forbade his family from interacting with Papa-Nnukwu, whom he deems a heathen. His rejection of Igbo language and culture exemplifies the insidious reach of colonialism into personal and familial spaces. Eugene extends this colonial language into his household, using religion as a facade and violence as a means to continue this colonial discourse. Eugene's disdain for his own country's language and religious culture reflects the lingering superiority complex of colonial culture. As a product of colonial influence, Eugene embodies these residual effects. As Azuike aptly states, "Africans developed a master-servant colonial mentality and a self-denigrating inferiority complex that has persisted in their psyche" (81). But the colonialists' condescending attitude toward Nigerian language and religious traditions should be critically examined, as it reveals how the so-called mission of spreading civilization served as a justification for colonial invasions. Once established, this mission provided colonialists with a moral pretext for systematic exploitation (Luo and Liu 140). Spivak, in numerous essays, critiques this Western superiority, particularly emphasizing the arrogance and misrepresentation embedded in Western academia and culture's attempts to "speak for" the Other. She

highlights how such efforts often unintentionally reinforce the inequalities between colonizers and the colonized. In postcolonial Nigeria, these inequalities manifest as the racial and cultural discrimination endured by subaltern groups, with Eugene representing a tragic embodiment of the colonial legacy.

Besides racial discrimination, Beatrice also endures gender oppression under the Igbo patriarchal system. This oppression is primarily manifested through domestic violence and social expectations in gender relations. Throughout the novel, Beatrice endures relentless physical abuse. Kambili's descriptions of her mother's injuries vividly capture the extent of this violence. In the first section, Breaking Gods, Kambili observes, "Her swollen eye was still the black-purple color of an overripe avocado" (10). Similarly, in the second section, when Kambili and Jaja return from their aunt's house, they once again notice that "Her face was swollen, and the area around her right eye was the black-purple shade of an overripe avocado" (127). Despite such visible suffering, Beatrice, as a subaltern woman, remains almost entirely silent. Her silence is depicted through Kambili's narrative: "She polished figurines each time I heard the sounds from their room, like something being banged against the door" (11). After each incident of violence, Beatrice does not articulate her pain. Instead, she retreats into silence, channeling her emotions into the repetitive act of polishing figurines.

Beyond physical violence, Beatrice also endures reproductive oppression in a patriarchal society that prioritizes lineage and male heirs. As the mother of two children, Beatrice is still compelled to give birth as the members of the umunna urge Eugene to have children with someone else (10). The umunna refers to the patrilineal and phallocentric system in the Igbo community, with the male as the leader of the lineage. Within the Igbo community, Eugene, as a successful businessman, is expected to have many sons to ensure the continuity of his line. As Eugene's wife, Beatrice becomes the "culprit." However, Beatrice suffers multiple miscarriages due to Eugene's violence. Rather than acknowledging his culpability, others attribute her miscarriages to supernatural interference: "Somebody had tied up my womb with ogwu" (20). These miscarriages not only inflict physical harm on Beatrice but also bring her immense reproductive pressure. At the same time, she lives with the constant worry of being abandoned by her husband. This concern is reflected in the novel when she recalls:

> *"The members of our umunna even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us" (21).*

Beatrice's inner thoughts reveal not only the tragic fate she faces, but also the cruel reality that women are reduced to reproductive machines. Even educated women, such as university graduates, are no exception. Consequently, women's reproductive issues, which are inherently private and tied to personal experiences, are dragged into the public sphere. Women's fundamental reproductive rights are denied, and their bodies are controlled by the discourse of the entire patriarchal society. Under the brutal gender oppression of Eugene and the patriarchal society, Beatrice severely suffered, which leads to her "loss of voice." As in the novel, both Kambili and Beatrice speak very little, they often communicating through silent, inner dialogues.

Beatrice faced the dual oppression of colonialism and patriarchy, resulting in her "silence," which epitomizes the predicament Spivak argues: "The subaltern cannot speak."

2. Insidious Resistance: Beatrice's Rebellion and Its Limitations

Faced with such dual oppression, Adichie does not allow Beatrice to remain silent indefinitely. In the final part of the novel, Beatrice undertook a drastic act of rebellion by poisoning Eugene, her oppressor. However, this act of defiance comes at a profound cost. Jaja, her son, assumes the role of a scapegoat, taking the blame to shield his mother, which leads to Beatrice's act of resistance remains unacknowledged, her agency overshadowed by Jaja's sacrifice. Even when Beatrice attempts to confess her actions by writing letters to newspapers, her words are dismissed and disbelieved. Despite the efforts of subaltern women to resist and make their voices heard, their voices are re-encoded within the dominant discourses. As Spivak argues "the subaltern cannot speak", emphasizing that the subjectivity of subaltern women is often constructed and erased within the web of ideologies and historical discourses that define them. Beatrice's resistance exemplifies this conundrum, highlighting the persistent barriers subaltern women face in reclaiming their autonomy.

2.1 Gradual Defiance: Insidious and Subtle Resistance

Beatrice is often seen as relatively passive figures, characters that are acted upon rather than agents of their own actions. However, this view overlooks Beatrice's resistance, which, although initially gradual, represents a process that culminates in her ultimate act of resistance: the killing of Eugene. Eugene embodies both colonial and gender oppression in the novel, so his death carries profound metaphorical significance.

Beatrice's ultimate act of defiance—poisoning Eugene—serves as a metaphorical victory over colonial domination. Eugene, as a staunch enforcer of Western values and authority, symbolizes the lingering effects of colonialism on his family. Throughout years of violence inflicted by Eugene on Beatrice and their children, her silence and endurance fail to alter their oppressive reality. Instead, the suffering deepens: Beatrice continues to suffer miscarriages, her daughter Kambili nearly dies from Eugene's violent beatings, and her son Jaja openly defies Eugene, pushing their family to the brink of collapse. Ultimately, after a brutal beating that results in another miscarriage, she ends Eugene's tyranny by poisoning his tea. In addition, the tea itself holds symbolic significance in the novel, representing a Western habit, and thus serving as a metaphor for colonial culture. Through this act, Beatrice transcends her role as a victim, embodying the resistance of a subjugated people reclaiming their agency.

In her defiance of patriarchal oppression, Beatrice begins asserting her agency in subtle yet meaningful ways. In the second section, Speaking with Our Spirits, she requests to stay behind in the car while Eugene attends a church service, saying, "Let me stay in the car and wait, biko … I feel vomit in my throat" (22). Though a small act, this moment reflects her desire to reclaim control over her body and decisions, challenging Eugene's dominance. This aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in The Second Sex that "for [a] woman there is no other way out than to work for her liberation" (664). Beatrice's request, while seemingly minor, marks a turning point in her resistance, foreshadowing her eventual decisive action against oppression. Towards the end of the third section of the novel, Beatrice confesses to poisoning Eugene, revealing the deliberate and prolonged nature of her plan: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" (189). This act of poisoning requires immense courage and determination, as it is not an impulsive decision but a deliberate and prolonged process. Her persistence in carrying out the poisoning underscores her determination to break free from the relentless repression she endures. This journey from tentative resistance to radical action demonstrates Beatrice's growing defiance against patriarchal oppression and her pursuit of freedom.

These acts of resistance highlight that Beatrice is far from passive or complicit within her oppressive environment. Her actions demonstrate a profound striving for freedom and a desire to protect her children. However, as a subaltern woman, Beatrice's voice remains unheard and unacknowledged within the dominant discourses. Her ultimate victory, though significant, is overshadowed by the societal structures that continue to marginalize her efforts.

2.2 The Limits of Resistance: Silenced by Dominant Discourses

Adichie foreshadows Beatrice's resistance early in the novel, most notably through the breaking of the figurines. These figurines, which Beatrice meticulously cleans after Eugene's violent outbursts, serve as a symbol of her internalized submission and an outlet for coping with her humiliation. When Kambili asks if she will replace the broken figurines, Beatrice responds with a resolute "no." This is a deliberate attempt by the author to make sure that the woman does not always look for means of hiding the humiliation and subjugation she passes through but rather to look for a way to say no to all forms of ill treatment as evident in the novel. (Ann 431) This act signals her awakening consciousness and persistent effort to assert her voice, even as a subaltern woman.

However, Beatrice's ultimate act of resistance, the poisoning of Eugene, remains unacknowledged and overshadowed. When Beatrice informs Kambili and Jaja over the phone about their father's death, Kambili's immediate reaction is, "Did he get a letter bomb? Was it a letter bomb?" After Eugene's autopsy reveals poisoning, Jaja acts as a scapegoat and takes the blame for his mother, ending up in prison. Following Jaja's imprisonment, Beatrice openly admits to poisoning Eugene, telling others that she killed him and even writing letters to newspapers. Yet, no one listens to her (297). The reactions of Kambili, Jaja, and others demonstrate that Beatrice's voice is dismissed and unheard. The narrative emphasizes Beatrice's erasure through the portrayal of her after Jaja's imprisonment:

> *They think grief and denial—that her husband is dead and that her son is in prison—have turned her into this vision of a painfully bony body, of skin speckled with blackheads the size of watermelon seeds. Perhaps it is why they forgive her for not wearing all black or all white for a year. Perhaps it is why nobody criticized her for not attending the first-and second-year memorial Masses, for not cutting her hair. (297)*

Beatrice's confession is perceived as a sign of mental instability caused by grief over Eugene's death and Jaja's imprisonment. However, her refusal to cut her hair or attend memorial Masses represents a form of defiance. As Christine Ohale notes, "The Igbo widow is often subjected to unutterable cruelty to which she is expected to fully comply." (4) However, Beatrice rejects not only the cultural norms of mourning that facilitate this abuse, but also the social expectations of widowhood: the wearing of a special mourning cloth in honor of the deceased, attending memorial services and cutting her hair. Through this act she makes a public statement about Eugene's reputation, suggesting that though he was a respectable man in society, he was nevertheless a terror in the home. If a widow's loud wail helps her deceased husband's soul to rest in peace, then Beatrice's blatant refusal to mourn can be read as a form of punishment of Eugene's soul. (Nwokocha 374) Her refusal to adhere to conventional mourning rituals represents a subversive act of resistance, however, her behavior is misinterpreted as mere "mental instability" caused by excessive grief.

Furthermore, Eugene's death is co-opted by political narratives. Following the Head of State died, pro-democracy

groups called for a government investigation into Eugene's death, insisting that the old regime was responsible. Eugene's death is thus reframed as a political assassination by the old regime. Once again, Beatrice's act of resistance is overshadowed by dominant discourses shaped by the political environment. Beatrice's speech and actions as a subaltern woman remain unrecognized within the mainstream systems of political representation. The words and actions of subaltern women are either suppressed by colonial and patriarchal discourses or reinterpreted within their frameworks. (Du 83) Beatrice's efforts to assert her voice are thus consistently muted or misinterpreted, highlighting the limitations of resistance within dominant discourses.

Through Beatrice's silenced rebellion, Adichie underscores the profound challenges faced by subaltern women. Their acts of defiance, no matter how courageous, are often dismissed or misunderstood within the dominant discourses.

3. Re-presenting the Subaltern Voices: Adichie's Role as a Spokesperson

Adichie, as a spokesperson for subaltern women, plays a pivotal role in "re-presenting" their stories, which are typically excluded from dominant discourses. However, Adichie faces the challenge of being both a native writer and an intellectual influenced by Western education. Despite this, Adichie strives to recover the histories of the subaltern, offering a more authentic portrayal while acknowledging the difficulty of fully re-presenting subaltern subjectivities.

3.1 Adichie's Efforts to Re-present Beatrice

In Purple Hibiscus, Beatrice's experience as a subaltern woman reveals the significant gap and misalignment between the representation of female identity in mainstream discourses and the autonomy of women's subjectivity. The freedom of subjectivity for subaltern women remains a luxury, an imagined ideal. Deprived of agency and a platform to speak for themselves, subaltern women must rely on others to re-present their realities. In this context, the stance of the spokesperson becomes crucial. A spokesperson must not only "represent" the subaltern, but also "re-present" them. According to Spivak, subaltern groups are defined as such because they lack self-determination and remain in a position of passivity, needing to be both represented and spoken for. Thus, the position of their spokesperson is vital. Adichie, as a spokesperson for subaltern women in Purple Hibiscus, assumes this vital responsibility.

The distinction between political representation and aesthetic representation is critical here. Literature, as Spivak asserts, plays a pivotal role in the production of cultural representation (113). Yet, the act of representing marginalized groups often risks becoming a form of "self-representation" (Luo and Liu 4). That is to say, in many cases, political representation does not genuinely capture the subjectivity of the Other but instead reflects the subjectivity of the spokesperson. Adichie, however, is deeply conscious of this challenge, particularly the exclusion of Third World women from mainstream feminist discourses. In her novel, she highlights the lived realities of subaltern women like Beatrice, exposing narratives silenced by dominant frameworks and giving these women a voice.

In Purple Hibiscus, Adichie employs Kambili as the first-person narrator, unfolding the story from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old girl. Through Kambili's eyes, the reader witnesses the aftermath of domestic violence against Beatrice—her swollen injuries, the muffled sounds of slamming doors. This narrative strategy enhances the authenticity and credibility of the portrayal, allowing the subaltern woman's experience to emerge with greater resonance in a postcolonial context.

Moreover, Adichie departs from traditional historical narratives that prioritize great men and grand events. Instead, she shifts the narrative to the real-life circumstances of ordinary people, especially marginalized groups subjected to oppression. Since any historical narrative is inherently a discourse closely tied to power, the ruling class that controls such discourses invariably excludes subaltern women from mainstream narratives. The novel illustrates this point: Beatrice writes to newspapers confessing to killing Eugene, but no one believes her. The voices of subaltern women are not acknowledged by dominant discourses. Similarly, literature controlled by mainstream ideologies often fails to authentically represent the lived experiences of subaltern women. In contrast, Adichie's Purple Hibiscus focuses on the lives of subaltern women, excavating narratives of their resistance to dominant discourses. It powerfully counters mainstream historical and political discourses that attempt to silence and erase subaltern women's voices.

For a long time, human rights discourses excluded anyone who was not white, male, and middle-class, affirming particular meanings and values as universal. This exclusionary framework often leads to cultural appropriation, where, as Moraga points out, "the white writing about Native peoples or cultures displaces the Native writer and appropriates the culture instead of proliferating information about it. The difference between appropriation and proliferation is that the first steals and harms; the second helps heal breaches of knowledge" (xxi). Similarly, Western feminist criticism has frequently centered on the experiences of white, middle-class women, marginalizing Third World women by interpreting their lives through a Western lens. Such approaches risk silencing subaltern women while claiming to represent them. Adichie, however, belongs to the latter group. As a native writer, to an extent, she avoids this issue, offering a more authentic and nuanced representation of the female subaltern.

3.2 Beyond Re-presentation: The Challenges of Subaltern Speech

Although Adichie, as a native writer, can to some extent avoid the problem of white female writers or mainstream feminism silencing the voices of subaltern women in the Third World, she is still an intellectual educated within the framework of Western elite culture. Adichie moved to the United States at the age of nineteen to pursue her education, which means her perspectives are intertwined with Western or colonial systems of power and knowledge. This suggests that studies of the subaltern are inevitably influenced by colonial discourses and practices. However, since subaltern women cannot speak for themselves and remain in a position of being acted upon, they must rely on representation. If intellectuals, such as writers, do not attempt to recover the histories of the subaltern, these marginalized groups risk being permanently erased from history. This underscores the difficulty of reaching a genuine subaltern consciousness. What Adichie does, in essence, is to speak for the subaltern; yet the subaltern themselves remains unable to voice their own stories. This is especially pertinent in a post-colonial nation like Nigeria, where imperialist forces are deeply entangled with racial oppression and gender subjugation. In Purple Hibiscus, Beatrice, as a subaltern woman, resists through her ultimate act of rebellion—killing Eugene—but her voice is obscured by dominant political and patriarchal discourses. Even after she writes to the newspaper confessing to Eugene's murder, no one believes her. Beatrice serves as a quintessential example of how subaltern

women become victims of both colonial and patriarchal domination. Faced with such paradoxes, Spivak advocates for a deconstructive approach that exposes the dangers of mainstream representations, emphasizing the importance of attending to the diverse differences within subaltern groups rather than oversimplifying their subjectivities. In Nigeria, a country marked by complex ethnic, religious, and historical dynamics, such a focus on diversity is particularly critical.

Adichie, despite her intellectual entanglement with Western systems of knowledge, demonstrates a persistent effort to bridge the gap between representation and the lived realities of Nigerian subaltern women. Drawing from Spivak's notion of "epistemic violence", which means colonizers are portrayed as messengers bringing "civilization" to the colonized, while the subjectivity of the colonized is constructed as that of uncivilized "savages" awaiting civilization and progress (Du 81). Adichie approaches her storytelling with a sense of responsibility that reflects a deliberate engagement with the voices and lives of marginalized women. Her narratives aligns with Bell Hooks' vision of "strategies of communication and inclusion", taking diversity seriously by situating her characters within the complex intersections of class, gender, and colonial histories. (Hooks 24) In doing so, Adichie highlights the unique challenges faced by Nigerian women without speaking for them in ways that might perpetuate the very silencing she seeks to counteract.

Adichie's deliberate focus on subaltern women's resilience and resistance showcases her commitment to what Spivak calls the "systematic unlearning" of privilege. Adichie does not claim to offer a definitive voice for the subaltern, instead, she creates a space where their fragmented and mediated voices can resonate. In Purple Hibiscus, for instance, Beatrice's resistance—though muted and misunderstood—emerges as a quiet but powerful testimony to the enduring struggle against patriarchal and colonial domination.

Adichie's work, therefore, embodies an ongoing effort to navigate the limitations of her own positionality while striving to represent subaltern women ethically and authentically. This commitment underscores the importance of recognizing and grappling with the challenges of representation, particularly within the postcolonial feminist framework. By engaging with the voices and histories of Nigerian women, Adichie contributes to a broader discourse that seeks to critique and deconstruct dominant narratives, offering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the subaltern experience.

Conclusion

This study, grounded in Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory, has explored the multifaceted oppression and resistance experienced by Beatrice in Purple Hibiscus. As a subaltern woman, Beatrice embodies the dual marginalization imposed by colonial and patriarchal structures in postcolonial Nigeria. Despite her significant acts of resistance, her voice remains overshadowed by dominant socio-political frameworks. This reflects the persistent challenges subaltern women face in articulating their struggles within oppressive systems. Adichie, positioned at the intersection of Western intellectual traditions and Nigerian cultural heritage, assumes the critical role of a spokesperson for these silenced women. While Spivak's skepticism highlights the limitations of fully recuperating the subaltern's voice, Adichie offers an alternative approach by engaging in a dialogic relationship with history. Through her narrative, she strives to re-present the experiences of marginalized women, foregrounding their agency and resilience without presuming to fully restore their voices. In this way, Purple Hibiscus becomes an act of resistance itself, creating a space for the subaltern to begin reclaiming their presence within history and culture.

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