

REDEFINING GENDER ROLES: AN ODYSSEY OF TESTS AND TRIUMPHS FOR AFRICAN WOMEN IN IRENE SALAMI-AGUNLOYE'S *SWEET REVENGE* AND *IDIA, THE WARRIOR QUEEN OF BENIN*

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Abstract

This study explored the renegotiation of gendering of roles, as well as the portrayal of the struggles and successes of African women in Irene Salami-Agunloye that are reflected in her plays, *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*. Although the feminist African discourse has increased, both prose and poetry, little emphasis has been put on the female playwrights whose plays criticise the patriarchal system and rewrite history. This research paper addressed this gap by talking about the dramaturgical elements, characterisation, and themes of Salami-Agunloye, which depict women as leaders and change agents in the male-dominated societies. The research design was based on a textual analysis, and it was illustrated on the concepts of Feminist Theory and Social Role Theory to explore how societal expectations on women were reinforced and violated in the selected plays. Studies have shown that Salami-Agunloye was conscious of the active use of practices of symbolism, historical reconstruction and dialogue in pre-empting the resistance, agency and political power of women. The plays succeeded in rejecting the old stereotypes of the two sexes and offered a counter-discourse to the marginalisation of women in literature and history. The Salami-Agunloye drama was discovered to be a critical tool of gender activism and social transformation that played a crucial role in African feminist discourse and contributed to the progressive redefining of female roles within the contemporary African society.

Keywords: Gender Roles, African Feminism, Irene Salami-Agunloye, African Women, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

Gender effect on African societies has been a dynamic and shifting process, and is heavily influenced by cultural and historical factors, along with religious and political factors. Historically, the African societies defined the gender roles in such a manner which was strongly related to the community beliefs, the notions of kinship and spirit. These definitions ascribed different roles to males and females and defined responsibilities and rights, and often omitted women within restrictive socio-cultural classifications (Jewkes and Morrell, 2010). A further complication of these dynamics transpired over time as a result of the impact of colonialism, nationalistic movements and independence struggles, without even mentioning the uncontrollable impact of the process of globalisation. Though these transformative forces remodeled the African societies, they leave behind a lack of patriarchal control which curtails the presence of women in such areas as governance, education and economic participation (Behrendt, 2022).

The colonial systems not only disrupted the gender relations of the indigenous people, but they also presented systems that consolidated the authority of men. Contrary to most of pre-colonial Africa, there was no hierarchy in the gender roles but rather a complementary relationship; however, with the introduction of colonial rule, rigid patriarchal structures were established, destroying the balance. The colonial experience changed traditional gendered roles, and women became subordinate, mainly through economic disenfranchisement, loss of access to education and legal limitations on property ownership. These ruptures were experienced right into the postcolonial era, since African communities had to overcome the issue of identity reconstruction and cultural reclaiming (Oguejiofor & Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 2015).

African states were going to gain independence, and it was a rediscovery of independence, independence and cultural rediscovery. Nevertheless, the issues of women were rarely the priority of the nationalist movements that pushed aside the problems of women in the name of the overall liberation (Chikwe et al., 2024). Literature and,

specifically, drama were made a major instrument of questioning social reality and providing a scathing account of the gendered aspects of power within this context. Theatre served to upset the system, by African male and female playwrights, to identify the injustices in the system, and to dream about a new future. Among these is Irene Salami-Agunloye, who has emerged as one of the most prolific female activists of employing drama as a means of dealing with the issue of patriarchy, and making the lives of women the theme of African communities.

The cultural artefact of literature is not merely an implication of social attitudes, but also a change. Gender cultural negotiations have a long history of being in the African context via dramatic works, and it is through these works that the traditions of oppression can be criticised, and emancipatory imaginaries imagined. The European works like “A Doll’s House” (1879) of Henrik Ibsen raised debates about female independence, and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* disrupted binaries of gender identity through cross-dressing and performance. Similarly, other African playwrights such as Wole Soyinka and Ama Ata Aidoo have discussed the gender relations problem in their plays, *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. With these publications, it is not irrelevant to mention that drama is an influential area to challenge the gender construction mechanisms and develop the streams of discussion of how the role of men and women in society can be shifted (Gupta et al., 2024; Vuciterna et al., 2024).

Irene Salama-Agunloye’s *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, are supplements in this general direction of evolution. The women in her dramaturgy become empowered, strong, and agents where they had been marginalised before. Against the backdrop of a mainstream, male-written tradition of the African drama, in which women are frequently relegated to marginal or symbolic status, Salami-Agunloye can afford to give her women characters a literal voice and presence. This is where she helps to subvert the patriarchal historiographies and create a counter-narrative where women are not subjects of oppression, but those who trigger resistance and transformation.

To know more about these gender dynamics, we can confess the fact that the literature is the tool that captures the struggle between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the position of the woman in the household, political and economic sphere is still dictated by the old patriarchal postulates (Gondal et al., 2023). On the one hand, feminist movements and the global gender activism have contributed to the opening of new spaces of emancipation, justice and representation. These antagonistic forces are played and fought out on the stage of literature, and drama in particular. To the same cultural and ideological battlefield where Salami-Agunloye places her plays, it is an intervention to challenge inequality as hereditary and reconfigure gender relations.

Scholars have long been describing the restrictive effects of systemic barriers, such as a lack of access to education and constraining legal frameworks to women’s participation in leadership and decision-making (Walker, 2013; Wadesango, 2011). Nevertheless, African women have continued to be resilient despite all these factors, organising themselves in grassroots organisations, taking part in liberation struggles and steering the socio-economic development. These are the strains that are called out in the theatre of Salami-Agunloye, and where women are at once a target of oppressive tradition and also the source of their emancipation. By revealing characters that rebel, undermine, and eventually succeed in the patriarchal society, her plays illuminate the heroic process of struggle and achievement that African women must go through.

The intersection of religion is challenging the cultural politics of gender in Africa because globalisation and postcolonial state systems are multiplying the existing issues. The significance of religion as a tool of promoting the idea of polygamy and restricting the movement of women has been used as an example (Agbaje, 2021). Globalisation has, however, increased its ideals and economic frameworks, which exploit the service of female labourers, with the possibility of a voice to their concerns through new avenues, where women can be heard (Smith and Sinkford, 2022). Such contradictions are not only social practices but also cultural production, and that is why drama is such a powerful instrument of study and combat against such forces. In his plays, Salami-Agunloye visualises this intersectional terrain by rewriting the past historically and as an ideology of feminism in the present, thus putting women at the centre of the political, spiritual and communal life.

The second reason is the incompetence of the Nigerian female playwrights on an academic level; this is one of the tremendous sins of African literature study. The reason why there is under-studying of female dramatists lies in the fact that they have never received the kind of critical attention that male dramatists have been given (Babatope & Azeez, 2021). Although feminist literary criticism and discussion have been extensively carried out in the writings of women novelists, including Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba, and Ama Ata Aidoo, the playwrights like Salami-Agunloye have not been given attention. This disaffiliation is the very antithesis of the performative immediacy of theatre, which might provide women with an unprecedented chance to speak out and dramatise their situation. Having found women in the centre of the historical re-imaginings and socio-political

discourses, Salami-Agunloye is not only widening the scopes of feminist literature in Africa, but also creating new possibilities in the analysis of the role of gender renegotiation on the stage.

The need for the study is therefore founded on a two-fold concern. First, it resolves the concern of the continuity of patriarchal organisation that continues to deny women equal opportunities in participation in African societies. Second, it attempts to address the gap in the literature on African studies of women kept in the periphery by the discourse on gender and power. The study concentrates on *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, and talks about the difficulties and triumphs of African women fictionalised by Salami-Agunloye and how contemporary African drama can be utilised as a social change and gender advocacy tool.

Although the theme of gender equality in Africa is debated, women are still in a structurally disadvantaged position because of the patriarchal structures that have been established to limit the possibility of women taking on leadership positions, economic, social independence, and recognition (Kinneer and Ortlepp, 2016; Dosekun, 2021). These injustices have already received literary treatment in earlier periods, but the critical interest of literature in the female dramatist has followed poorly relative to male dramatists and prose fiction. The most notable aspect of this imbalance is that it not only literally deprives the female writer but also limits the realm of feminist discourse in African literature.

This gap is directly bridged by the plays of Irene Salama-Agunloye, who serves as the protagonist of the plays and who struggles against oppression and rewrites history. Her works have, however, not been scrutinised concerning their contribution to the redefinition of gender roles in finer detail. *Sweet Revenge* individualises the resistance of women to injustice by men, and *Idia, Warrior Queen of Benin*, reiterates the historical records by placing women at the core of political leadership. Such plays are not studied critically as important as they are. The issue is, however, that there is no long-term scholarly interest in the dramaturgy of Salami-Agunloye and that the question remains on how far her dramatic techniques, her characterisation and the thematic concerns can offer us an insight into the path of the struggles and conquests of women in the African communities.

Literature Review

The anthropological study of gender roles in African societies has undergone dramatic change, as scholars and activists have sought to question the very ways in which identities are produced, contested, and transformed. Through literature, and especially drama, these roles have been explored through a critical lens. By dramatising the struggles and triumphs of women, African playwrights are bringing to light the patriarchal systems that have been in place and limit female agency, while also providing counter-narratives of empowerment. This review is undertaken in three areas that form the background to this study: gender studies as a discipline, the evolution and deconstruction of gender roles in Africa and the performance of gender in African women's drama. It ends with a theoretical framework, which expands upon the applicability of Feminism and Social Role Theory to this research.

Gender Studies

Gender studies became an interdisciplinary study that was interested in the social construction of identity, relations of power, and cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity. It challenges the male and female dichotomy by showing how the male and female categories are socially constructed and reproduced. The key distinction in the field is the distinction between sex, which is biological, and gender, which involves roles, expectations and behaviours which are culturally constructed (Risman and Davis, 2013).

Another important dimension is intersectionality, which was developed in the late 1980s by Kimberle Crenshaw and must understand that gender is inseparable in terms of race, class, or ethnicity (Cho et al., 2013). The case of African women can be that of increasing forms of marginalisation that have been informed by colonial practices, cultural and economic systems. Gender studies thus put their struggles into broader frames of inequality - they indicate the facts of the multiplicity of identities affecting means of subsistence.

The field is also interested in language and representation. The media/cultural narratives tend to exist based on stereotypes that men are in charge and are rational, and women are submissive and nurturing (Okpokwasili et al., 2023). These representations cement unequal relationships of power. These types of representations are problematized in gender studies, and plural and inclusive representations are demanded, which acknowledge the agency of women (Mustapha 2012). In addition to theory, there exist field implications, as it has bound up activism, policy modifications, and the feminist movement across the world (Mama, 2011). The relevance of gender studies, in the context of Africa, presents the essential point of view through which the dynamics of drama as a resisting and advocacy space should be perceived.

Evolution and Deconstruction of Gender Roles in Africa

Gender history in Africa is fluid and contested as opposed to being fixed in differences. Complementary in pre-colonial societies, men and women were alike. Women were significant in the fields of agriculture, trade, spiritual leadership and governance. Examples have been recorded in institutions like Omu that gave political authority to Igbo women in Nigeria and queen mothers who had influence and advised kings in Ghana (Stoeltje, 2004; Muonwe, 2020). These instances dispute the notion that there existed a homogenous African past, which is patriarchal.

Indigenous systems, on the other hand, were radically destroyed by colonialism. The colonial rule had rigid patriarchal systems that did not allow women to participate in economic and political activities. The women with the colonial legal systems no longer possessed land; they were not formalised in the educational system and were confined to the domestic realm (Sreenivas, 2004). The male dominance and the adjustment of African societies to alien hierarchies were cemented by the Victorian ideas about gender. Nevertheless, women resisted by conducting systematic demonstrations, market riots and participating in national struggles (Ojajorotu & Segun, 2017).

The postcolonial era was an era of fresh possibilities, as well as a time of fresh challenges. Numerous of these women claimed that in the independence movements, the gender-related problems have also been relegated to the periphery and underemphasized at the expense of the nationalistic agenda (Chikwe et al., 2024). The economic inequalities worsened in the 1980s due to structural adjustment programmes that mostly impacted women by reducing health, education and social services (Assie-Lumumba, 2000). Despite this, feminist movements and organisations such as the African Women Development Fund provided a platform of advocacy, which demonstrates the strength of the African woman (Bailey, 2012).

Women's violence and oppression in the modern world still demonstrates the persistence of the patriarchal stereotype of men as the master gender and women as the dependent ones (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017). These roles are reinforced within the family, schools and religious institutions. Nevertheless, gender-neutral educational campaigns and programs initiated by women have developed efforts to break down and abolish such stereotypes (Thelma, 2024). Another example of digital activism, like the Bring Back Our Girls, is also used to demonstrate how African women shift the paradigm of confronting inequality (Balogun 2021). African gender roles deconstruction thus inevitably presents a challenge to the colonial legacies, culture and socio-political frameworks that enforce inequality.

Performing Gender by African Female Playwrights

African female writers have never failed to redefine gender discourses. Fictional writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Mariama Ba and Ama Ata Aidoo developed their stories that challenged polygamy, widowhood, motherhood and the intersections of tradition and modernity. These were works that criticised patriarchy and a declaration of the power and potential to do things of women.

However, African female playwrights have not received the same academic recognition despite having made an impact on feminist literature. Theatre is especially a strong place through which gendered experiences can be played out with their performative immediacy. Contrary to prose, where narratives mediate the lives of women, drama presents embodied live performances, bringing the struggles of women into the limelight of the population. Irene Salami-Agunloye is a good example of how female dramatists intervene in African literature. In *Sweet Revenge*, she sees women as key figures who find it difficult to resist subjugation by patriarchy and regain voice and dignity in a hostile system. She reinvents history in *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, the role of women as political rulers and warriors against their non-historicity. These are not only plays that are reflective of the perseverance of women, but plays that dramatise their achievement of turning theatre into a place of advocacy and changing social attitudes. Salami-Agunloye plays on the male-based canon of Soyinka, Rotimi and Osofisan. She also reverses the stereotypes of women as secondary and symbolic by the focus on women. Her works contain an African feminist struggle to recover history and rewrite the role of women in society. They incorporate theatre as one of the cultural and political empowerment instruments.

Theoretical Framework: Feminism and Social Role Theory

The two interrelated frameworks on which this study is based are Feminism and Social Role Theory; the two frameworks combined form a holistic approach when analysing the plays by Salami-Agunloye.

The feminist theory challenges gender inequality patterns and demands social, political and economic justice. It opposes systemic oppression and concentrates on women's agency in the private and the public domain (Zielke et al., 2023). The feminist theory should be put in the context of the historical and cultural context of the African context. African feminism opposes the Eurocentric strategy of Western feminism and demands issues to be shaped by colonialism, tradition and culture (Nutsukpo, 2020).

One of the main aspects that has been raised by feminist scholars in Africa is the need to contextualise gender struggles. As an example, a custom like polygamy or bride wealth cannot be simply denounced with the help of the paradigm of Western society but should be critically evaluated within the socio-cultural context (Ajiboro & Etieyibo, 2023). African feminists demand relational empowerment and a strong focus on the significance of community, kinship and solidarity as opposed to the Western focus on individuality (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). Feminist structures play a significant role in the study of female playwrights in the literary field, who challenge the patriarchal standards. The heroes of Salami-Agunloye are a symbol of resistance, agency and leadership. Replacing history with to present women as fighters and kings she is not only criticising patriarchy, but also making empowering examples of African womanhood. Her plays are hence feminist invasions, dramatising the struggles and the triumphs of women.

The Social Role Theory, formulated by Alice Eagly (1987), is an explanatory theory of social construction and social maintenance of gender roles. It claims that divisions of labour that were once ascribed to the sexes evolved into cultural stereotypes that dictated how people should behave. Such stereotypes restrain the opportunities and become normalised in the long term (Anglin et al., 2022).

Social Role Theory was applied to the case of Africa, where women were allocated domestic and care-taking roles, whereas men were allocated public and economic roles (Dawood and Seedat-Khan, 2023). This was reinforced even more by colonialism, which denied women rights to own land, hold formal education and political representation. The books are turned into a space where these constructions are argued out through the presentation of other role models.

This process is clearly depicted in the plays by Salami-Agunloye. Her characters fail to appreciate the position of being confined or submissive in any sense and represent leadership, strength and courage that are typically male. In so doing, they are showing that gender roles are not inherited, but cultivated socially. The arbitrariness of the gender differences and the opening of new possibilities of femininity and contribution are demonstrated by the plays in the attempt to dramatise the escapes from the norm by women.

Feminism and the Social Role Theory go hand in hand. The ideological and structural problems of the phenomenon of patriarchy are critically analysed in Feminism, and the formation and maintenance of gendered expectations are critically analysed in Social Role Theory. A combination of them creates a prism in which the degree to which literature not only reflects the battle of genders, but also becomes a part of the cultural debate. The reflection of this intersection can be seen in the Salami-Agunloye drama. Her plays oppose oppression by feminist critique, and they oppose the breaking down and re-creating of roles by social role analysis. This twofoldness is an extension of her fertility in dramaturgy that reveals the contribution of African drama to gender redefinition, empowerment and social transformation.

Methodology

The research design used in the present study was qualitative research because it was necessary to critically examine how the plays of Irene Salami-Agunloye, *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, challenge and redefine gender roles in African societies. The qualitative design was selected because it creates the opportunity of engaging in the texts, and the focus is on the interpretation, making meaning and being critical about the themes as opposed to quantifiable data.

The method of the research was text analysis. Textual analysis was suitable as the plays under analysis are cultural and artistic productions that convey messages related to gender, history and power. In this manner, one was able to identify dramatic techniques, symbolism, dialogue and characterisation through which the playwright brings out the struggles and victories of women. In examining these aspects, the study brought to light Salami-Agunloye's concept of redefining women as leaders, warriors and agents of social change.

The analysis was informed by two theoretical frameworks - the Feminist Theory and Social Role Theory. Feminist Theory also provided a perspective to question the patriarchy and emphasise female strength and empowerment in the plays. Social Role Theory was used to explain how gender roles are socially constructed and how the characters in the play the playwright uses challenge and break through these constructs. Taken all together, these frameworks offered a complete and balanced understanding of the texts.

Data collection was limited to primary sources - the two plays - with secondary sources consisting of relevant scholarly literature relevant to the study, such as gender studies, African feminism and drama. Data thematically coded around the following issues, namely resistance against patriarchy, historical reconstruction and dramatisation of female agency. Overall, the methodology ensured that the plays were not only treated as works

of art but were also analysed as interventions on the feminist movement, which strives to break the dominant discourses and contribute towards broader debates on gender equality in Africa.

Play Analysis

Based on the thorough analysis of Irene Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, the data presentation and findings present a strong and consistent feminist redefinition of gender roles with female agency, leadership and resistance against the patriarchal structures. The findings are arranged in major thematic areas of emphasis in the plays, showing how Salami-Agunloye uses drama to undermine and reframe societal norms.

Women as Leaders and Agents of Change

One of the themes is the emergence of women as empowering and subversive leaders. *Sweet Revenge*: The transformation of Aisosa from a betrayed housewife to a respected senator shows that anybody can become a leader, provided he/she is courageous enough to overcome misfortune, to stand up on behalf of what he/she believe in and to serve people. She is not driven to rise to power through lust for power, but it was a natural consequence of personal injustice and a wish to help improve the lives of the people. Likewise, in *Idia, Queen Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, is depicted as a tactful politician whose political skills, military prowess and spiritual influence played a major role in saving the Benin Kingdom. Her leadership was more of an aberration than a reflection of the historical reality of women in such positions of power in pre-colonial Africa. Both characters are examples of ethical leadership founded on the well-being of the community, visionary leadership and are a strong contrast to the patriarchal tales of disenfranchising women.

Political Participation and Empowerment

The plays are very much pro-female in the political sphere as a way of empowering women and creating changes within society. The reason why Aisosa became politically involved is an extension of her talents and experience of gender suppression. Her triumph is linked to restoring some space in a male-dominated realm and is a sign of how women can create a difference in terms of positive interest in relation to policy and administration. This is reflected in *Idia*, whose political involvement is historically proven by her hand in securing that her son was put on the throne and also in institutionalising the political power of women in Benin, being the *Iyoba* (Queen Mother) later. Together, such accounts indicate that the role of women in politics is pivotal in the development of fair societies and denying women the opportunity to contribute to politics has long been a barrier to societal development. The points of the information indicate that individual fortitude is not the only way of achieving empowerment, but structural recognition and inclusion are also listed.

Education and Economic Independence as Tools of Liberation

Education and economic independence are the most vital factors that can assure female autonomy. The fact that Aisosa is a medical doctor and therefore can reorganise her life after being betrayed by someone offers this kind of skill and confidence. The second stage of her triumph and the reclaiming of her professional practice is a testimony of how education can make any woman immune to dependency and empower her to be agency-driven. The other theme which is brought out by the play is the importance of self-reliance in terms of economics as the sole means of breaking free of oppressive relations and social limitations. Education in *Idia* is provided in broader terms to incorporate traditional bodies of knowledge, such as spiritual knowledge, strategic knowledge, which *Idia* uses to structure and regulate her society. This finding introduces the multidimensionality of empowerment - that both formal education and indigenous knowledge are important to women to effectively challenge the boundaries of patriarchy.

The Pursuit of Social Justice and Equity

Both plays are also engaged in the concerns of social justice, and they make women the centre of the fight against the inequality of systems. The book *Sweet Revenge* is about how one personal story of oppression can be used to motivate individuals to act together to fight oppression, since in the course of seeking revenge, Aisosa finds it more political to fight on behalf of not only herself but the whole nation. As demonstrated in the play, justice is not purely legal, but also social and economic and entails the breaking down of systems that support gender-based inequalities. In the play, *Idia*, the main character, challenges unjust traditions such as the tradition of killing the queen mother once the king is crowned, and at the end, succeeds in altering the cultural practices to be based on a more just culture. The stories show us that social justice is, in many cases, only realised by challenging and transforming the cultural and institutional norms that are deeply entrenched, and that women spearhead such change processes.

Intersectionality in Feminist Discourse

The analysis reveals an intersectional mode of feminism where gender oppression is connected with other social statuses like race, class and marital status. Sweet Revenge introduces financial reliance and social expectations of a subservient role of a wife to the situation of Aisosa, whereas Sota's marrying a white woman introduces racial concerns that push her even deeper to the sidelines. The ruling power of the queen in Idia is not only because she is female, but also due to the challenges of her mother, spiritual leader and political strategist, in displaying the manifold identities of power and resistance experiences. This conclusion shows that feminist advocacy should address the intersectional and diverse systems of oppression that do not affect women equally, and not regard gender as a single issue.

Solidarity and Collective Action

A major outcome is the emphasis on women's solidarity and mutual action as a way of resisting oppression. In Sweet Revenge, friends like Ede and the unity of women groups to ensure that Sota is answerable for his acts, being the one who enables Aisosa to heal and emerge as a successful politician. Likewise, in Idia, the victories of the queen are reinforced by other women who join her side to fight the patriarchal resistance collectively. These illustrations demonstrate that individual empowerment could not be achieved in many cases without communal assistance and that structural change could only be implemented through collective and not individual struggle. Finally, the representation of data and the analysis findings of Sweet Revenge and Idia the Warrior Queen of Benin make a significant contribution to the African feminist literature by Irene Salami-Agunloye. Her texts are not only critical of the patriarchal regime of norms but also offer empowering options by making the experience, agency, and leadership of women the focus of the story. The plays form a symbol of struggle, as well as a symbol of the African woman, and a symbol of a new vision of a fairer society. With strongly depicted characters and strong narration, Salami-Agunloye demonstrates gender roles, social justice and the power and strength of women.

Discussion of Findings

The contribution of African feminist literature towards derailing the patriarchal discourse and restoring the identity of women is critically discussed in reference to the contents of *Sweet Revenge* and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, in the works of Irene Salama-Agunloye. The plays do not simply record the fate of women; they write their own stories of accomplishment, so that they become creators of their own fate and agents of social change. It is a provocative action in the literary and social discourses, not necessarily a criticism, but showing what is possible to do to make people strong.

The manipulation of the dual temporalities makes the project by Salami-Agunloye successful. Sweet Revenge is a contemporary story of a way to survive in a world of a patriarch, politically sidelined and dominated by men, all under the influence of education, economic independence and unity. In contrast to this, Idia goes back into the pre-colonial past to discover a historical example of female power, to overcome the colonial and patriarchal myth according to which the oppression of women belongs to an inalienable African culture. The playwright has brought these tales together to create a reinforced female resistance chain, which says that there is nothing alien in the empowerment of modern women; it is merely a recovery of a repressed history. This duality provides a rich feminist discourse, which is grounded in cultural authenticity, and on the other hand, enables progressive change. In addition, the results bring in a uniquely African feminist philosophy on the foundation of community and ethical leadership. The reason why Aisosa and Idia rise to power as opposed to the individualistic ambition that is the staple of Western models is the sense of communal responsibility. Their leadership is not defined by the pursuit of personal glory, but they serve and one way to deliver justice to their societies. This redefinition is important because it deconstructs the patriarchal image of the power-seeking, unfeminine female and replaces it with the image of the asserting and nurturing power. The sole real feminist victory, according to the plays, is not to emulate certain of the male versions of power but to make leadership sensitive, honest and concerned with the common good.

Salami-Agunloye, in the book, discloses that literature can be a powerful instrument of social engineering. She symbolically liberates herself by putting women in the centre of political, historical, and spiritual discourses. Her dramas are a protest play, and depict how change can be brought through power, learning and collaboration. The conclusion is therefore that such feminist dramas are not only academic articles but also useful cultural resources that can be employed as an inspiration for real-world activism and policy information, and changes in the perceptions of people in society that would help to gradually but surely trample down the patriarchal systems in Africa and other countries.

Conclusion

Sweet Revenge and *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* by Irene Salami-Agunloye are potent illustrations of how African feminist theatre can be a significant agent of social transformation. Through the characters of Aisosa and Queen Idia, these plays can dismantle the patriarchy of their own scripts and renegotiate gender roles, portraying them not as victimised women but as influential rulers and tactical politicians and ethical engineers of their own kingdoms. Mediating between the present and the past, Salami-Agunloye demonstrates how female empowerment is simultaneously a recuperation of a suppressed past and a future necessity of equal development. Her writing validates the fact that literature is not just a reflection of society, but a force behind it, in awakening the mind and awakening the action in society, in persuading a new generation that the role and the leadership of women is fully and fully valued.

Recommendations

To strengthen the impact of feminist ideas in African drama, several steps could be suggested. The first is to include the works by such playwrights as Irene Salami-Agunloye in the literature and gender studies courses in secondary and tertiary schools. It will facilitate high-quality engagement with gender equality and social justice in the early years of development.

Secondly, feminist drama production and marketing should be targeted by other cultural institutions and granting agencies at the national and online levels. Enacting plays like *Sweet Revenge*, and *Idia* is also going to initiate the conversation with the audience and challenge the conservative stereotypes, and this will enable the feminist discussions to be more available to more people.

Besides, policymakers and gender advocacy organisations should make use of the examples and models of leadership presented in these texts. Aisosa and Idia are two interesting cases that could be utilised to formulate civic educational curricula and leadership training seminars based on the needs of young women to engage in the public service and governmental arenas.

Finally, further academic study in the field is required to know the works of other African female playwrights, feminist theatre reception across different demographics, and their useful resources to transform the attitude and policies of the society. By bridging a gap that exists between the theoretical analysis of literature, the performance and application of what has been learned, feminist drama can be even a more useful tool of social change that is here to stay.

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