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African Traditional Art Forms in Aidoo's *Anowa* and Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia*: Relevance for Contemporary Africa

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Abstract

The paper highlights various African traditional art forms depicted in Ama Ata Aidoo's '*Anowa*' and Tess Onwueme's '*The Reign of Wazobia*'. The analysis of the two plays shows that traditional art forms from two different African societies – Ghana and Nigeria include poetry, local idioms, proverbs, music, dance and masquerades. The functions of these art forms are majorly being didactic as well as entertaining. They are used to project the theme of gender inequality in African societies as well as the rich entertainment aspect of African culture. These are relevant to contemporary Africa whereby many aspects of the people's traditional life are fast being eroded by globalization. In addition the thematic pre-occupation of the two plays on gender inequality contribute to ongoing efforts in contemporary Africa to achieve gender equality in every aspect of the society. It is therefore recommended that African playwrights make frequent use of their rich traditional art forms as vehicles for their thematic projections.

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Introduction

The culture of the African society is rich in many aspects. One of these is her traditional art forms which are highly entertaining and didactic. The usage of these art forms in dramatic works serves several functions such as the promotion of African cultural values. This is of particular significance due to globalization which has caused many cultural practices to cease to exist.

This paper highlights various African traditional art forms depicted in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* and Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia*. These traditional art forms which are from two different African societies include poetry, local idioms, proverbs, music, dance and masquerades. These art forms have also been used by the playwrights to project their thematic pre-occupation of gender inequality in the two African societies.

The importance of gender equality in all human society is under sored by the U.N development goal emphases on gender equality and women empowerment. The necessity for achieving this goal is the belief that:

Equality between women and men is a matter of human right and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people centered sustainable development (fourth world conference on women, 1995).

Gender refers to socially determined and culturally-specific differences between women and men as opposed to the biologically determined differences. It also encompasses the relationship between the two sexes, the roles and responsibilities assigned to them and the values society assigned to them and the value society assigns to these roles. In African societies the role ascribed to the males is usually perceived to be superior to those of the females leading to women occupying a secondary position. The quest for development of the African society would be greatly enhanced if men and women are accepted as equal partners in the development process.

The two plays focused on in this paper highlight issues of gender inequality in two different African societies-Ghana and Nigeria. The two plays portray these thematic concerns through devices such as poetry, local idioms and proverbs, dances, music and masquerade displays.

Gender Issues In Anowa

The play is set in what is now Ghana about a hundred years ago. It tells the story of Anowa, a strong willed exceptional woman who has an enquiry and an independent mind. She refuses of marry any of the men who have asked for her hand in marriage. When she finally decides on a husband, is against her mother's wishes and societal expectations. Due to the conflict between her desires and her mother's wishes, she walks out of her parent's home swearing never to return. Anowa and her husband Kofi engage in trading between the coast hin-

derland. The trade prospers and Kofi decides to buy slaves so as to further expand the business. Anowa rejects this vehemently leading to irreconcilable differences between the two. The couple's problem is compounded by the fact that Anowa cannot bear a child. At the end it is discovered that Kofi has lost his manhood. It is believed that "he consumed it acquiring wealth or exchanged it for prosperity". Kofi commits suicide due to shame while Anowa drowns herself.

In the play, Aidoo ties the issue of slavery to that of the position of women in the society. The writer combines the political with the personal. The view of Michael Etherton is that slavery is the norm of that society and is unquestioned and that in questioning it Anowa steps out of her society and becomes too different. Second, a woman must acknowledge and accept the superior wisdom of the man (233).

Anowa stands out in her village due to being discerning and outspoken. She is also restless because she is intelligent. Her understanding is beyond that of her peers. She is regarded as being strange and unusual particularly because she is a woman. The father, Osam admits that he has always feared her. The husband declares that she is too different.

Another incident in *Anowa* that depicts the secondary position women occupy in the society is the fact that it's the maternal family who decides whom Anowa can marry. Anowa goes against this practice and chooses her husband. This contributes to people's anger towards her. The issue of lack of freedom in choosing a husband is still at times a contemporary problem for woman in African communities. In such cases, the choice of a husband is usually to serve the interest and convenience of a family rather than the woman involved. This is the subject of many plays by African female playwrights. *The Wedlock of the Gods* is by Zulu Sofola, the first major female playwright in Nigeria. In the play, through genuinely in love, Uloko and Ogwoma cannot marry because there is a higher bidder for Ogwoma whom she is eventually forced to marry. In *A Hen Too Soon* by Tess Onwueme, another Nigerian dramatist, the heroine is forced to marry an old man due to the parents' desire to get rich quickly. *Of Heroes and Men* is written by Zodwa Sithebe a female playwright from Swaziland. It focuses on two lovers Duma and Nontombi whose relationship is in danger because the king also desires to marry Nontombi. Her determination to marry the man of her choice against her mother's, father's and king's wishes leads to the two lovers being put to death.

Lack of freedom to choose one's husband exemplifies limitation on women's self-determination and also constitutes a violation of their human rights. Writing on this situation as it concerns Nigerians women (This also applies to women elsewhere in Africa) Julie Okoh states:

A woman's rights to her own person include the right to define and to choose her own action and life style. But the prerequisite is hardly realized by most Nigerian women because their desire for self-determination often enters into an antagonistic relationship with the determination by others.

Consequently they find themselves in the position of an object carrying out the will of others at the expense of their own desire. (68)

Okoh's assertion exemplifies gender inequality in the society. Men are often at greater liberty to make personal choices while women are more in the position of objects used to satisfy the desire of others.

The play *Anowa* also depicts beliefs about women's inferior position in the society through derogatory comments about women made by characters in the play. In a conversation between *Anowa*'s parents concerning their daughters' plight in her marriage the father states:

Osam: Of course, women have mouths to talk with. And indeed they open them anyhow and much of the time, what comes out is nothing a man can take seriously (Aidoo 32).

It is therefore not surprising that Kofi fails to listen to *Anowa*'s view about slavery. Other opinions about women are that expressed by *Badua*, *Anowa*'s mother that "a good woman does not have a brain or a mouth" while the old woman states that "the dumbest man is always better than a woman" These opinions show that the community does not expect good ideas from a woman nor the fact that a woman should assert her views and her rights.

However, the fact that the matrilineal rather than the patrilineal family has the right to finally decide whom a girl should marry, show that women are not entirely without some privileges in that society. Also, *Badua* was able to withstand her husband's wish to have *Anowa* become a priestess. Nevertheless, on the whole, women are clearly depicted in the play as not equal in status to men. Gender equality means equal valuation of the persons, need and aspiration of women and men. The concept also implies that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices (Angya 1)

The Reign of Wazobia And Gender Issues

The play is set in Ika, Igbo land of Nigeria. The main thematic preoccupation is the struggle by women to overthrow the patriarchal system of excluding women from political power. It is based on the Bendel Ibo kingship system.

On the death of king *Ogiso*, *Wazobia*, a young progressive woman is chosen to act as regent. She is to act for three seasons, after which a male king is chosen by the people. At the end of the three months, *Wazobia* refuses to step down for various reasons. She tastes power and finds it sweet and also against the unfairness in using women as regents but not as kings. During her reign, she pursues programmes that enlighten women of their potentials and rights. She also tries to let the men realize that women are also human beings and should be treated as such. She encourages women to engage in progressive ventures in the interest of their families and their society. Initially, some women like

the Omu (the head of the women) are apprehensive of her rules because her ideas are revolutionary. But later Omu gets convinced of the positive and fruitful results of her action and directives and gives Wazobia the necessary support.

On the other hand, the men become afraid and insecure. They feel that Wazobia's continued stay on the throne would spell doom for them so they plot to overthrow her. They get some women on their side but the plot fails. Omu rallies the women together to confront their oppressors (the men) and saboteurs (their female allies). As a last resort, they use the unusual solution of striping themselves naked in the belief that a radical problem requires a radical solution. In many traditional societies the revolt by angry naked women assumes spiritual significance. So any one who is familiar with the implications and consequences of such action will try to avert it. The action makes the men to retreat and abandon their plan to remove Wazobia by force. The women successfully resist their exclusion from the kingship position.

The major focus of the play is the issue of gender dimension of women's right in the area of governance. The belief of the land is that women are not fit to be placed in kingship position though they can be used as regents that rule for only a limited period. Therefore, though Wazobia rules well as a regent, tradition demands that she steps down after three months for an elected male king. Wazobia protests against this practice in her determination to continue as king. She also argues that, if the law prescribes a female regent when men are available the kingship should not be left exclusively for the men:

Wazobia: ... Ask yourselves why the law prescribes
A female regent?

Where are the men? If rulership is the preserve of men?
(Ibid 7)

As to be expected, her determinations to hold onto power and the changes she makes for the emancipation of women in the land are opposed by most of the men symbolized by Iyase and Idehen. From the onset, after Wazobia is crowned as the regent, Iyase refuses to bow to her (a typical male bigot!). But Wazobia's is able to subdue him. He continues the opposition and together with Idehen plots to overthrow her.

In addition, Wazobia, though a woman has to be dressed in the robes of king Ogiso, which is a male regalia. This means that kingship belongs to the domain of men. Wazobia has to hide her woman identity in the robes of the male king. Only then can her rulership be recognized. Even Wazobia herself, through revolutionary is torn between the pronouns he and she while referring to herself or is it himself.

Also, Omu who is the head-wife calls herself "king" among women and is upset because she is called a woman. She demands of the priest of Ani:

And you call me woman? I, the Omu, surpassed all women, king among women (10).

The opinion of Josephine Odey is that *The Reign of Wazobia* is perhaps Onwueme's most confrontational testament against patriarchy. No longer satisfied with talking about forced marriage and inhibiting traditional practices, which disempowered the female, Onwueme moves into the arena of governance (164).

The issues of exclusion of women from leadership position highlighted in the play correlates with women's position in contemporary Africa. In most African societies, traditional leadership is the exclusive preserve of men.

In the political arena there is a high level of mismatch between the number of female voters and female presence in elective political offices. This seriously reduces their effective participation in decision-making and governance. Currently, though more and more women are occupying political posts in Africa countries, female heads of government are still rare.

A major reason for gender inequality in the area of governance in Africa is the cultural beliefs of the people as depicted in the *The Reign of Wazobia*. Many African cultures are slow to accept assertive, public or leadership roles for women.

The Universal human rights include:

The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels. The eradication of all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community (Vienna declaration and programme of Action, 1995, Part I, Para 18).

The above declaration implies that access to leadership positions and opportunities for involvement in decision-making are important human rights for women. There is therefore need for African governments and societies to fashion out deliberate politics to enhance women's involvement in governance.

African Traditional Art Forms In *Anowa* And *The Reign Of Wazobia*

Many of the dramatic devices in *Anowa* and *The Reign of Wazobia* are elements of African traditional art forms. There are entertaining as well as being didactic. The performances of the plays are therefore effective avenues for passing across messages of gender equality.

Anowa is a traditional tale. A legend of the Akan people of Ghana. However, the tale is common in many African communities with variations. It is usually about a beautiful but disobedient daughter who refuses for a long time to marry any of her suitors. She finally ends up with one that leads to disaster. Megan Behrent states that in *Anowa*:

Ama Ata Aidoo borrows heavily from heritage of oral literature for the structure, the themes and the characters of the play. She consciously uses these art forms and effectively shows the merits and intricacies of these

traditional art forms while adapting them to deal with modern issues in Ghanaian society... It is as she says more or less my own rendering of a kind of legend, because according to my mother, who told me the story, it is supposed, to have happened. <http://www.poscolonialweb.org/africa/ghana/aidoo/anowal.html> (Retrieved 20 November, 2017)

Folk tales were common occurrences in African communities. They reflect society and its beliefs. They are also means of socialization and avenues through which societies passed on their histories from one generation to the next. Naana Jane Opuku opines that usually in primary oral culture the folk tale constitutes a major early source for the liberation of the imagination. Opuku states that built largely on fantasy, the tale has therapeutic, emotional and cathartic usefulness as well as didactic function (83). Aidoo in *Anowa*, has utilised the Akan folktale to depict contemporary issues. These include the issues of gender equality and man's inhumanity to man in the form of slavery.

Umemedimo Atakpa (2012:478) using the Efik society in Nigeria elaborates on functions of folk tales in African society. He states that the stories centre on animals, humans and the supernatural. Animal stories are told mostly to children. They entertain, help to educate the children and also satirize human society. The other type of folk tale centres on human beings as the protagonists. They are lengthier and their themes are woven around marvelous events and persons identified in everyday life. These tales possess explanatory aspects and their endings are always moralizing.

Atakpa further cites Amadi (1980/3013/) who states that:

The mythical tales are told to be believed by faith and are cited as sources of answer to ignorance, doubt or disbelief. They constitute dogmas, and therefore regarded as sacred and associated with theology or religious ritual.

However, even when these tales are not believed, the lessons inherent in them are useful for the development of the society. Folk tales are therefore still relevant for contemporary Africa especially for the upbringing of children.

The language of *Anowa* and *The Reign of Wazobia* are structured in ways that reflect the traditional way of speaking in African communities.

The plays abound with poetic expressions, local idioms and proverbs which help to evoke the cultural milieu in which the actions take place. These reflect the view of Chinua Achebe (acclaimed to be the greatest novelist from Africa) that:

African people did not hear of cultures for the first time from Europeans: that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. (157)

Examples of poetic lines from Anowa include the following description of Anowa by the old man:

Old man: Beautiful as korado Ahima,
 Someone's – Thin-Thread.
 A dignity little pot
 well-baked,
 And polished smooth
 To set in a nobleman's corner
 (Aidoo 7).

Elsewhere the old man also describes Anowa as one that had the hot eyes and nimble feet of one born to dance to the god's (20).

In *The Reign of Wazobia* the heroine is praised several times in poetic ways by the drummer. This is in line with praise chants of traditional rulers in Africa. In addition, Idehen one of Wazobia's major male opponents tries to seduce her as a means of getting close to the throne. He praises her beauty through poetic words full of local idioms:

Idehen: ... Ugbana, the bird of unalloyed whiteness Ozugwe,
 The king and beauty of snakes!
 Ekenogwulugu, Agu;
 Rainbow which commands the sky,
 Taunting the earth with her tears and smiles'
 Rainbow whose laughter shakes the land,
 Leaving the waters loaded (Onwueme 44).

There are also several similes and metaphors drawn from village life. Examples in Anowa include the old man and old woman being metaphorically referred to as "The mouth that eats salt and pepper" in reference to their being used to symbolize people in the village community. One common factor about human beings is their habit of eating food. In addition, Anowa's mother derogatively refers to Kofi as a "good for nothing cassava man" and "watery males of all" An example of simile in play is Badu's description of marriage. She states that "marriage is like a piece of cloth... And like cloth, its beauty passes with wear and tear". In addition towards the end of the play as Anowa refuses to partake of the gains of slavery, the contrast in the appearance of the couple is described by the old woman as follows.

Old woman: they say to Kofi sits like a bullfrog in a swamp, while Anowa grows thin, her eyes popping of her head like those hungry toad in a parched ground. (Aidoo 41)

In *The Reign of Wazobia*, Wazobia internationally states that "women bear elephant tusks" in reference to her belief that women are courageous. Wazobia herself is also described as "The one who has the heart of a gun." Similies in the

play include Wazobia's explanation of one reason she is unwilling to step down from the throne.

Wazobia: Power, like sweet palm wine sends your feet dancing
in the air until you hit the rooftop broken and tumbling
down like chicken feather to earth. (Onwueme 4).

In another instance, Idehen while urging the people to dethrone Wazobia states that wazobia is like a decaying tooth which must be extracted from the clan". These figurative expressions are appropriate to the place and people pictured in the plays.

Furthermore, proverbs abound in the two play reflecting the view of Drain A Roscoe "that proverbial idioms are one of the most ancient and protean teaching devices that Africa has to offer" (131) In the plays they enhance the themes, sharpen characterization and also portray the values of the society. In Anowa, in reference to the heroine's disobedience and the expected consequences the following proverbs are stated- "The yam that will burn shall burn, boiled or roasted" and "The sapling breaks with bending that will not grow straight". In addition, the old man in his wisdom points out that there should be a balanced view of Anowas' behaviour by also considering her parents contribution. He states that "the best way to sharpen a knife is not to wet one side of it only". In *The Reign of Wazobia*, Omu tries to convince Wazobia to listen to her view as the older and wiser woman by stating that "she who has cooked longer can boast of more broken pots" A man who beat his wife uses the following proverbs to challenge women that men are superior to them: "If the fowl boast that urinating is an easy matter, let it urinate for the world to see".

The effectiveness of proverbs in the two plays is in line with Bernth Lindford's view that proverbs can be employed:

Not only to receive communication gone astray but to speed it up, slow down, convey weighty messages, deliver lighthearted jests, sharpen arguments, blunt criticism, clarify difficult ideas and disguise simple ones beyond easy recognition (105).

Additional dramatic devices, In *The Reign of Wazobia* are the use of drumming, singing and dancing. This makes the play highly entertaining. The play begins with a background described as follows, "A flue plays somber tones which rise in crescendo until overtaken by vibrant rhythm of drums. At the centre of this hot dance is Wazobia surrounded by dancing women" (Onwueme 1).

According to Osita, Ezenwanebe, (2012:286) The action of the plays pulsates with the music of drums and the dances of women and young maidens. In *The Reign of Wazobia*, the women's dance in the prologue, followed by incursion of the masquerade that hypnotized the women and leads them in a backward dance, symbolically foreshadows the dramatic action and summarizes the play. The choice and coronation of a king surrogate falls within the period of

Ifejoku's rite (bush clearing ritual) during which the priest, Ani, offers supplication to the god, Ani, to accept the people's supplication and bless the land for a new planting season. The success of the ritual, marked by the god's acceptance of their offerings and blessing of the new planting season, is celebrated with the dance of maidens, among whom the mantle of surrogate-king falls on Wazobia. The coronation of Wazobia as the regent of Ilaa is done amidst songs and dances. After the coronation, her entrance into the palace square is celebrated as a royal procession, marked by heavy drumming and horn blowing. The lead drummer chants praise names for Wazobia and traces her pedigree.

Another function of the dance in African society is explained by Teghtegh Dennis, using the Tiv people of middle belt Nigeria as an example. Teghtegh (2016:38) states that dance through the years has been a form of documenting diverse human experiences of the Tiv. Teghtegh cites Akpede (2010:13) that there is a female dance "Daserda" which marks the introduction of the then Tiv Native Authority police in Tivland by the defunct Northern peoples' congress (N.P.C) regime under the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the then Northern Region of Nigeria in the Sixties. Teghtegh further states that the efficacy of dances in chronicling historic events makes African performance into tenable measures for safe guarding further occurrences.

Music and dancing which occur several times in the play are used by the writer not just to entertain but create different moods and convey different messages. For example music, which is used for jubilation, is also used in the final scene of the play during the confrontation between the men and women. It is stated that "Battle-calls are heard. War sounds. Drums increase in tempo, throbbing the sound of battle (Ibid 61). The women also use dance to force the men to accept their position to have a woman as king. Omu declares:

Omu... This naked dance is a last resort women have had over the ages. If our men force us to the wall, we must use it as our final weapon. Unusual problems demand unusual solution (Ibid 53).

Onwueemes' frequent use of music is a reflection of the African way of life whereby songs are employed in almost all spheres of life. These include worship, ceremonies such as marriages, funerals, naming ceremonies, wrestling, going to war and in praise of rulers. Adunni Joseph asserts that:

Music has been an integral part of African life. Every aspect of the people's existence is musical. Music is used as a weapon of correction, social change, expression of love, hatred and relationship ... (53)

Dance usually accompanies music; it is a significant type of art forms in Nigeria (similar to other African community) that manifest in different stages of the people. Abimbola DosumuYeside asserts that this occurs from birth to puberty,

adulthood, courtship, marriage, old age and death. Long before the coming of theatrical dances to Africa, rituals have played major roles in shaping the history and cultural practices of the people (38).

Onwueme also utilizes masquerading in *The Reign of Wazobia* for entertainment purposes and to convey messages. In the prologue of the play, a masquerade plunges into the group of dancing women and compels them to join in a backward dance. Wazobia orders the women to stop. For Wazobia, the backward dance symbolizes retrogression rather than progress.

In many African communities, masquerades connote supernatural forces and ancestors. They are used for leisure and regulate societal activities such as issues of morality and curbing of other behavioural excesses.

The view of Utoh-Ezejugh, Tracie is that (2015:223) Masquerades possess aesthetic qualities which attract large audiences to their performances. They form an integral part of festivals, and cultural displays and exhibit elaborate artistic dexterity during celebrations such as cultural festivals, ancestral feasts, funerals, historical enactments and religious feasts. Masquerades hold a fascination for all age groups. Their aesthetic values are significant and provide the motivation for modern acceptance, as they often constitute the major entertainers during Christian celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. The music, drama, dance, mime and songs incorporated into their performances, provide entertainment for the audience, while at the same time performing some other socio-cultural functions. Masquerade displays hold a fascination and appeal which stems partly from traditional expectations and partly from the people's genuine love for art.

Relevance for Contemporary Africa

The above traditional art forms in dramatic works still have relevance for contemporary Africa. These art forms have high aesthetic values as they are usually very entertaining. For example African Masquerades, dances and music are normally spectacular with their movements, costumes and make up. Utoh-Ezejugh, Tracie (2015:223) posits that:

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Enyeribe, Onyemuchara (2013:90) collaborates Utoh-Ezejugh view about the high aesthetics value of African art forms by describing Nigerian (African) dance as a total performance because it has elements of other genres of the performing arts such as music – songs or beats that come from instruments such as drums (wooden or metal), clappers, flutes, maracas and other such instruments. Oftentimes, the performance is lyrical, performed melodiously or in chants and

accompanied with beautifully articulated movements and patterns.

The inclusion of African traditional art forms in dramatic works increase their aesthetic values. They enhance and sustain the interest of the audience in the plays.

Traditional art forms in dramatic works also project and aid the understanding of people's way of life. They are means of communicating ethical values and norms of a society. Asante (1996:64) cites primus that dance rituals in Africa express the very heart-beat of communal living and is an accurate mirror of the psychology of the people.

Ademola Kafewo cited in Anyebe, Ted collaborates the above view:

Since culture presents the most viable outlet for self definition and self-assertion to study a people, it were better we study their arts, which in the main, represents the emblem not their culture. (2014:30)

The above perspective also shows that traditional art forms can enhance relations among nations. It is due to this factor that traditional art forms are increasingly being used for cultural diplomacy. Performance of plays with these art forms before foreign audiences can help to promote African countries images and values amongst other foreign countries. Culture has been referred to as soft power that can enable a country to make its political ideals and policies more attractive to other, nations.

Furthermore, traditional art forms have a role to play in preserving a people's culture. This is of particular significance in contemporary time whereby globalization has led to some cultures being swallowed up by others. This has been the experience in African countries due to western influences.

The view of Iyav, Ben is that:

In various communities especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the indigenous culture is suffering from extinction as western attitudes, styles, mannerisms, behaviours, and beliefs are fast overthrowing existing indigenous values. (2016:25)

It is obvious that beyond entertainment traditional art forms in literary works such as plays help in documenting people's cultures. This preserves traditional values and practices for future generations.

The uses of devices also enhance the thematic concerns, which include gender inequality in African societies. This thematic preoccupation is particularly relevant in contemporary times in line with the current global effort to achieve gender equality and women empowerment.

The two plays are common in portraying the issue of gender inequality in the African society. The plays are from two different African communities- Ghana and Nigeria. They also reflect two different time periods. *Anowa* is a set in pre-colonial African while the setting of the *Reign of Wazobia* is post-colonial

Africa. The issue of gender inequality depicted in the play *Anowa* portray as incorrect the view that life for women in pre-colonial African was free from patriarchal oppression. Colonialism certainly compounded the gender problem of the African women but it was not solely responsible. Katerine Frank posits that while traditional African life before colonialism is usually the object of nostalgic celebrations in the African novel, women writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa show that traditional life was full oppression for women (44) Ayesha Mei Iman terms the attitude of portraying pre-colonial African as a land of peace and harmony free from conflict as was the Garden of Eden before the fall as 'the golden age of merrier African'. Iman asserts that this approach ignores the life of the generality of women and the issue of control, power and exploitation (34).

Ongoing efforts in different African countries to bridge the gender gap have certainly brought some gains for women, but much more still need to be done. There are still many cultural practices that are against women empowerment in the continent. These include commodification of women in the form of bride price, female circumcision, non-inheritance by females and maltreatment of widows. The political arena in Africa also shows much gender disparity. Women have rarely held positions as heads of the government including other positions of importance. The thematic pre-occupation of the two plays are of importance to the development of the African continent.

Conclusion

Aidoo and Onwueme in using dramatic devices that are essentially African in the above plays have helped to bring about greater understanding of the African way of life such as the rich entertainment aspect of African culture. The usage of these traditional art forms also aids the documentation and preservation of these practices as well as plot development and enhancement of the thematic preoccupation of the two plays. The functions of these traditional art forms in the two plays show their values even in contemporary African societies.

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