

Historical Drama and Feminism at the Crossroads of Postcolonial Dialogue: A Reading of Irene Salami's *Idia: The Warrior Queen of Benin*

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Abstract

This paper, through the prisms of postcolonial theory and feminism, interrogates history as a way of subverting and re-presenting issues that have been subjected to exclusion and oppression. Postcolonialism as a counter discourse is used to create a yardstick by which many discriminative and exploitative practices, regardless of time and space, are confronted. Among the tools of the exploitative practices are history and patriarchy. Writers (dramatists) are assessed in their exploration of history to make certain statements that bear directly on our contemporary society. To achieve this goal, Irene Agunloye-Salami's *Idia: The Warrior Queen of Benin* is used as case study. This paper, through the plumb line of postcolonial theory and feminism, interrogates history as a way of subverting and re-presenting issues that have been subjected to exclusion and oppression. It further reveals that contemporary African women dramatists engage in re-writing history as a signpost for gender representation and the creation of lofty roles for African women that history refused to acknowledge. The importance of this paper lies in its use of drama to contribute further to the assessment and interrogation of feminist discourse in contemporary Nigeria.

Introduction: Interrogating Postcoloniality

Postcolonial theory remains an open field of discursive practices. In interrogating postcoloniality as a concept, two particular questions are often asked. Mukherhee, (2009:94) raises these questions:

Is postcoloniality a mere chronological label referring to the period after the demise of the British Empire? Or is it, as some scholars have conceived it, an emancipatory, ideological concept enabling students of literature outside the western world to interpret certain aspects of the study of literature that were hitherto taken for granted, and also encouraging them 'not only to read their own texts in their own terms but also to re-interpret some old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of their specific historical and geographical locations?

Postcolonial theory in its conceptualisation has multiple discourses and trajectories, significations and positional ties. Nevertheless, as a set of unstable formations, it claims as its special provenance the terrain that in an earlier day used to go by the term 'Third World', describing the emergence of new cultural productions as a result of colonised-colonial relations. While it does not have one fixed meaning, it is generally applied to a range of theoretical positions which are developed in and from the works of Edward Said (1978), Homi K. Bhabha (1998), and Gayatri C. Spivak (1985). Frank Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1980) also remains a key text when interrogating this important discourse.

While there are different forms of postcolonial theory that vary both in practice and political implications, there are certain fundamental assumptions they all share; issues such as decolonisation, political independence, subjectivity, self-identity, hybridity, representation, etc., have become key themes in postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory thus remains an open field of discursive practices, and as a counter discourse, it aims to achieve, as Hammond (2006:46), posits:

An authentic globalization of cultural discourses, extending globally the intellectual concerns and orientation originating at the central sites of Euro-American cultural criticism and by introducing into it voices and subjectivities from the margins of earlier

political and/or ideological colonialism which now demand a hearing at those very sites at the centre.

The goal, indeed, is to address the question of culture, history and power, departing from the essentialist and dichotomist thinking and dualism that are characteristics of western thought.

Historical Drama as a Site of Postcolonial Reconstruction of History

The conflation of the concepts 'postcoloniality' and 'historical drama' may at first appear to be inevitable or even 'natural' especially in the general context in which the former emerged and how they have been employed by both scholars and critics alike. However, the way the decolonisation process is being conceived and prosecuted, remains problematic. The combination raises several pertinent questions we must not leave unscrutinised.

The first of these questions is not even the relationship between literary or dramatic texts and history which as we know, has always been inevitably dialectical, but history itself as a concept. Is history an accessible reality? Can we have direct access to its objective facts? Do not the ideology and the verbal strategies of the historian determine what he chooses to notice and how he describes it? To Walder (1991:315), these questions are, indeed, pertinent. According to him in "the foundation of traditional history, the document can become a text among many; and the one chosen for analysis becomes an issue in itself, by focusing attention upon what the choice excludes, raising questions of race, gender, class and institution". Therefore, this awareness of the voices of 'others' must be brought to recognise the forces of historical fact, if nothing else, that have shaped that exclusion. In his introduction to Michael De Certeau's *The Writing of History*, Tom Contey (2006:40), posits that 'historians, often in the name of pursuit of the shape of evidence of a past, end up silencing the past.' Historians believe their narratives to be objective. But the scientific account of the past cannot be the end of history.

Even after we acknowledge the absolute requirement that the scientific historian – say an archeologist – must draw a line between brute facts, the evidence of the past and the present; we should ask can we hope – can we reasonably expect – that historiography itself will also be capable to address even silent and murmuring aspects of the truth about the past in history?

What the above postulation implies is the reality of the historian's subjective position (which could be read as including ideological, institutional and other such biases) in the very processes of interrogating the past.

As our colonial experience has borne out, the narration of historical events is, simply put, the question of the angle from which the historian chooses to tell his or her story. It is important to recall that Africa, for a long time, was subjected to stigmatisation by western historians, and that what is regarded today as modern African literature was born as a form of protest and revolt against the doctrinal colonial heritage introduced by the Western world. And even if this were not so; even if we were to deny the brute facts of the past, the narration of a particular historical event would still remain problematic. As Hawkes (2008:99) posits:

The world does not consist of independently existing objects whose concrete features can be perceived clearly and individually, and whose nature can be classified accordingly. In fact, every perceiver's method of perceiving can be shown to contain an inherent bias which affects what is perceived – to a significant degree. A wholly objective perception of individual entities is therefore not possible. An observer is bound to create something of what he observes.

In the light of the assertion above, it seems entirely consistent to ask why we should trust any form of narration. This question becomes important when we recall that in the hands of the modern

African writer, writing was a process of imaginative recovery and affirmation. There is a sense in which it can be argued that, in correcting or reframing the facts of history, and their subjective impacts on the people, the African writer was as much concerned about its literal truth as he/she was anxious for a process of cultural retrieval and re-memorisation of the African self and society. Writing thus became an act of historical self-understanding of a people, a culture and tradition.

As we have asserted before, the 'question of history' is a prominent feature of postcolonial writings. The view that history is not about the past but about the present is by no means a new one. The past is inextricably tied to the present day understandings of what it is to live in a postcolonial world. In this postcolonial period, it has become a matter of some importance not only to recover histories of the colonised but also to analyse them at the level of theory.

Postcoloniality is arguably a condition as well as a set of reading practices and concerns, probing the conditions, the psychic and epistemological orientations of people formerly subjected to colonial rules. Thus, imperialism and colonial histories have become the most widely discussed and contested area in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial literature, of which historical drama is a part, is one of the discursive practices of cultural and political affirmation that postcolonial theory adopts. The 'othering' of a vast number of people and their construction as backward and inferior in Eurocentric history, depended on a binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised. Therefore, postcolonial critics are generally preoccupied with uncovering the way in which such binaries work in colonialist representations.

Indeed, the issues in postcolonial studies are largely a question of representation in history. Historical drama, as a genre, has proved crucial to the formation of postcolonial discourse. It has served as a means of approaching, inverting and challenging dominant means of representations and colonial ideologies. Historical drama as an imaginative recreation of history, creates ways of seeing and modes of articulation that are central to our

new apprehension of history. It helps us towards a nuanced analysis of our colonial past.

The history of our colonial past has been one constructed by the coloniser in which assumptions about the superiority of the West are evident. It is a history that the West has had to fabricate in order to justify the continuing colonial domination. Historical drama has proved a fecund site in which such domination is critiqued and resisted. Edward Said whose book, *Orientalism* (1978), was influential in establishing the field of postcolonial criticism, opines that 'colonialism begins with colonialist language. Said deconstructs a speech given by Arthur James Balfour in 1910 to the British House of Commons on Britain's occupation of Egypt. Balfour's speech represents a discourse in which an educated English man can assume that he knows everything about Egypt, and his knowledge is superior to what the indigenous Egyptian historian might give. Balfour constructs Egypt chiefly as a British mission that will vindicate Western imperialism: "we are in Egypt not only for the sake of Egyptians... but for Europe's sake" (Said, 1978:31-39). Said's main argument is that the Orient is a western construction – the West has imagined the Orient as the other, projecting onto Arabia, India or China such characteristics as dishonesty, promiscuity, backwardness and dirtiness – the opposite of all that the West values.

Postcolonial dramatists such as Ola Rotimi, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Wale Ogunyemi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ahmed Yerima, and Irene Agunloye-Salami, have all drawn from history to create some of their works. With varying degrees of self-awareness and self-confession, they have set out to set the record straight, and in the words of Knipp (1980:42), "to create a useable past, to relate and interpret their culture and its past to their own subjective confession, and to define their own relationship to it". Thus, in some of their works, one discerns a manifest impulse to resist colonialism and its exploitative ideology. These dramatists see themselves to be part of the larger decolonisation struggles, not strictly speaking to legitimate African 'nationalism', for we are all witnesses to its distorting tendencies, but as agents of democratic

social change. In many respects, this dimension of their practice defines African and postcolonial writings.

In Irene Agunloye-Salami's *Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin*, the text that forms the subject of this paper, we see a much more frontal engagement with the issues of history both external and internal. It is a feminist response to history in an attempt to free it from its pure masculine and hegemonic pursuits. Feminism and postcolonial theory have contrasting features, which attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture. Indeed, as Childs and Williams (1997:199) assert in their joint essay:

Both began with strategies that aimed to upset dominant hierarchies and recover or reassert marginalized histories and writings. Both have since turned towards analyses of the construction of those hierarchies, categories and canons, questioned the systems of thought and the forms of critical legitimation behind them.

In postcolonial theory, there is a complexity of intersecting discourses and struggles. Feminism is one of these interesting discourses that interrogate the discursive possibilities of this theory. Donaldson (1993:187), in her book *Decolonizing Feminisms* opines how "discourses of nationalism and gender cut across each other in the most elementary way in the pervasive trope of nation as women." Gender, being an elastic category, is easily defined and manipulated because of its lack of specificity or biological evidence.

Feminist critics have drawn attention to unreconstructed discourses in postcolonial criticism. In other words, there is the 'double colonisation' of women under colonialism and patriarchy which highlights the general problems of theories that attempt to offer a method of reading, but also pays attention to the complexity of intersecting discourses and struggles. Henderson (1997:5) puts it thus:

The critical insights of one reading might well be 'blind spots' of another reading. That is, by privileging one category of analysis at the expense of others, each

critical method risks setting up what Fredric Jameson describes as 'strategies of containment' approaches which restrict or repress different or alternative readings.

Aware of this susceptibility, feminist readings now usually eschew universalist claims and pay attention to discourses of historical specificity and 'race', while postcolonial critiques are more sensitively attuned to gender and sexuality both as discourses mobilised by the texts they study and as aspects to the inscription of all subjectivities.

Nationalist discourses interpolate individuals; its rhetoric of freedom, progress and equality is couched in the most feminine terms and images – 'our motherland', 'the virgin land' the rape of our nation by foreigners and such like emotive phraseology. Yet women are made passive in the nation's unfolding historical process; they are made to have little voice or representation in the materialist discourse. As Quayson (2000:68), opines:

For many feminist postcolonial critics, what seemed historically to have been a radical opposition was actually a dialectical relation between similar patriarchal discourses which sought to speak for and to represent women's lives without real recourse to them.

The above citation does not imply that women did not participate in the making of the history of their nation, or were entirely passive in the unfolding of events in their country – examples abound of women even here in Nigeria who stood up to be counted in the struggles against colonialism. Heroic women like Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, etc., really come to mind. It does rather show that in the discursive and ideological environment of their representation, they were essentially marginalised. Spivak (1993:85) notes with respect to the historiography of the subaltern studies group:

The question is not of female participation in insurgency or the ground rules of the sexual division of labour, for

both of which there is evidence. It is rather that both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the contexts of colonial production, the subaltern female is even more deeply in the shadow.

Therefore, feminism and postcolonial theory are conceptually and historically connected to each other in ways in which they engage with colonial domination, on the one hand, and patriarchal oppression, on the other.

Irene Agunloye-Salami is among the female dramatists in Nigeria, who have explored history in some of their plays. In fact, she seems to be aware of this in contemporary Nigerian drama, and has decided to correct it. So far she has written three historical plays: *The Queen Sisters* (2000), *Emotan* (2001) and *Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin* (1999), the last being the subject of this paper.

In the interview, she granted Adeoti (2010:87), she reveals why she has an obsessive interest in exploring history in her works, affirming that:

The main inspiration or incentive that I had as a playwright was to write history through plays because I feel that reading through history or biography that people write, historians just didn't remember women. History is not fair to women. Let's take the case of Emotan. In spite of everything that Emotan did, if you check history books, maybe she is mentioned in just two or three lines. Yet we have the great kingdom of Benin today because of the efforts of women like Emotan, Queen Idia and Queen Iden. You don't have those three people in history books.

It is then not surprising that Salami has continued in her quest to document the level of women participation in politics and governance in her plays. That women have been less represented in

history is not a new allegation; that they have suffered under 'the double colonisation' of colonial domination and patriarchal oppression is now generally acknowledged. And this is why Salami's untiring efforts at documenting the participatory roles of women in Nigeria's (Africa's) historical processes must be commended. However, there is a particularly personal edge to her obsession with recording history from a feminist perspective. In her interview with Gbemisola Adeoti (2010:87), she states:

My father was a historian. He wrote one of the ground-breaking books on ancient Benin history. When he was writing that book, we used to discuss. He asked me to carry out some research for him as an academic. Sometimes I made use of some of his books... I always challenged him on why he did not write extensively about Emotan, since he had the privilege of writing in the 20th century. His own position was that these women just did what they did. They were used as a vehicle or a means to an end. Besides, how many women actually read history books? he would ask. History books are read by men, and men make history... I felt that was quite unfair, and that was what drew my interest into historical playwriting.

The political participation of women in the politics of a nation's past generates an on-going conflict, and dramatists are not left out of this conflict. The central roles of women in the dramatic texts written by Salami dispel the view held by other writers who see women as emotional, irrational and incapable of any organised action like politics.

As a champion of the women's cause, Salami knows that mere comments and verbalised intention are not enough to change or even alter societal thoughts and mindsets about men. Therefore, she concretely highlights her political vision in her major works to align them with her verbal comments. In *Emotan*, for instance, she demonstrates that women, just like men, have the strength and

dogged commitment even to the level of self-denial and ultimate sacrifice to further the interest of their society. She equally debunks the philosophy and myth that only men are capable of manipulation, intrigues and scheming on political matters.

Emotan's central political role in the stability of Benin Kingdom is visible in several ways. Her high sense of justice and fair play is clearly demonstrated when she mobilises the market women against the injustice meted to Ogun. Even when her detractors branded her a witch, she was not deterred at all by the distractions. Secondly, Emotan raised a secret army with which she successfully staged a coup d'état by restoring Ogun on his rightful throne as Oba. She further courageously gave her life as a sacrifice for the stability of her society as directed by the oracle. In *More than Dancing* Salami explores history towards similar end. Here too, she uses history as a focal point to assess the contributions of women and their historical relevance. *The Queen Sisters, Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin* – which we shall discuss fully in this paper – and others, underscore Salami's interest in recording the biographies of these historical women as a source of inspiration to women. History itself is made by people who do not only act as activists but also as recorders of events. The historical dramatists, therefore, are not contented with the simple discovery of past events or facts; they aspire to say not just what happened, but also to show how and why it happened.

So far we have expended efforts to show how historical drama has been successfully explored to address great contemporary issues. Now, let us turn to how historical drama can be used to engineer national development.

Conscientising Through Historical Drama: Agunloye's Example in *Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin*

The writing of history in the theatrical/ dramatic medium becomes significant because the historical narrative in itself is a statement of the self, and an expression of the conceptualisation of the historical process. The writer (dramatist) goes over the past to understand the present, and when he fails in his attempts at an explanation, he

raises certain questions. When women-writers turn to exploring history, another dimension appears on the scene. Armstrong (1999:14) states in 'The Gender Bind: Women and Disciplines' that when a woman (feminist) writer explores culture 'it is to detach it from its active role within a historical field and to endeavour its meaning in a private sphere of gendered consciousness'. This endeavour is not a personal, feminine response to history, but, an attempt to free history from purely masculine pursuits and hegemonic structures.

Feminism has been about challenging the representations of women and arguing for better conditions for them. The question of representations and their relation to reality is one which a number of postcolonial critics have raised in relation to women. For example, discourses of nationalism and gender cut across each other in the most elementary way in the pervasive trope of nation as woman. The identification of women as national mothers stems from a wider association of nation with the family. The nation is cast as a female body whose violation by foreigners requires its citizens and allies to rush to her defence. Such nationalist discourses subtly subsumed concerns about women under what turned out ultimately to be patriarchal concerns under the impetus of a nationalist agenda. Thus, from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond), female bodies symbolise the conquered land.

As mothers to the nation, women are granted limited agency. Arguments for women's education, in metropolitan as well as colonial contexts, rely on the logic that educated women will make better wives and mothers. At the same time educated women have to be taught not to overstep their bounds and usurp authority from men.

For Quayson (2000:420)

it is when a western patriarchal discourse subtly coincides with local practices in certain historical conjunctures that the true cross-cultural nature of female subordination becomes most acutely evident.

It is this double 'colonisation of women' under colonialism and patriarchy that some postcolonial feminist critics and dramatists, such as Irene Agunloye-Salami, seek to engage with by their exploration of history.

Now, if it is true that writers explore historical materials that allow them to raise certain questions – political, epistemological, moral, etc. – about their societies, what happens in a situation in which 'historical materials are not readily available to the writer; if they are in fact 'lost' in history. This is where Agunloye-Salami's tireless exploration of history in her dramatic text, *Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin*, must be commended. In this play, Agunloye-Salami revisits history in order to celebrate the prowess and dexterity of an historical warrior Queen so that contemporary society can draw inspiration, meaningful lessons and values from it. Agunloye-Salami attempts in this play to relate history to literature in order to make relevant contemporary statements. It is common knowledge that African writers, especially dramatists, are chroniclers of history; they record events of the past not recognised by the present and so stand the threat of disappearing irretrievably. Agunloye-Salami can be said to have succeeded in reminding us of the past and pointing out ways to social and political regeneration.

The play is set in the old Benin kingdom during the period of colonialism. The play begins with Idia seated, deep in thought. A new king has just been installed, and she, as the king's mother, must die as tradition demands. But this, she is not ready to do. She demands rhetorically of the market woman who has come to remonstrate with her that she should not dwell too much on the matter 'Why must I, a woman, stand condemned to die, simply because I am the mother of the reigning king? Is being the mother of a king a crime?'

IDIA: Is it because I have been fortunate enough to bring to life a prince who is also fortunate to have ascended the throne of the great Benin Kingdom? (*Idia...p.2*)

One immediately recognises that Idia is going to be the mouthpiece of the playwright, the one through whom she would raise some feminist issues.

At the Oba's palace, the Oba is busy discussing the issue with his chiefs. There is a sharp disagreement among them. Oba Esigie wants the tradition that 'demands the eternal exit of the Queen mother' jettisoned, but the chiefs, Iyase, Ihama, Ezogban and Esomo, who came late for the meeting are all for the upholding of the tradition. Only Oliha supports the king's view on the matter. The scene ends with the Oba's very effective repartee at the chiefs that they should go and kill their mothers first, after that they can discuss the killing of his mother.

At the palace of Iyase, the prime minister of the kingdom, the chiefs are still engrossed with the issue whether the Queen mother's life should be spared or not. Ezomo comes out clearly with his position. He warns: "Do you know what we are saying, by asking for Idia to be spared? Queen Idia is a powerful queen, politically and diabolically. She has a strong influence on her son. We would end up being ruled by a woman if she lives." Oliha, this time supported by Ologbose, tries in vain to sway the other chiefs to his view that this diabolical tradition be abolished.

Iyase continues to hold tenaciously to his position that the Queen mother's life should not be spared. He is shown to be a highly-strung character. Some women of the kingdom storm the Oba's palace in protest, demanding that Idia's life be spared. All the chiefs considered the women's invasion of the Oba's palace not only as an unpardonable insult, but also as an abomination, in fact, a veritably ominous sign of some evil days to come.

There is a brief love scene in Scene Five, between Oliha and his favourite wife, Imaguero, that makes one wonder why the playwright tries to integrate this love episode into the whole story of Idia. But this, as later events in the play show, is the beginning of a climax and a concatenation of events that will turn two bedfellows into implacable foes, and catapult Idia into a triumphant heroine.

At the next meeting in the Oba's palace, while discussing an important issue about the Attah of Igala, the king of Benin's satellite town, growing more independent of Oba Esigie and defaulting in his tribute to him, the chiefs allow their discussion to take a digressive turn. Both the Oba and the chiefs poke fun at Oliha for his love and unbridled commitment to his favourite wife, Imagueoro. Oliha reacts angrily at his colleagues' raillery, and this sets the stage for the tragedy that is to occur later in the play.

While Oliha is away, Oba Esigie sends his servant, Uke, to Oliha's household to woo Imaguero with gifts on his behalf. She turns down the king's amorous advances. Through malice and cunning, Uke succeeds in getting Imaguero enraged, by lying that he had overheard Oliha during a discussion with the king refer to Aminghen – Imaguero's greatest rival in Oliha's harem – as his most beloved wife.

Imaguero leaves for her parents' home in a fit of anger. She considers it an act of betrayal on the part of Oliha for declaring his greatest love for her rival, having earlier in the play pledged the same to her. Oliha returns and finds his beloved wife to be absent from home without his permission. This enrages him and fuels his suspicion of his wife's infidelity to which the king had earlier alluded by declaring that no woman on earth deserves to be trusted.

At their next meeting, Oliha confronts the king in the presence of the other chiefs by accusing him of personally discrediting his beloved wife. But the king sticks to his guns, revealing that Imaguero had fallen for Uke, seduced by a mere gift of coral. Oliha dashes out of the palace and rushes to his home in a fit of rage.

At home, without listening to Imaguero's explanations, Oliha murders her accidentally by bashing her head against the wall. His subsequent murder of Aminghen in revenge of his mistake brings things to a climax. He declares war against the king for the latter's hand in the tragedy that has befallen his household.

Idia is informed of the state of affairs in the Benin kingdom and Oliha's threat to commence a war against her son, Oba Esigie. Iyase and Ologbose plead caution, advising that Oliha be given

another wife. Idia sends two of her beautiful servants, Zewe and Igbo to Oliha as wives, not really to placate the enraged Oliha, but as a way of emasculating him. Oliha rejects the two maidens and reiterates his threat to wage a war against the king. Idia receives the news with equanimity and sets about preparing for war. She is surprised that none of the chiefs is prepared to head the battle. The chiefs are in turn astonished that Idia volunteers to head the battle herself, if none of the chiefs, especially Ologbose, fails to do so. The chiefs wonder how possible it is for a mere woman to wage a successful war. They laugh derisively at Idia's rise to the challenge, and remind her that it is not in a woman's place to command warriors. But Idia remains resolute.

There is a brief meeting between Idia and two Portuguese traders. Idia accuses them of causing the troubles of Benin kingdom. She declares:

White men, you bring to us a God who is just and loving, and you say we should accept him and abandon our own gods, yet your ways are unjust. A relationship where one person keeps giving and giving, and another keeps receiving and receiving is not a good relationship... White men, if all you want, is to teach us your language, sell us your goods, preach to us about your God and ask us to accept your culture without you appreciating or accepting ours, then you are selfish and do not depict the attributes of the God you preach to us so passionately about (*Idia*, p34).

After turning the Portuguese traders out of her palace, she visits her son, Oba Esigie, to consult with him about the impending war with Oliha and his ally, the king of Igala. A queen mother visiting her son in the palace is totally unheard of, but Idia is prepared to break with tradition. There is a grave matter in their hands they need to discuss. After expressing some reservations about Idia's resolve to lead the battle herself, the king concurs with his mother's persuasions. She holds a meeting with some of the

market women's representatives who have also volunteered themselves for the war. She rejects their offer of charms and amulets, insisting the war will be fought with physical strength and military strategy.

In another scene, Idia meets Attah of Igala and Oliha at a place where the battle is to begin. Attah and Oliha try subtle strategies of demoralisation, by poking fun at her and lying that her most trusted general, Asoro, has been captured and cut to pieces. But Idia is not deceived. The battle soon begins and Idia defeats the two men and their soldiers by outwitting them. Attah and Oliha are captured and Asoro is released. Idia returns to Benin kingdom with her soldiers in triumph and jubilation.

In Benin, the chiefs, Iyase, Ezomo, Ologbose, Isiuwa are forced to acknowledge her prowess and dexterity at the battle front. They pay her due compliments and regards. Idia thanks them all and the Bini people. And this is where the play ends.

Conclusion

In the dramatic text that we have studied in this paper, Irene Agunloye-Salami's *Idia: the Warrior Queen of Benin*, there is a manifest focus on the deed to resist historical amnesia, if our society is to progress. The playwright revisits the past in order to rewrite and counter the predominant versions of history that are replete with blanks and misrepresentations. It foregrounds the contemporary legacies of traumatic national pasts and points to apathy in national regeneration. The exploration of history and historical materials has allowed her to raise certain political, moral and epistemological questions about contemporary Nigerian society.

The perception and treatment of subordinated groups as the 'other' is central to the historical projects the playwright has undertaken in her dramatic texts. By her exploration of history and the maximal use of drama, she seeks to open up grounds for socio-political discourse referred to as Postcolonial Theory. In the play, we see Agunloye-Salami's advocacy for women's rights and our attention is drawn to the cultural practice of subjugation of women

with regard to social and political power. Patriarchy is the appropriation of social power by men and the persistent effort to make women inferior. She revisits the past to valorise a historical female hero in order to serve as a challenge to men's hegemony and patriarchal political structure in contemporary society. She also draws our attention to the necessity and importance of women's participation in political processes and governance, if we are to usher in a new era in our socio-political existence. Through the characterisation of Idia in the play, the dramatist, as she shows in some of her historical plays, has reaffirmed her position as one of the female playwrights in Nigeria that are set to counter patriarchal domination in the reproduction of history.

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