

Interrogating Gender Dynamics through Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*

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Abstract

Ama Ata Aidoo's vociferous oeuvre is a reflection of her apprehension of the position of African women in a postcolonial African society. Her works reflect her proclivity to locate women within the matrix of cultural, gendered, ideological, economic, and political constraints. Aidoo's representation of the female characters in myriad situations in her oeuvre is an interrogation and chronicling of African women's response to oppression and gender dynamics. Mary Modupe Kowalowe in *Womanism and African Consciousness* notes that the "emergence of women writers as their own voices transformed the depiction of femininity in African literature. Women as objects and marginal characters gave way to women as subjects and positive protagonists. This breakthrough came with women writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa as pioneers" (80). In this regard, the genre of drama is crucial in engendering the conundrums of an African woman as it gives a more realistic expression of society. The intersectionality of theatre with feminism enables an apt description of gendered spaces. As such keeping in context Aidoo's contributions to resonate with African female voice, this paper intends to analyse the significance of the dramatic technique in the representation of women in her play *Anowa*.

Keywords: Anowa; Dramatic devices; Female voice; Folkloric tradition; Gender.

The theatre in Africa has its inception in the autochthonous tradition of rituals and celebrations that form the historical, social and cultural aesthetics of African society. Indeed, K. E. Agovi has defined African theatre as a "form of creativity in the theater which is rooted in the composite tenor of African experience, embodying a relationship of relevance between the past and present, and which in effect reflects principles of African per-

formance aesthetics" (67). Drama and performance is considered as an effective medium to respond to colonial hegemonies in Africa because, in Ola Rotimi's words, it is "not alien in form, as is the novel" (qtd in Gilbert 8). African playwrights like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Efua Sutherland among others reconfigured African drama to embody their cultural roots by resuscitating indigenous dramatic forms in their artistic output. Similarly, one key proponent in the revival of traditional Ghanaian theatrical conventions in contemporary Ghanaian drama is Efua Sutherland. Sutherland was determined to develop the African theatre and African dramatic forms had reintroduced the Akan oral traditions which comprised folktales, proverbs, riddles, dirges, poetry, etc transmitted from one generation to the other. The relevance of these indigenous art forms is that they enable the people to absorb the "precious traditional beliefs, customs, and taboos" of their societies (Asante 349). She imbibed the Akan folktales of Anansesem and transformed them into a new theatrical convention called Anansegoro that shaped the grounds of New Ghanaian drama. The Anansegoro is a fusion of Akan spider tales (Ananse) and the Ghanaian heritage of "concerts, drumming, dancing, singing, and acting" (Asante 351). This is evident, in her play *The Marriage of Anansewa* where she draws from traditional folktale conventions coalesced with other structural elements to shape the narrative form of the play.

The theatrical convention of Anansegoro served a two-fold purpose of historical recuperation and regeneration of Ghana's cultural identity that waned with the experiences of colonialism. The rituals and festivals that resemble the rich heritage of African culture are entwined with the performative and aesthetic elements of African theatre. The theatrical repertoire of songs, dance, music, story-telling, and so on not only echoes the social practices of African societies but also offers a fecund space for the "collective renewal of arts as a form of community experience or as expressing group consciousness" (Bame 113). The aesthetic elements are an integral part of African rituals and traditions. The literary drama of contemporary Africa has restored the indigenous customs and traditions in the theatrical space not only to reinstate their lost cultural consciousness but to effectively accentuate the content of a play. In light of the above context, this paper aims to examine how Aidoo functionalises the theatrical space as a politically motivated tool to restore the silenced voices of women within the social and political matrix of Ghanaian life through a close reading of her play *Anowa* (1970). The central focus is to draw attention to how the employment of traditional African oral art techniques like folklore, musical instruments, storyteller figures, and other elements in *Anowa* are essential structural elements to underscore two important narrative strands

in the play: first, to redefine gendered spaces and second, to bring to focus how the genre of drama acts as an intrinsic medium to interrogate the position of women in Africa and reinstating their silenced voices. Thus, the paper shall take the intersectionality of indigenous African narrative art of performance and gender discourse as a point of reference to decipher its implication on the postcolonial African community and women in particular.

Position of Women in African Literature and Tradition: The phallogocentric nature of society that licenses the domination and oppression of women has pervaded the African literary landscape too. The literary representation of women by male writers has further led to the political disempowerment of women in African societies. This politics of representation has increased the social imbalances based on gender. The inability of male writers to portray female characters in all its essence has enhanced their objectification and marginalisation in the social and cultural milieu of African communities. The male-dominated literary tradition is responsible for perpetuating popular myths of the subservient position of women because of its partial representation of women. The subordination and discrimination of women based on their gender pervades the social, cultural, and political arenas of Ghanaian societies too. Aidoo belonging to the Akan community in Ghana proclaims her concern about the gender parity prevalent among the Akan people, despite being known as a matrilineal society in her essay "To Be a Woman." She writes:

The position of a woman in Ghana is no less ridiculous than anywhere else...Once you, the young man, had been bold enough to go and take her of her mother's back, you could take it for granted that you had acquired a sexual aid; a wet nurse and a nursemaid for your children; a cook-steward and general housekeeper; a listening post; an economic and general consultant; a field-hand and, if you are that way inclined, a punch-ball. (259)

As such, substantial resistance to gender-biased power structures by subverting the subservient position of women and their deplorable condition in the social, political, economic and cultural arena of Contemporary Africa is a pressing concern in her literary oeuvre. Questions pertaining to female agency, subjectivity, and victimisation through colonial and patriarchal discursive practices are some of the major thematic strands in Aidoo's work. She experiments with multiple genres to negotiate and challenge the experiences of African women in their quotidian lives in an attempt to bring forth female consciousness. In this regard, reading her experimentation with the genre of drama particularly in *Anowa* as a medi-

um to ameliorate the condition of women in African society gives incite to explore theatre's ability to re-enact lived spaces through performance to provide a relevant forum that enables women to speak out and engage in social change. This efficacy of theatre is underscored by Lebogang Disele when she urges "the theatre-goers and theatre-makers use the theatre space to re-imagine, re-invent, re-define, and re-consider our lived spaces and through them our interactions with each other and the world around us" (68). Accordingly, Aidoo's drawing from African oral traditions and cultural practices enables her to give a larger picture of the inner workings of gender dynamics in African societies.

Literature Review: Regarding the relevance of traditional dramatic elements in African literary drama, she remarks:

I believe...that in order for African drama to be valid, it has to derive lots of its impetus, its strength, from traditional African dramatic forms; however one conceives these forms because they exist. What we must do is to find out what they are, and how we can use them. (Interview, Aidoo 22)

Both her plays, *Anowa* and *Dilemma of a Ghost*, deeply rooted in traditional oral art conventions explore the societal perception of women and how women revert back to such convictions with the aid of the traditional narrative drama genre pioneered by Eflua Sutherland. However, it is interesting to note that, literary scholarship on *Anowa* manifests the feminist concerns of the play by taking into account the content of the play but overlooks the marked influence of oral narrative art in augmenting the raised concerns of the play. For instance, literary articles like Priscillia Appiah's "The Illiterate African Woman as Depicted in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa*," analyse the self-expressive and powerful illiterate women characters with special reference to *Anowa* who raise questions about societal norms imposed on women but the essay fails to consider the relevance of Ghanaian conventions of story-telling used by Aidoo in the play. In a similar vein, Assimina Karavanta's essay "Rethinking the Specter: Ama Ata Aidoo's "Anowa", considers the current postcolonial situation in the light of *Anowa* to rethink the issues of "belonging, representation, and silence" that the spectre's haunting politics engender but does not mention about the structural elements of the play in evoking these issues. It is to be mentioned that the criticism of *Anowa* has mostly concentrated on certain aspects of the play's plot without interpreting the relevance of the integral role of the formal aspects of the play. As such, my study attempts to add to the existing scholarship on *Anowa* by shedding light on how the use of

narrative folktale tradition that is infused with music and dance illuminates and problematises the gender themes in the play as well as sets the tone and rhythm of the play.

African Foklore: The socio-cultural fabric of African societies is rooted in orature and folkloric tradition. African folklores are teeming with animal stories, tricksters, folk wisdom, tales of conflict and morals, etc. They form a vital aspect of African societies in communicating and passing on the ideas, customs, beliefs, and traditions of respective societies from one generation to another. A comprehensive meaning of African folktales can be discerned from the book *Folkloristics: an Introduction* where it is defined as:

expressive forms, processes and behaviours that we customarily learn, teach and utilize or display during face-to-face interactions and that we judge to be traditional because they are based on known precedents or models and because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, through beliefs and feelings. (Introduction, Georges and Jones 1)

They play a significant role in the continuity and preservation of African culture. The didactic function of folktales serves a crucial role in inculcating values and morals for the smooth functioning of the community. Folktales also play a notable role in the characterisation of gender roles. Their role in influencing the social dynamic of power and gender stereotyping is irrefutable. The images of women represented in the folktales serve as models to be followed by women in their daily lives. They are used as viable mediums to interpellate women in “restrictive and subordinate subject position” that reinforce “an androcentric tyranny” masqueraded as “culture and tradition” (Sheik 47). Two popular images of women that come to focus in the folktales of different cultures are the docile and submissive women who are seen as the ideal representation of women; and the norm-defying assertive woman who is seen in suspicion and awe by society. If certain folktales are used as vehicles to define the social, political and cultural roles of women, then several other tales debunk the established prescription of gender within a patriarchal framework. Subsequently, African female writers have also drawn from the oral tradition of folktales to construct a counter-hegemonic discourse that subverts the stereotypical images of women. Aidoo in her play *Anowa* uses the folktale of Anowa as a dramatic device to authenticate female agency and subjectivity. These devices enabled her to stimulate thoughts, doubts and concerns about the position of women in her society. Aidoo uses folklore

and other traditional African repertoire elements in her plays to develop a more enriching effect on raising the consciousness of people.

Anowa as a Discursive Tool: In Ghanaian culture, the folktale of Anowa illustrates the story of a disobedient daughter who rejects the suitors chosen by her parents, and marries a man without her parent's consent only to meet her doom. Aidoo based her play on the folktale of Anowa and infused it with new meanings of contemporary relevance. She states this in an interview with Maxine McGregor, "[t]he ending is my own" and so is the meaning I assigned to what transpired (Aidoo 22). She re-defines this tale that cautions women not to act at their will as an example of a rational, independent and assertive woman. Traditional African communities are structured in a way that significant decisions in life are not taken by individuals, particularly girls, rather the elders of the village community wield their authority. At the beginning of the play, we get to know that Anowa is the topic of discussion in every household in Abura. When Anowa displays her courage to make her own choice rather than succumbing to her parent's choice, she is misinterpreted. Her reluctance to marry the prospective suitors of her parents, Badua and Osam's choice has exacerbated the anger of the village people of Yebe. Her culture views her as an example of a wicked woman because of her tenacity and propensity to voice her ideas. This is because she has defied cultural norms. This is evident when Badua condemns her attitude by commenting that:

BADUA. A good woman does not have a brain or mouth. (2.93)

Her uniqueness and sense of individuality estranged her from other girls in the village. The Abura society was unable to conceptualise her insightful thinking as it did not conform to the prescribed cultural and social norms. The society's inability to silence her voice and confine her within the conventional social structure made them identify her as a priestess. This identification of women in possession of religious or supernatural powers has been observed by Catherine Coquery as such:

Men have often worshipped female figures, for indeed, they have feared a power that they needed but could not control: the ability to give life, to obtain good harvests for the community through fertility rituals, to intervene as mediators in complex marriage strategies and social relations among neighbouring groups and villages, to diffuse quarrels, and to heal. (46)

Similarly, the villagers in Abura insisted Badua apprentice Anowa as a

priestess because they were not able to comprehend her behaviour as normal. They believed that if she turns a priestess she may quieten down. Unfortunately, it was not easy for society to break her strong-willed nature. She doesn't cower in to maintain her perspective, even after her marriage to Kofi Ako. We see her staunch opposition to slavery throughout the entire performance when she announces to Kofi Ako that he cannot maintain slaves. Her strong convictions against slavery damage her relationship with Kofi Ako, but she doesn't waver from her choice until she dies. Furthermore, another matter that is entwined with the honour and subjugation of women in African societies which mirrors in the play is to expose societal biases like infertility. In traditional Ghanaian society, the sole purpose of marriage is childbearing as it manifests the lineage system of the family. Women are expected to conceive briefly after marriage. This has been observed by J. S. Mbiti in his book *African Religions and Philosophy* when he says that "marriage and procreation in African communities are unity: without procreation marriage is incomplete" (107).

Fertility holds a significant place in the Akan way of life, and to be barren is perceived as a curse. This aspect of Akan culture is placed by Derek Wright as such, "[t]he barren have no face in the other World, runs one Akan proverb, expressing the customary consequences of childlessness" (140). In a similar vein, when Anowa says that, she is unable to see her future, Kofi Ako quickly remarks:

KOFI AKO. This is because you have no children. Women who have children can always see themselves in the future. (2.96)

The above lines indicate the significance of fertility in Ghanaian culture. Moreover, Kofi Ako's statement is a subtle way of making women easily responsible for their own fate. In the play, her resistance to yield to cultural norms is seen by society and Kofi Ako as a reason for her barrenness. Besides, Kofi Ako holds Anowa responsible for barrenness to shield his impotency. In this case, Aidoo's re-imagining of the Anowa folktale in the play serves a twofold purpose—it shows the cultural conventions of confining women and also uses Anowa as a representative model of gender equality. It demonstrates the inadequacy of society in conceiving Anowa's gender perception. Throughout the play, Anowa has raised her voice against gender parity. For instance, when she expressed her dissent to Kofi Ako's idea of buying slaves, he said that she was acting like a woman. On hearing Kofi Ako's remark, she reminds him of her equal contribution to expanding their business. She says:

ANOWA. ...I had as much a mouth in the idea of beginning this trade as you had. And as much head. (2.90)

She exercises her agency by making it clear about her position in their prosperity. Moreover, Anowa emerges as a powerful, hardworking woman, who can look at both domestic and public space when she exhibits her consciousness about her position in society. Even Kofi Ako acknowledges her strength when he says:

KOFI AKO. Ei, Anowa. You ought to have been born a man. (2.84)

Though Kofi Ako synonymise's strength with man; yet his expression of her to be born as a man shows his acknowledgement of her empowered self. It further demonstrates Anowa as a rational and intelligent woman with the potential to secure her voice in a static social system. Furthermore, the play's interlinking of the two thematic strands—slavery and the position of an independent and strong-minded woman in a male-dominated society through the character of Anowa also manifests the subversion of power structures. Her logical reasoning on both the matters of slavery and gender hierarchy exemplifies her “stubborn resistance” and “transgressive attitude” to be compartmentalized as per societal norms. Henceforth, it can be discerned that the theatricality of folktale in engaging with social issues proves to be an essential structural element in the play as it re-fashions the folktale of the ‘disobedient daughter’ as an example that Ghanaian women need not look at other cultures but their own to learn feminist lessons. Apart from deploying the folktale as a dramatic technique to depict issues concerning women, other attendant devices in a folktale further enhance the issues at hand. The narrative's engagement in theatrical dispositions that are imperative to the overall effect of the play accentuates that folktale is not simply story-telling but an amalgamation of other artistic devices like songs, dance, drumming, role-playing, and music. The relationship of folkloric tradition with theatre and its necessity to be recognized as a “narrative art” has been mentioned by Daniel Crowley in his work *African Folklore in the New World*. In this work, he describes that folklore should not be considered as literature but theatre (3). Similarly, all the dramatic elements intrinsic to folklore as well as traditional African oral art employed in the play intensify the narrative vitality of the play to convey the gender intricacies with depth and resonance as it allows the character to construct a fecund space to assert oneself.

The Story-teller: Another dramatic device employed by Aidoo that emphasises the gender manifestations in the play is the ubiquitous narrator/

storyteller. The oral storyteller is indigenous to African oral traditions. They are used as framing devices of stories and are characterised with omniscient quality because they know what is going to happen, they “intervene in the action and comments upon the events” (Schipper 127). Being skilled in oral art, the storyteller may add humour or drama using diverse tactics such as onomatopoeic phrases, proverbs, and images. Being an actor himself/herself, he/she can mimic many accents and voices and dramatise actions with body language, gestures, and facial expressions. Aidoo extracts this story-teller figure from the oral traditions to introduce the characters, set the play in motion, and act as string-holders in the play by commenting on the incidents in the play. Interestingly, the functionality of the narrator/commentator in both the plays of Aidoo—*Anowa* and *Dilemma of a Ghost*—is also similar to the theatrical role of “sutradhar” in Indian dramaturgy. Contemporary Indian theatre has revived such dramatic conventions intrinsic to Indian folk tradition to develop Indian aesthetics and weave it with contemporary subject matters. The sutradhar or string-holder occupied a central place in the traditional Indian theatre of precolonial times. They have their root in Bhasa and Bhavbhuti in Sanskrit theatre of ancient India.

The influence of Sutradhar or string-holders in contemporary Indian drama is irrevocable. In Indian drama, they sometimes act as the narrator as well as the character of the play who observes the action of the play. Contemporary playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, and Girish Karnad, among others have persuasively used the narratorial figure as connecting threads in their plays. For instance, the use of Sutradhar by Vijay Tendulkar in his modern drama *Ghasiram Kotwal* has a far-reaching effect on the Indian theatrical landscape. In the play, the sutradhar Haridasa plays a crucial role in the development of the plot. Tendulkar employs the sutradhar as a dramatic technique to foreground and comment on social ills and malaise prevalent in contemporary society. The string-holder or Sutradhar in Indian theatre is similar to the story-teller figure in African oral traditions. Aidoo employs the same technique in both the plays *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. In the play, *Dilemma of a Ghost*, the role of the oral storyteller/narrator as a dramatic device accentuates the theme of (in) fertility. In keeping with this view, the characterisation of the storyteller as two female figures—First Woman and Second Woman—to articulate the issue of barrenness in Akan society becomes strategic to accelerate the play’s narrative momentum. For instance, the First Woman depicted as barren comments on the position of a barren woman in society; simultaneously, the Second Woman as fertile shares her drawbacks of having children. From the beginning of the play, they inform the audience about

the situation in Esi Kom's (protagonist) household as well as share their perspective on what it is to be fertile or barren.

Similarly, the introduction of the narrator/commentator in *Anowa* "as a framing device is crucial to the establishment of the full meaning of the play" (Etherton 229). In *Anowa* the narratorial figure or the string-holder is characterised as the compound choral figure The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper comprising an Old Man and an Old Woman. They are instrumental in mirroring the perspectives of the community as well as connecting the action of the play. They offer a sense of continuity and coherence and have their exits and entrances. The play opens with a prologue in which The Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper acquaints us about their village Abura as well as introduces us to the protagonists Anowa and Kofi Ako. The fusion of two contradictory characters represents the existence of alternative perspectives in society as well as unfurls both problems and possibilities for a woman in an African society. It is the Old Woman who keeps retorting Anowa for not behaving like a woman. For instance, when the Old Man tries to convince the Old Woman that it is not the first time that a man and a woman have married against the will of "grey-haired crows". On hearing the Old Man's words she expresses her anger at Anowa's defiance by saying:

OLD WOMAN. What foolish words! Some people babble as though they borrowed their grey hairs and did not grow them on their heads! Badua should have told her daughter that the infant which tries its milk teeth on every bone and stone grows up with nothing to eat dried meat with. (1.81)

In another incident, when the old man acquaints the townsmen about Anowa's disapproval of Kofi Ako's business of buying slaves, the old woman again blames Anowa. She says:

OLD WOMAN. She is a witch She is a devil, She is everything that is evil. (2.100)

The Old Woman labels her as a witch and a product of "cancerous growth" because she thinks Anowa has tried to supersede her husband:

OLD WOMAN. ...she who thinks she knows better than her husband in all things. (2.101)

Furthermore, the Old Woman accuses Anowa, that if given a chance she would have found fault in the preachings of their forefathers and would

have given them a lesson on “what action of men are virtuous” (2.101). The figure of the Old Woman’s narrative relevance stems from her resemblance with society’s cultural beliefs on gender roles. This is also evident in the Old Woman’s use of proverbs to illustrate on women’s position in the social structure. For instance, when she says:

OLD WOMAN. ...As the sourest yam. Is better than the sweetest guava, The dumbest man is Always better than a woman. (2.102)

Interestingly, the use of the story-teller figure fused with occasional proverbs provides the readers with a more realistic picture of Ghanaian life. The Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper symbolises the importance of elders and cultural norms in African societies. Additionally, the play’s weaving of two characters into a storyteller also balances the community perspective and enhances the dialogic nature of African narrative art. For instance, the figure of the Old Man takes into consideration other people’s thoughts and beliefs, unlike the Old Woman who is more inclined and ardent in cultural ideologies. It is the Old Man who repeatedly restrains the Old Woman from blaming Anowa for everything without paying attention to her point of view. In addition to that, the amalgamation of contradictory worldviews through the Old Man and Old Woman that comprise The Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper embodies the need to achieve harmonious co-existence in a social space by respecting different points of view. The Old Woman is rigid in cultural beliefs, while the Old Man is cooperative, and their synthesis into one enables them to impinge on dynamism as a requisite for society.

Drumming and Funeral Dirge: It is necessary to emphasise certain structural components that influence the play’s narrative flow. Apart from the storyteller figure, the use of theatrical tools like music and musical instruments set the mood of the play. Drumming holds a significant place in the social, political, and cultural life of African people. They are played in every ritual and festival of African society. In the play, the drum fontonfrom is used as a musical instrument. In Ghanaian society, the sound of fontonfrom is used to herald the presence of an important individual during festivals or funerals. Interestingly, in the play, the drum can be analysed in its musical expression of Kofi Ako’s rise and fall. In Phase Two of the play, the drumming along with songs are played to inform everyone of Kofi Ako’s arrival. The drumming, in this scenario, connotes the prominence of Kofi Ako’s presence. However, in Phase Three of the play, the drumming becomes an instrumental device of foreshadowing.

In Phase Three, they are played as part of the funeral dirge. The funeral drums are played without the occasion of any funeral rites in the play. Rather they are played whenever Kofi Ako examines his limbs. In this regard, the playing of funeral drums can be interpreted as a premonition of an imminent danger that will disintegrate his and Anowa's life. The original legend narrated in the form of a song, did not provide any "clue" to Kofi Ako's changed attitude towards Anowa who equally contributed to his phenomenal wealth, rather he blamed her for being a disgrace to all women. In contrast to the legend, Aidoo provides "an answer to this...a kind of pseudo-Freudian answer" (Aidoo, Interview 27). The answer that the play offers is that Ako, the husband, is infertile and tries to hide this by manoeuvring against his wife in order to eventually divorce her. Anowa, his wife, outwits him and reveals his impotence; Ako, unable to bear the humiliation in front of everyone, commits suicide, and Anowa does likewise. In this regard, the theatrical space becomes an instrumental tool to embody the counter-hegemonic discourse. The play executes it with the playing of funeral drums and music every time Ako examine his limbs – a clue to his impotency and his eventual death. Thus, the structural element of funeral drums amplifies the narrative content of the play as it insinuates the probable reason for Kofi Ako's death. Thus, drumming and music act as an undercurrent to redefine the gender hierarchies and roles stereotyped for men and women. Hence, in *Anowa* the dramatic devices that Aidoo draws from African oral traditions aid her representation of issues concerning gender in a more encompassing way.

Apart from conventional oral art techniques, another indispensable element in the play that creates a space for Anowa to connect with the audience and speak out her mind is the dramatic device, *Aside*. An aside is a dramatic technique in the form of a short comment or speech addressed by a character to the audience, sharing his/her unspoken thoughts. It is only heard by the audience, while the other characters are ignorant of it. It is through the aside, that Anowa reveals how men's power and prowess lie in their predominance over women. She says:

ANOWA. ...in order for her man to be a man, she must not think, she must not talk. (3.112)

Anowa expresses that she did not learn to be a woman normalised by society, so she has been disgraced by society. Thus, the dramatic device of 'aside' aids in casting light upon the unheard and silenced female voices, in a society where the definition of a good woman is someone who does not have a "brain or mouth" (Aidoo 23).

Conclusion: Playwrights across the tri-continent have drawn from traditional narrative drama genres to frame their narratives in cultural aesthetics indigenous to their land. It enables them to develop a connection with the audience which as a result will help them to put across their views wholly. Helen Gilbert in the chapter "Traditional Enactments: Ritual/Carnival" argued that the incorporation of traditional elements into a contemporary play "affect the play's content, structure, style, and consequently, its overall meaning/effect" (54). These mnemonic devices characterised by their participatory and communal nature facilitate the playwrights to have a greater impact on the audience. This is because the multitude of theatrical techniques employed in a play enhances the visual, emotional and aural experience of the theatre-goers. From the above discussion on *Anowa*, the paper justifies that the narrative elements of African oral traditions are essential components to take into account for a gender-centric reading of the play. The influence of colonialism on modern African literary drama cannot be denied but the oral traditions act as a source of inspiration for the contemporary playwrights to evince the entangled relationship between theatre and society. Thus, the study derives that the play's reconstruction of the Anowa folklore re-imagines and redefines the female space in contemporary Africa and the genre of drama becomes an essential medium to materialise it. The theatrical devices facilitate a realistic representation of the African aspects of life. Henceforth, it can be concluded that the dramatic devices drawn from African oral conventions play a significant role in illuminating the ideological contents of the play.

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