

## **The Culture of Resistance in Six African Plays by African Female Playwrights**

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### **Abstract**

*There is no literary creation that exists in a vacuum. Most creative works like plays have a strong link with the society that inspires them in such a way that they mirror the ills and preferences of the society for corrections or improvements. It is on this basis that the present study focuses on the commitment to female resistance to socially entrenched oppression in many African societies as depicted in the plays of six African playwrights. The study used the social logical approach as the theoretical framework and examined the *Sweet Trap* and *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola; the *Marriage of Anansewa and Edufa* by Efua Sutherland; and the *Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa* by Ama Ata Aidoo. At the end, the study argues that the idea of resistance flows through the six plays where the resistance is mainly in two folds; the major being the resistance against negatively entrenched stereotypical roles of women which include the lack of choice and freedom to make personal decision as can be seen in *Ugwoma* and *Anowa* and the others.*

**Keywords:** *resistance, Female African playwrights, female oppression.*

### **Introduction**

The popular image of early African literature has men as the predominant characters resisting the rising powers of the European Colonialist and other forms of injustice in the society. Little or no image of a resistant African woman is predominant even among literary works written by women. That might not necessarily explain the situation. The fact seems to be that most literary critics do not focus on the image of female resistance to socially induced forms of oppressions such as patriarchy, religious hypocrisy and the others in the creative works of Africans most especially, African plays by African women.

Most African female writers have always battled several hurdles which most women are facing in many African societies. According to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, there are metaphorically six mountains that are strapped on the back of the African woman, which the African woman must get rid of if she is to be emancipated from the tyranny of traditional patriarchy. According to

Ogundipe-Leslie:

The first one is oppression from outside (colonialism and neo-colonialism), the second one is from traditional structures, the third one is her backwardness, the fourth is man, the fifth is her colour, her race, and the sixth is herself. (28) Women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. (36)

Looking at these various burdens that have been placed on the African woman, Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that one of the first tasks is to fight against all these various forms of oppression that women are still subjected to in Africa. Fight here connotes resistance and repression of the already established norms. In this study, the researcher examines the kind of resistance that have been put up by African women through their plays. The aim is to examine the current situation and make possible incursions in to what would be the next phase of the resistance in Africa.

Playwrights and other creative persons are in one way or the other strongly committed to the social and moral issues of the time or they are strongly linked with certain social crusades that aim at a better and safer society. According to Canice Chukwuma Nwosu and Nicholas Akas Chielotam 'it could be seen as a form of inhumanity, a crime against the Nigerian people, if a Nigerian playwright writing for Nigerian audiences today chooses to merely play to the gallery in the face of the numerous injustices in society.' (23) This opinion can be extended to include the entire continent. It would not be right to have creative individuals who do not channel their creativity to the overall good of the people. In the same line, many African writers (both men and women) have in several ways demonstrated their commitment to this course. In the opinion of Femi Osofisan: 'If we warned ourselves often and painfully enough with reality, with the reality around us, if we refuse to bandage our sensitive spots away from the hurt of truth, then we can attain a new and positive awareness.' (in Awodiya,18).

### **The Sociological Approach to Literary Criticism**

The sociological approach to literary criticism provides an apt frame work for this study in the sense that it marries the realities in the societies which serve as the setting for a particular work of art and the work itself. In the words of Irele:

A fruitful kind of sociological approach attempts to correlate the work to the social background to see how the author's intention and attitude issue out of the wider social context ad to get an understanding of the way each writer captures a moment of the historical consciousness of the society. (32)

The sociological approach to literary analysis is rooted in the historical changes and different situations that have been and are still in existent in the society. The theory has copious aspects of applicability but we are going to focus on Marxism alone. An ample elucidation will be done on Marxism because it is central to our study.

Marxism, a socio-economic, political, and aesthetic ideology founded by the German philosopher, Karl Marx, has provided the literary critic with a good tool for analyzing the functions and forms of literature. According to Egleton, Marxism explains a literary work, paying huge attention to its style and meaning as the product of a particular history in the society. (3) Every literary work lends itself to a society and every society has its own history. It is the function of writers to account for this in an imaginative and creative way. That is the reason why Hegel says:

Every work belongs to its age; to its nation and to its environment, and depends upon particular historical and other ideas and aims. For this reason art scholarship further requires a vast wealth of historical information of a very special kind. (38)

Marxism as a core component in sociological approach to literary text analysis allocates a certain commitment to literary writers to their society. What we mean by commitment here is a call on the writer to commit his work to the cause of the common man, the peasants and the oppressed in the society. Those that are abused on the basis of negative traditional practices fall under the oppressed in the society.

Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo in their plays fulfill the commitment as a writer by speaking for the oppressed women in Africa in a bid to resist the oppressor and advance the course of women in the society. Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike aptly articulate the doctrine of commitment in relation to the African writer:

A writer does have a minimum professional responsibility to make his work relevant... to his society and its concerns. He may do this by treating the burning issues of the day... or.. by treating themes germane to his community's fundamental and long range interest... (152)

In trying to make the burning issues in the society the bedrock of creative writing, the writer must enact realism. Not creating scenarios that are not realistic. According to Luke Eyoh in general literary parlance, realism denotes a depiction of socio-historical realities as they or in likeness to life. (71) Chidi Amuta sees this as: “the fictional representation of a slice of social experience in a manner that reminds us through the laws of probability and causality of everyday existence.” (136) The events which a writer presents can be subjected to literary analysis to check if it is capable of happening or has happened in the society.

On the basis of the above, the focus of this study is to see to what extent African women playwrights are committed to the fight of resistance against patriarchy and other traditional practices that inhibit the freedom of women in the African society.

## **Methodology**

This study is mainly mainly qualitative because it deals on non-numerical data that are interpreted for meaning that is related to the idea of female resistance in African plays written by African

females. Six plays from Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo serve as the primary data for the study; two plays each were selected from each of the female playwrights making a total of six. The plays include: *the Sweet Trap* and *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola; *the Marriage of Anansewa* and *Edufa* by Efua Sutherland; and *the Dilemma of a Ghost* and *Anowa* by Ama Ata Aidoo. In analysing the plays, the pairs from each are picked and extracts, scenes and incidents from the plays which depict the culture of female resistance are illuminated for clarity.

### **Female Resistance in Sofola's *the Sweet Trap* and *Wedlock of the Gods***

Nwazuluoha Sofola was born on June 22, 1935 in Umuezeachima in Delta State. Sofola was among the foremost African female writers who popularized feminist literature in Africa. She was the first daughter of a family of two wives and eighteen children. After completing her primary school at Agbor, she travelled to read music at the Catholic University of America Washington, but later settled and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in English Language. She also got her M.A Degree from Virginia Union University, Richmond.

In terms of currency, *the Sweet Trap* is among Sofola's contemporary plays that expose some strands of resistance to some domestic limits, cultural oppression and the maltreatments of the female gender in all aspects of life in the society. The play starts with the dialogue of Okebadan festival by the male and female folks in scene one. The dialogue presents an opportunity for women to resist the cultural male dominated Okebadan performers. It also give women the opportunity to respond to all the laughs about female weaknesses which the male Okebadan performers sing of. This is an implied form of rejection of the status quo. Ordinarily women do not participate in such a ritualistic ceremony in most African societies but with Sofola bringing them to the fore, the intention is to illuminate their (women) opinion and create an avenue for resistance. The women show in the outbursts that characterize the discussion that they feel outraged and pushed to the wall by the male folk. Hence, their decision to resist the established societal harassment and subjugation of their group by the opposite sex.

In another instance in the play, Sofola leans on Mrs. Clara Sotubo's birthday celebration to elongate the female resistance agenda which is used to develop the plot. We see the women empathize with Clara as a group when her husband Femi Sotubo strongly refuses to approve her

birthday party on the grounds that it was unnecessarily expensive and wasteful. This would not have been the situation if it was the man that needed to celebrate.

In terms of the female characters, many of them wish to resist the status quo. For example, the likes of Mrs. Ajala and Clara, are not happy with how they are treated and how men devalue the sacredness of the female reproductive organs (the pride of every woman) as part of the Okebadan festival. Their annoyance is that the Okebadan festival only derives joy in ridiculing womanhood while the men watch in excitement without plans to put to an end to such a primitive lampooning of women. This is depicted in the dialogue between Mrs. Ajala and Clara as presented below:

Clara: it is amazing how the government is doing absolutely nothing about this primitive festival. (2)

Mrs. Ajala: How could it? The government is run exclusively by the male species, you know. The Okebadan festival is a ridicule of the female organs and could be more exciting to the men than a legalized opportunity to take a swipe at us women. (2)

The women see this festival as a direct attack on the female folk and an opportunity by the men to showcase their masculinity, dominance and superiority over women. Moreover, the men use this festival to show that they are always in charge while the women are to be restricted fully from all communal activities with the final aim of total submission of females.

In the ensuing conversation below, Clara wonders why the attack should focus on women. They say:

Clara: So it is our sex that this festival ridicules.

Mrs. Ajala: Obviously. Have you ever seen the participants ridiculing male sex organs? Mark you, the attack on the sexes in this rowdy festival was not originally restricted to the female sex only. It was only on recent years when our women began to resist male dominion and brutality that this festival degenerates into a rowdy display where men could take revenge for bruised egos.(2)

The women's anger stems from the view, that men have changed the concept of the festival and singled them out to be castigated and marginalized; especially with regards to participation in important communal festivals and taking family decisions on issues concerning them. In most cases they are not allowed to carry out personal decisions without permission from their husbands, whose answer finally determines the woman's fate.

The other aspect which men face resistance from women is in the area of the use of brute force. Unlike the female folk, who are persuasive, some men use brute force such as wife battering, for instance to check any attempt to alter their decision as in the case of Dr. Sotubo who broke an empty beer bottle on his wife's head to keep her under control. This act is an extension of the narrative that men think women are children who can easily be controlled through the use of the rod. On higher narrative, most men think that women are part of their physical possessions which are under their whims and caprices. However, in Sofola's *the Sweet Trap*, there is an attempt to stop these acts from continuing in the society.

In the case of Sofola's *the Wedlock of the Gods*, we still meet instances of female resistance to deeply established cultural beliefs and traditional practices that oppress. In rare occasions, even women themselves are the architects of their own oppressions in connivance with the dominant men. Women are revealed to the world only for them to observe their complete submission in the supremacy of cultural tradition. In the play, *the Wedlock of the Gods*, Ogwoma, the female protagonist, is compulsorily pushed to marry her late husband's brother against her choice for her lover. She goes through several widowhood rites such as creping her hair, including that of the pubic, arm pit as well as eye lashes. These and the compulsory three months consignment to the ashes by the fire place, all in the name of mourning her late husband, are represented as secondary issues. Most of the times, the enforcements of these unjust laws are carried out by women in the society such as the mother in-law to Ogwoma who insisted that she must pass through all the tortures in order to prove her innocence.

There is so much inhumanity in the cultural practices of the society in which the play is cast. For example, Ogwoma sleeping with her lover during the period of mourning. With this, she is made to payback the bride price with her action attracting the swearing of the body. The question then

is: who owns the body of the lady who is alive? Is it the late husband or herself. Even when the lady is still married to a husband, she still owns her body and should determine what she does with it irrespective of what the culture thinks of but that is not the case in most African societies. Women are more or less appendages of the men.

The actions of Ugwoma in sleeping with another man is symbolic of the female resistance of the already established culture of subjugation. In breaking the law known to the period of mourning, Ogwoma elevates her own status from an ordinary female citizen to that of a freedom fighter who is ready to resist all kinds of injustices. In the play, Okolie says: “Never before has it been heard that a woman in mourning lets another man in.” (3) The death of Ogwoma at the end represents the supreme price a lady could pay for being a freedom fighter. The death becomes an avenue for the society to re-examine itself and develop into other levels of socio-religious and cultural consciousness. The fact is then that she died for love. The broken taboo becomes light in the face of love and deaths. The community becomes more aware of the eternity of their actions and the relevance in deaths. The thinking is that from there, the social reengineering of the society begins for equality and freedom. Ogwoma in this instance elevates to the level of being a heroine of love and the fight against oppression. ‘Heroes are known for their steadfastness to the cause(s) they believe in. Sometimes they live and die for their cause(s) after facing a lot of hurdles from various angles: their deaths epitomizing their success’ (Solanke, 22). The case of Ogwoma reflects this. From the beginning, Ogwoma decides to face the music of their actions.

At the end, Ogwoma is not alone in this as her lover Uloko joins in the fight and the consequences with death as a major penalty. They stick together with a focus and decisiveness that show that they are determined to achieve their purpose. The equality and sameness in their thinking and focus is reflected in the following statement which Ogwoma (in the absence of Uloko) says at the beginning of the text and Uloko (in the absence of Ogwoma) re-echoes near the end: “I was not going to wait for another blink of the eye this time” (9 and 36). This is a projection into what the future holds for the African society- men and women would appreciate the humanity in both genders and there would be freedom for all.

### **Female Resistance in Sutherland’s *the Marriage of Anansewa and Edufa***



Efua Sutherland is a Ghanaian playwright, poet and producer who has established herself primarily as someone that is aimed at trying new things at every point in time. Between 1958 and 1961 she founded a programme of experimental theatre, the Ghana Drama Studio in Accra. As a traditional drama activist she has sought to elevate indigenous theatrical practice from its pristine stage to a modern pedestal. Apart from such popular plays, *Edufa* (1967) and *Foriwa* (1967), she has written plays in the indigenous language (Akan) for children and adults. One of the unique features of *the Marriage of Anansewa* is that in her reworking of the indigenous "Anansem" she gives human form to the original animal characters central to the exploits of the hero, Ananse, which translated means the spider. The totality of the theatric expression she classifies as Anansegoro. Like the tortoise in most folk traditions in Nigeria, Ananse, the spider, is a trickster, clever and cunning. In both the Anansem and Anansegoro, it represents a kind of everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve as a medium for self-examination. Thus, central to the social vision of *The Marriage of Anansewa* is Sutherland's exposition and portrayal of the social conditions, lies, greed, moral depravity and economic exploitation prevalent in most African post-independence cities. The researcher views the experimental nature of the playwright as a form of resistance on its own because as a lady in a typical African society, everybody expects her to conform to the norm or the established standards. However, she breaks free of these bondages through her creativity.

If the plot is to be examined, Sutherland depicts through the comic idiom the naivety as well as the rascally attempt of Ananse to enrich himself through the act of giving out his daughter (Anansewa) to several rich suitors at the same time. This too shows that daughters and women are like possession which should be well managed for better returns. Aiming at the above goals, Ananse sends his daughter to a secretarial school for prospective brides, while he makes his journey to the four different chiefs. As gifts continue to pour in from the chiefs, problems start unfolding. While the outdoor ceremony of the bride is taking place, dates of payment of the bride price were being fixed simultaneously by the chiefs. Caught in his own web, Ananse solicits the help of Christie, his lover, into tricking his mother and aunt, who were on a visit from the village, to return home, on the pretext that enemies have burnt down the family cocoa plantation. In the midst of the chaos, Ananse tricks his daughter into feigning death. On her deathbed, Ananse discovers her true lover through the messages and actions of the representative mourners of the

rich chiefs. Finally, Chiefwho-is-Chief (Ananse's choice) wins the hand of Anansewa. Central to the exploits of Ananse is the theme of economic survival in an urban setting.

Focusing on the economic choices parents make for their girl children, Sutherland is able to illuminate the economic consideration which the girl child gives to parents. For Ananse to survive, he must use what he has his daughter. He says:

ANANSE: Listen, my one and only daughter, what I have done is that I have organised around you a most lively competition. I'm counting on human nature to help disentangle it. All four chiefs can't be winners, don't you see? Child, your father is trying for you. Don't ask too many complicated questions. Your father can only cope with one step at a time. (15)

This dilemma confronts all the characters in this drama of manoeuvre and cheating. Ironically, the positive moral tone that resolves the play is dictated by the robust interplay of wit, tactical manoeuvre and economic exploitation of each other.

At the end, Sutherland's effort at resistance might not be seen against the African culture of demining women alone. She emphasises the need for African playwrights to look inwards for inspiration in their attempt to create committed plays relevant to the present socio-political and moral needs. Furthermore, it points to a much desired radical restructuring not only of our play conventions but also the architectural and scenic concepts. Most African playwrights are strongly attached to the European standards of drama creation neglecting the folkloric enterprises from which African plays can be created.

In the second play under consideration by Sutherland, *Edufa*, an affluent man, who in the quest to sustain his wealth consults a diviner for spiritual fortification. The diviner tells him that death knocks on his door and that he would die four years from the day of consultation. Frightened by the news, *Edufa* seeks help from the diviner to avert his fate; but he can only do so if he can get a loved relative who will be willing to die in his stead, by saying so to *Edufa* while the latter concealed a charm on his body. He attempts to attract his father to the charm but his father readily declines. He tries the charm on his wife, *Ampoma*, who readily agrees and says the words, 'I love

you enough to die for you', ignorant of the charm on Edufa. Four years later, Ampoma's condition worsens and she dies.

In the 60's women seemed to be second rated in Ghana and when men are talking, women do shut up in submission or say just a little, that is if they speak at all. It was a period in which males dominated and unfortunately, the women seem to accept the trend of things. Since women were not very much regarded within the era, if a man wants to protect or preserve himself, he could choose to use a woman anyhow he liked to satisfy his interests.

Having observed this trend, Sutherland wants to use the play to help women emancipate themselves. It is possible the playwright is only being subtle so as not to incur unnecessary negative reactions from the men in her level- the educated at that time. In order to change a person, let the person know who he is; that is what Sutherland is doing for women through Edufa. She wants women to observe how men consider and treat them so as to liberate themselves from the hegemonic tendencies of their male counterparts. Again, Martin Owusu and Benjamin Asante in "an interpretative analysis of Efua T. Sutherland's *Edufa*" state that:

As a product of a male-dominated society, Efua Sutherland uses her plays to create an awareness among women to change their situations in a dynamic society. She portrays the nature of human power as used against African women. She, therefore, creates a conducive environment for the necessary changes. (4-5)

The way and manner in which Ampoma is viewed goes for all the women in the play, who in turn represent the entire female faction in Ghana. The level of disrespect for women at the time is nothing to write home about. Though not meant to denigrate the line of Kankam, Edufa's father goes a long way to confirm the notion formed about women around the sixties. Kankam refers to her as "...poor, doting woman" (16). A doting person is somebody who is foolish or weak minded; it could also mean a person who is excessively fond of someone. The playwright uses Ampoma's helpless condition to warn women to realise their status in order to rise up for their right.

Ampoma is a wife to Edufa and the mother of his children; it is her health that gets everybody busy in the household in order to restore back to her, good health. The efforts to me are vain

because it is obvious that this rich husband does nothing extraordinary to show the urgency of his wife's situation. In the prologue of the play, Abena laments on why more potent help is not being sought. She highlights the fact that:

...True that Ampoma ... is unwell; but  
If she is unwell, should we not open our  
gate? She is not mortally ill; but even so,  
just let it be known, and sympathy and  
comforting gifts will flow in from every  
home. So much does the whole town hold  
her dear. (3)

Ampoma is a wife who shares everything with her husband but could not look him in the face to refute Edufa's request of dying in his place but swore her life away for her husband. The relationship between Edufa and Kankam his father is of blood tie; therefore the love between them cannot be said to be less than that of Edufa and his wife. However, Kankam is able to look into Edufa's demand and rejects his request outright but Ampoma fails in doing same. Sutherland might have kept her silent in order to show the voiceless and subservient condition of most of the women in those days which made the men walked over them as if they were nobodies. It is not as though they knew not what is right or wrong but accepted everything with the intention to avoid any castigation from their men and spouses respectively. Sutherland made Ampoma show regret at the end when it was too late. The researcher is of the opinion that it was done to send a wake-up call to women on how badly men treat them in society. Edufa might have loved Ampoma but when it mattered most, he secures his life over that of his wife's. When it becomes obvious that Ampoma could die at any time, Edufa hypocritically tells his wife, "... Oh, wife of my soul. You should never have made that fatal promise." (10) Instead of Ampoma putting it across to him that after all, he wanted someone to die for him and since she has already done that, he ought to shut up, she followed the old order by bowing in with the words.

Once again, the playwright establishes through the character of Ampoma that in the sixties, women had not much voice, a situation they accepted as their fate. The circumstances in which the women found themselves warrant them to accept anything that came their way without scrutinizing it. For instance, because Edufa is her husband, she just accepted to die for him without first examining the consequences of her actions. This even confirms that women at the time could accept whatever

the condition without questioning it. It is apparent that once a thing comes from a man, that is all; they agree to it with confidence and this is an attitude the dramatist abhors for which she preaches change.

### **Female Resistance in Aidoo's *the Delimma of a Ghost and Anowa***

In Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, there is an attempt to present two types of an African lady. The first type stays abroad and would wish to come back to her root while the second lady stays in Africa hopeless of any sight or sign of change. This is introduced in the play by the use of the two-woman chorus who seem to foreground the hopelessness and timelessness of the traditional African woman's gender oppression and subordination. Set against the two-woman chorus's resigned acceptance of the average woman's condition, Eulalie's lonely attempts at pursuing her liberated gender identity as a modern African woman are rendered futile, unachievable, largely misdirected and out of place. This is particularly so if it is argued that Aidoo's two-woman's chorus serves a thematic function that is not dissimilar to the chorus in classical Greek plays whose function it was to provide a running commentary on the futility of mortal man's puny efforts in trying to circumvent the immutable will of the gods.

The contrast of the traditional African womanhood are further sustained through many minor personalities in the play. Chief among whom is Ato's grandmother Nana, an 80-year-old sage and female who comes across to the reader as caustic, incorrigible and cast in the old traditional ways of gendered female African identities. Together with Ato's mother Esi Kom, Old Nana is at the forefront of the propagation of gendered female identities which view marriage not as an individual choice that Ato and his westernised wife Eulalie take for granted, but rather, a collective decision made on the basis of normative gender choices. These are highly conservative collective gender choices that do not allow for deviations in marriage that are based on race, or marrying someone with a background in slavery or indeed someone who is without roots.

It is thus that in seeking to expose and resist the gender constraints and regressive nature of traditional African societies such as that which is depicted in *the Dilemma of a Ghost*, Ama Ata Aidoo unwittingly presents the reader with a seemingly insurmountable predicament for the

hapless Eulalie. Any attempt to break with Africa's normative gender identities seems to trigger the apocalyptic as evidenced by the reaction of Ato's clan to Eulalie's gender transgressions such as smoking cigarettes, use of modern gadgets and her apparent refusal or inability to procreate. This is because Eulalie's gender changes seem to be established through her education and exposure to western enlightenment. The play presents the western education for women as corrupt to the extent that traditional values and identities are in contrast presented as normal, upright and pure. This might justify the reason why most African in the past do not value educating the girl child as it is seen as a waste of resources and an avenue for them to turn evil on the society.

The people's views on Eulalie's gender misbehaviors are consistently seen throughout the play by the god-like two-woman chorus, which at one time satirises Eulalie's predilections for using modern gadgets whenever she comes home to the village. For all its commendable efforts at exposing gender oppression in traditional African societies, in the end Aidoo's play seems to propagate the somewhat uncertain view that an adoption of modern gadgetry which renders the individual African woman almost indolent is perhaps something that Africa might well do without. This is because there is an already established standard that women are beast of burden who need to work hard physically to justify their womanhood in the society. This is the norm or standard which the play tries to resist.

In the play, most of the confrontations and normal discussions that are placed on the protagonist spin around the idea of marriage, so much so that marriage comes across as an uncompromising gendered institution whose dictates for the subordinated female character are all but immutable. In her constant run-ins with members of Ato's clan as she makes an effort to assert her personal freedom and independence, Eulalie is portrayed as a hopeless cultural misfit who has no place in Africa. Her spirited efforts to repudiate the host society's patriarchal traditions and institutions in the name of gendered self-definition as a woman only seems to alienate her further from both the host society and the reader. This too further sustains the resistance to negative established cultural practices that are not helpful to women. It is as if as long as the protagonist is unable to reconcile herself to the rigidity of the normative gender identities put before her, then she has absolutely no place at all wherever she happens to find herself in Africa. Given such circumstances, it is ironic that Eulalie initially views marriage as her ticket to a sense of wholeness and liberation once she

is back in Africa.

### ***The Case of Anowa***

The play, *Anowa* is set in the nineteenth century, after the abolition of the slave trade and the signing of the Bond of 1844, between the British Crown in Cape Coast Castle and the chiefs of the near-by communities. The play tells the story of a young woman who, after refusing to marry several suitors, decides to marry a man of her own choice. This, in the first instance aligns with the theme for the current study. Women do not have the choice of making decision on what to do when it gets to who they wish to marry. Anowa resists this established norm by marrying a man of her choice without paying attention to what family ties hold or think. The couple, after encountering opposition from Anowa's family, decide to leave their hometown of Yebi and start trading in animal skins, a life which increases Kofi Ako's wealth. It is when Kofi Ako embarks on the use of enslaved labour that Anowa's distress takes over, leading to its tragic climax. Anowa's resistance to Kofi Ako's insistence on trading in humans, and her rejection of the wealth Kofi Ako accumulates through this trade leads ultimately to their tragic end. Through the character of Anowa, Aidoo explores an emerging pan African identity, forged out of the traumatic events of slavery.

According to Carole Boyce Davies, *Anowa* is a play that negotiates both the temporal and spatial boundaries. It re-imagines and recuperates the past, giving salience to women's conflicted and contradictory experiences of major historical upheavals. Davies describes this form of engagement with mobility and migration in Aidoo's play as "creative theorising" (44). She explains that this form of theorising is a strategy that is central to Black women's writing. Following the postulations of Davies, the current study argues that Aidoo's portrayal of women in the play is aimed at resisting the negatively established roles and actions of women and this is at the centre of Aidoo's woman-centred pan-African perspective, through which she writes women into a historical record that has erased their presence.

For instance, in the issue of the slave trade, Anowa's dream in Act Three of the play resists the

boundaries set for most women in a typical African society. According to her:

‘I dreamt that I was a big, big woman. And from my insides were huge holes out of which poured men, women and children. And the sea was boiling and steaming. And as it boiled, it threw out many, many giant lobsters, each of whom as it fell turned into a man or woman, but keeping its lobster head and claws. And they rushed to where I sat and seized the men and women as they poured out of me, and they tore them apart, and dashed them on the ground and stamped upon them. (71)

Anowa’s dream positions her at a powerful position not meant for women. She is at the heart of the slave trade as the woman out of whom the men, women, and children are born, and whose progeny are seized and destroyed.

### **Conclusion**

What we have done in this study is to trace the idea of female resistance to six plays written by three African women namely: Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo. The study took two popular plays from each of the playwrights and used the theory of sociological commitment as the theoretical framework for the study. At the end, the study presents that the idea of resistance flows through the six plays where the resistance is mainly in two folds; the major being the resistance against negatively entrenched stereotypical roles of women which include the lack of choice and freedom to make personal decision as can be seen in Ogwoma and Anowa and the others. Also, there is a resistance to the colonialist induced mentality that education corrupts the women folk hence, they should not be educated as can be seen in the case of Eulalie who tries to find a balance between being in African society and being educated in the Western way. The study argues that resistance presented in forms of plays can go a long way in improving the bad situation women find themselves in the typical African society. So, many of these types and other advocacies in this line should be done.

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