

FEMINISTIC
PERSPECTIVES
IN THE
DRAMATURGY
OF
AHMED YERIMA

EDITED BY:
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'Feministic Perspectives in the Dramaturgy of Ahmed Yerima'

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First Published in 2025 by Department of the Performing and Film Arts,
University of Ilorin

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Cover Design & Formatting by Tokunbo Esho

ISBN: 978-978-776-786-3

10987654321

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CHAPTER FOUR



HISTORICISATION OF PATRIARCHAL NORMS AND REPRESENTING GENDER ROLES IN AHMED YERIMA'S SELECTED PLAYS.

ATTEH, Femi Yinka

Introduction

History, drama, and theatre examine the impact of patriarchy on the construction of gender roles in Nigeria. Nigerian writers convey their reflections on the socio-historical, religious, economic, and political influences that shape daily lives through their writings, addressing challenges that seek to redefine traditional gender dynamics within African societies. Therefore, this study is a historicisation of patriarchal norms and representing gender roles in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu* and *Queen Amina*. This study utilises a descriptive research design and content analysis. The descriptive method enables us to conceptualise issues, while the content of *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* is used to analyse the nature of African patriarchy and its delineation of gender roles. Findings reveal that Yerima's *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* illustrate a tension between the desire for change and evolving gender roles influenced by socio-historical factors. Lecherous characters like Atiba and Isikulu, driven by desire, compromise their judgment. In contrast, *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* should be emulated for their efforts to protect and empower women. Thus, this study recommends greater scholarly engagement with

African dramatic texts to further explore gender portrayals and their societal impacts. It concludes that *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* provide critical insights into history, patriarchy, and progressive gender representations.

The representation of patriarchy as a significant institution that delineates gender roles is prominently reflected in Nigerian cultural history, theatre, and drama. The patriarchal framework in Nigeria has consistently played a central role across various literary forms, particularly emphasising the psychological implications of history, as might be interpreted by any postcolonial artist. In African societies, cultural and traditional norms significantly influence contemporary social dynamics. In Nigeria, indigenous ways of life shape gender relations and contribute to ongoing psychosocial challenges. Nigerian theatre and drama reflect the rich diversity of African history, theatre and literature, serving as vital mediums for exploring the people's psychosocial essence, and socio-political issues, particularly concerning gender relations.

Patriarchy has significantly shaped gender relations by clearly defining the roles of both men and women within a given society. Nigeria, as a patriarchal society, "sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages for equal or comparable work" (Makama, 2013, p. 116). Patriarchal norms favour men and subjugate women. Notable Nigerian playwrights like Duro Ladipo, Wole Soyinka, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Osofisan, John Pepper Clark, Ola Rotimi, Bode Sowande, Ahmed Yerima amongst others use drama to explore and challenge these gender inequalities. Their works highlight the impacts and effects of gendered roles in the society, particularly the lives of women and also reveal the pervasive impact of several societal norms. Thus, the historicisation of patriarchal norms and representation of

gender roles in Nigerian drama is seen by Obafemi 2008, p. 15 as, coming especially from a Western European standpoint, this definition is prescriptive and excludes the dramatic experiences and activities which took place in the indigenous settings of Africa and the Orient before writing was introduced, referring to them merely as non-drama, or as residues and vestiges of drama.

Obafemi discusses how the representation of historical events often acts as a mask that conceals underlying dynamics of power dynamics and gender norms. Interestingly, Ahmed Yerima explores past events to highlight the persistence of patriarchy within Nigeria's sociocultural system. This system is characterised by male dominance in areas such as political leadership, moral authority, and property control. Consequently, only a limited number of women attain independence in these domains.

The rise of modernisation, education, and globalisation has led to increased scrutiny of traditional gender roles, creating a conflict between patriarchal values and contemporary perspectives. Ahmed Yerima explores these themes in his works, particularly through characters like Queen Amina and Aetu, who illustrate the impact of patriarchy in Nigeria. His historical dramas reflect entrenched gender dynamics. This study historicised these dynamics through Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the Third Space. This is to question the legitimate nature of patriarchal norms in Nigeria. By contextualising these norms in Yerima's plays, this study seeks to challenge readers to reevaluate their views on gender roles and power dynamics influencing contemporary gender relations.

Historicisation of Patriarchal Norms and Gender Roles

The concept of patriarchy denotes a social framework in which men control most of the affairs of the state by primarily holding access to power. This prevailing access is reinforced by society's

socioreligious, economic, and political structures. Also, gender roles pertain to the behaviours, tasks, and responsibilities that society deems suitable for men and women. Patriarchy is a Greek word, *patriarchia* which according to Cannell and Green (1996, p. 592) contextually means; a social system "in which power is primarily held by adult men", functioning to directly or indirectly shape the norms, values, and expectations around gender roles. Patriarchy in Nigeria manifests itself through the people's cultural, social, religious, and political structures. This system of male dominance has historically shaped the norms and values that govern the roles and expectations of men and women in Nigerian society.

Furthermore, from the family unit to the highest levels of governance, patriarchy as a hierarchical structure dictates that men are typically seen as the decision-makers, while women are mostly relegated to a subordinated position. The exclusive rule and control by men

in most African countries including Nigeria have been a common practice over the years, this has been perpetuated through several socio-cultural practices which range from child marriages and female restrictions to widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, denial of inheritance rights and others. (Offiong, Eyo, and Offiong, 2021, p. 79).

Culturally, many Nigerian communities have traditional customs that reinforce patriarchal values. However, resistance from social movements advocating for change remains strong in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in urban areas, against the rural areas where traditional and religious beliefs are deeply held. The tension between maintaining cultural traditions and promoting gender equality continues to shape discussions about patriarchy in Nigeria, reflecting a society in transition, grappling with its identity in the face of modernity and globalisation.

The relationship between patriarchy and gender roles is

complex and multifaceted. This is because patriarchal societies established their distinct and often rigid gender roles by themselves. Gender roles in Nigeria are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, religious, physiological, and social factors which are dictating diverse expectations for both men and women. Men are typically expected to be the breadwinners, protectors, and authority figures, while women are majorly relegated to domestic spheres, tasked with caregiving, nurturing, and household management. Interestingly the parameters above instigate that, “man must desire and fight to broaden that scope of impact and to vehemently, even brutally resist any contest or obstruction to it” (Nwawuloke and Uwah, 2023, p. 31). Women are strong and sensitive about the social realities around them. However, “social roles lie primarily in humans’ evolved physical sex differences, specifically men’s size and strength and women’s reproductive activities of gestating and nursing children” (Eagly and Wood, 2012, p. 458).

Challenging patriarchy and rethinking gender roles in Nigeria require a comprehensive approach from both feminist and womanist scholars who consider both the individual perspective and structural setup of aspects of society. However, Magbagbeola (2018, p. 123) believes that these movements are relatively “young and cannot firmly be sustained in Africa, the male gender is becoming more aware of the feminist issues which tend to threaten their cultural egoistic tendencies within the patriarchal settings”

Movements like Women’s Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative, #BringBackOurGirls Movement, Feminist Coalition and many others continue to advocate for gender equality. They challenge traditional roles by seeking greater protection from patriarchal norms like inheritance laws favouring males, limited access to leadership and political power, gender-based division of labour, and restrictions on women’s sexuality among others.

Reading works like that of Deborah Cameron, Germaine

Greer, Mabel Ekwierhoma, Mabel Segun and many more, gender roles are seen as institutionalised through legal frameworks, religious doctrines, and cultural practices that uphold male dominance. Research works on patriarchy and gender roles in contemporary times are expanding statistics on a variety of gender roles in education, culture, and religion to motivate cultural shifts from the compulsory ordained position of men in the affairs of the state. The diagram below from Eagly and Wood (2016, p. 465) gives a general perspective on the statistics of how gender roles are formulated in society.

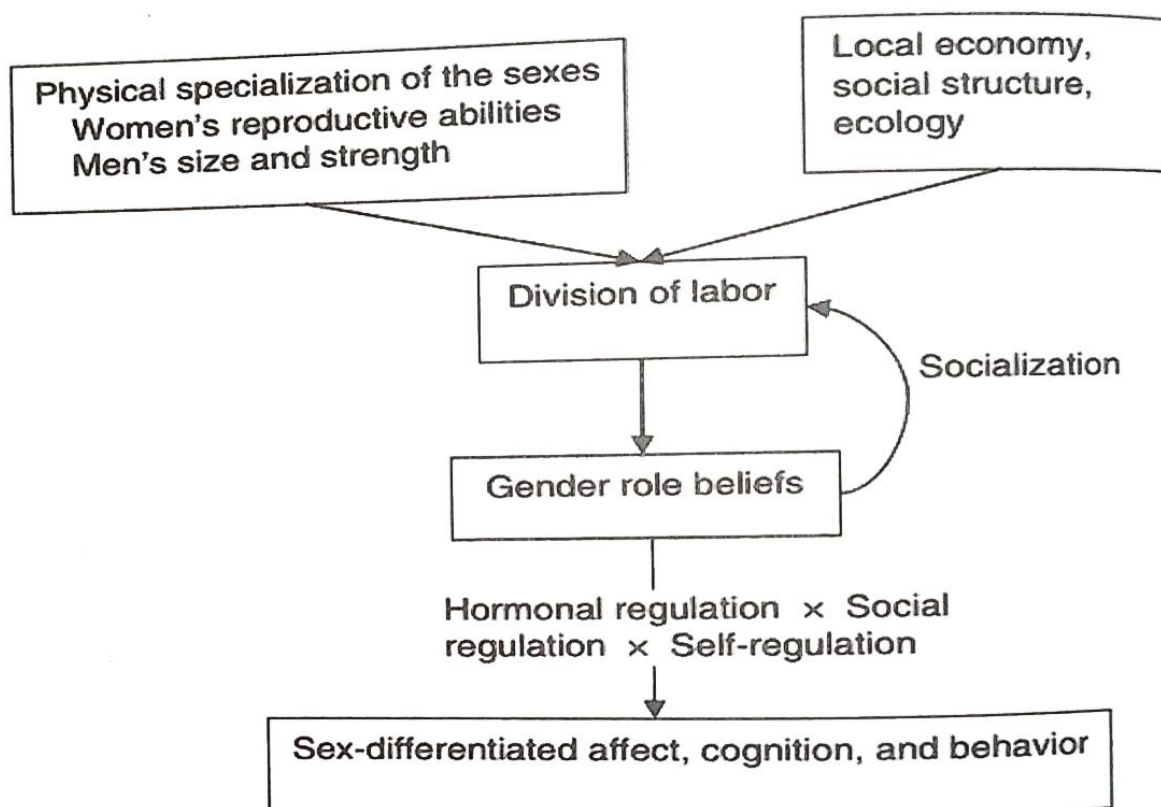


Diagram 1:

Diagram showing how gender role statistics are formulated

In Nigeria, gender roles are influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors that shape both men's and women's expectations. Key points include a higher literacy rate for men compared to women, significant gender disparities in education especially in rural areas, and the fact women are mostly considered

underrepresentation in politics cannot be overstated.

Societal perceptions in Nigeria often view leadership as a male-dominated role, reinforcing gender gaps through cultural norms that emphasise male authority and female subordination. Despite this, scholars like J. P Clark, Femi Osofisan, Bayo Afolabi, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Mabel Ewrierhoma, Julie Okoh, Oludolapo Ojediran, Ahmed Yerima, and others advocate for gender equality and a redefinition of traditional roles. In essence, notable historical figures in Nigeria, including Efunsetan Aniwura, Queen Amina, Moremi, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who played significant roles in shaping the country's history and influencing the perception of women's contributions. However, efforts of the contemporary Nigerian Artists and filmmakers to salvage the usual "subjugated and sexist" representations are still low (Atteh 2022, p.10). Rather portrayal of women with stunning "prolific gender, capable of functioning at the domestic, national and international level of any given society" are desired for inclusive and healthy gender image building.

Interestingly, this concept stems from the innovative individual ideas of film directors, artists, and even feminist scholars who are readily focused on empowering women and amplifying their voices. The context of patriarchy and gender roles is uniquely imaged through Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space". It continues to evolve fancies portraying social movements in historical contexts and cultural behaviours.

Imaginary Fancies on Homi Bhabha's concepts of Hybridity and the Third Space

Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity as modified by Drichel (2008) offer a framework for understanding how postcolonial identities are deconstructed and articulated, particularly concerning sociocultural and traditional behaviours of human beings over time.

These identities have been influenced by works of literature, history, drama, and theatre. By challenging the idea of static pure identities, Bhabha's theory enlightens us about the timeline on which we postcolonial subjects continue to navigate patriarchal norms and gender roles. Aligning with historical and cultural identities associated with already suppressed forms of Indigenous theatre practices of the people, Nigerian continues to thrive through the influences of Western civilisation by reconnecting Nigerians to their true artistic expressions. Drichel, (2008, p. 587) states that; "some elucidation in the increasingly reductive debates over hybridity in postcolonial studies, suggesting that what is commonly overlooked in these debates is hybridity's complex relationship to temporality". He expresses that the inevitable dynamics of social change are factored into space and time. Interestingly, Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity involve;

the negotiation and ambivalence that arise from cultural encounters. It encompasses the simultaneous presence of multiple cultural influences, ideas, and practices, resulting in complex and layered identities. Bhabha suggests that hybridity challenges essentialist notions of identity and highlights the ambivalent and contradictory aspects of cultural representation (Mohammed, 2022, p. 1734).

Bhabha's concept of hybridity refers to a process where the subjects are merged as elements of Indigenous cultures mixed with Western behaviours. This combination results in the creation of a new hybrid identity, reflecting the evolution of Nigeria's contemporary cultural landscape.

Hybridity in Nigerian history reveals how precolonial and colonial legacies combine to create cultural forms that now resist ancient classification. By merging Indigenous and colonial elements, Yerima's portrayal of pre-colonial identities in *Actu* and *Queen Amina* replicates the fluidity and interconnectedness of history and

postcolonial identities, especially in Nigerian theatre and dramatic space. Obafemi (2008, p. 28) in his own opinion states that:

Compelling factors of the presence of active research affirm the vitality, diversification and variety of forms and contents of the black cultural presence including drama -factors which from a semiotic perspective evince the culturalization of the black world with its clear implications of sense making out of existent images from ramifying non- homogenous contextual possibilities.

In dramatic space and theatre, hybridity represents a blend of diverse cultural traditions, languages, and performance styles. Ahmed Yerima combines inheritance law favouring males, gender-based violence, rape, women's voices being devalued, and so on are portrayed patriarchal norms associated with the Nigerian people. This is an avenue to create a contemporary unique genre that could properly reflect the complexities of having a postcolonial identity, historicity, and digitalised versions of the people's cultural realities.

Furthermore, Homi Bhabha's conception of the Third Space represents the "in-between space" where cultural identities are negotiated and redefined. These negotiations invariably new identities that are neither wholly indigenous nor entirely colonial. What is developed is a synergy between the indigenous ways and the colonial experience. By situating his narratives within this space, Ahmed Yerima's compositions highlight the tensions between the nature of traditional patriarchy and the influences of modernity, serving as a gateway to understanding drama and history. According to Yerima, (2007, p. 7) the;

real Aetu's life is slightly different from the one in this play... but in a sad way, they were both victims of women as subjects of inheritance within one family... the two women's sensibilities, humiliation and pain, while still trying to touch the essence of their souls... their very beings.

In postcolonial drama, the Third Space is a metaphorical and literal stage where characters and audiences can confront cultural norms and historical legacies they grew around. According to Yerima's conception of Queen Amina, I know;

why I wrote this play, but it will remain my suppressed motive, until prayerfully the play blossoms, and sits appropriately where I want it to be. In this new play, I return to history trying to tease out my own personal worries and also place history within contemporary issues and consciousness while still retaining the historical flavour that made the history of Amina interesting to me, in the first place (Yerima 2019, p. 5).

This blending allows an exploration of history, challenging patriarchal norms that rely on a single dominant narrative. Yerima's postcolonial theatrics are historical representations conceived to invariably align with Bhabha's theories of hybridity and the Third Space.

By embracing hybridity, postcolonial dramatists incorporate elements from precolonial and colonial history to question established authorities in contemporary settings. This is because they reimagine historical events from new perspectives, expressing the experiences of the colonised as innovative tools of social dynamics. Interestingly, postcolonial dramatists mostly compose

something that has concerned only with the national culture after the departure of imperial power. But in actual practice, it has to be understood only in reference to colonialism, myth and history, language and landscape, self and other are all very important ingredients of postcolonial studies (Sawant, 2011, p. 1).

These thought processes challenge dominant colonial narratives and validate alternative histories, which have been marginalised over time as part of the people's way of living.

The implication of Bhabha's theories of hybridity and the Third Space in postcolonial times generally depicts that “to move post the other, it appears, postcolonialism risks the credibility of its own critical project, its very unwillingness to break with past concerns throwing its own postness into question” (Drichel, 2008, p. 588). In these mind frames, drama and theatre evolve within the Third Space as a vortex of the people's hybridised identities as creative ingenuities. Through drama and theatre, readers'/theatre audience and characters/actors, can realign with their history, identity, cultural symbols, and narratives which are overlapping “to include major challenges of the 21st Century, such as unemployment, killings, recolonisation, rape and sexual violence. Indeed, postcolonial texts have been rebranded into the art of performativity in the crest of reality known as political theatre” Adeoye and Atteh (2022, p. 336). Ahmed Yerima's approach to postcolonial theatre reflects the complexities of history and contributes to cultural negotiations ongoing in postcolonial societies today.

Synopses of the Selected Play-texts

Aetu

Ahmed Yerima's composition is a portrayal of an indigenous setting in Nigeria with high disregard for a woman's choice when it comes to selecting a profitable suitor. Without considering Oke's personality and age, Aetu's parents select the wealthy suitor to pay the heavy bride price. Aetu is caught up in the web of ancient patriarchal norms of child marriage at a tender age. The choice of the family makes her Oke's wife, an old man Aetu finds very disgusting. Aetu lays a curse on herself, her husband, and her children because of being subjected to the patriarchal ways of her people. After Oke's death, she is inherited by a family member. This frustration leads her to think the gods are playing tricks on her. The repercussion of her action is that the gods ensure she stays even in death to witness it all. Aetu delivers

her third child after which she commits suicide. However, a re-occurring effect of Aetu's curse is captured by Obajimi, her last son whereby Yerima portrays Aetu's powerful destructive curse as an unstoppable cancerous effect capable of revoking some patriarchal norms negatively impacting Nigerian societies.

Queen Amina

Queen Amina shows the legendary Hausa warrior queen, who breaks boundaries by assuming the role of the patriarchal head, as well as the people's military leader. The play is set against the backdrop of a male-dominated society, where Amina, a strong and skilled military leader, challenges parameters set around traditional gender roles. From experiences of sexual abuse, Amina develops a tough skin that motivates her rise to power, leading her people as a ruler and a warrior. It is expressed in this play-text that women are mostly objectified for pleasure rather than the prolific gender capable of representing the state at local, national, and international levels of society. Amina defies all odds by becoming the Queen, thriving on the battlefield and leading armies to protect the legacies of her land. Through Yerima's dramatisation of Amina's experiences, contemporary issues relating to gender, leadership, and the dynamics of power are expressed. This is because Ahmed Yerima's perception captures the complexities of gender relations, authority, and identity formation. The play resonates with both historical and contemporary issues within Nigerian societies.

Patriarchal Norms and Gender Roles in *Aetu*

Ahmed Yerima's play, *Aetu*, an exploration of the complexities surrounding cultural identity, gender roles, inheritance law, and personal autonomy within the framework of Nigerian society. The narrative centres on Aetu, a young woman whose existence is significantly influenced by the traditional values and expectations

imposed on her by both her family and community. Yerima's characterises Aetu as a victim of the prevailing patriarchal norms. In this context, Aetu's family prioritises financial considerations over personal qualities, selecting the wealthiest suitor willing to pay the substantial bride price, irrespective of his character or age. This selection process reflects a critical commentary on the societal pressures faced by women in similar situations. It is expressed that the need to appease the spirit of Aetu has invariably changed perspectives on child marriage and inheritance laws on women, especially in marriages with recently deceased family relatives.

OLD WOMAN: That is where she lies in the unmarked grave. Old man, you were going to make your sacrifice to the wrong person. This is why Aetu was angry with the whole lot of you.

KANDE: Did you know her then... my grandmother?

OLD WOMAN: The whole village knew her. I was young, and I grew up to hear her sad story. Because of her, the people stopped the practice of making over a woman to another man without her consent.

KANDE: Mama, she cursed my family before she died. See my father... all the male children in the family died this way. (Old woman chuckles) You chuckle. Did you know about the curse? I want to know (Yerima 2007, p. 13).

Aetu's early experiences as a young girl are profoundly influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms including the practice of child marriage which occurs against the will of the girl child. Additionally, the cultural attitudes surrounding inheritance within her community impose significant burdens upon her entire lineage. The drive for wealth by her parents ultimately decide to sell her through marriage to Oke, an elderly man.

Ahmed Yerima also expresses a perspective in which both genders are affected by the ramifications of residing within a

patriarchal society. This reinforces the fact that the family was motivated by survival instincts not the desire to be wealthy:

AETU: Never mind my father. No one can stop me. Atiba it is either you or no one else.

ATIBA: Your father says that the old man, Oke, wants you. He has threatened me also. His men have even beaten me up, and he has said that he will kill me if I don't leave you alone. (Aetu begins to giggle.) See this little girl. My life is in danger, and she giggles. My end has really come.

AETU: Nothing will touch Atiba. I swear, nothing will. (Giggles again) (Yerima 2007, p. 25).

It can be argued that, patriarchy adversely does not only affects women, but also men. The above excerpt shows the fact that the family is motivated by survival instinct and not the desire to be wealthy at that point. This perspective arises through Oke's voice. An aged man willing to fight to get married to an underage girl. Oke fights to hold on to a girl that is like a granddaughter to him.

OKE: I see your ears are blocked. I told you to leave Ayishatu alone. She is my wife.

ATIBA: That was not what she told me. She said that I was the one she wanted.

OKE: She is confused. All little girls are confused in matters of love. Men on the other hand are foolish, and need to be set right most times in matters of love. And it seems you have chosen a good place for us to settle the matter once and for all. Akalu, deal with him. Teach him a lesson. Hold him. Grab him and kill him.

(Akalu comes forward, grabs Atiba by the neck until he falls. He strangles him.)

AETU: (Aetu runs out to save Atiba) Leave him alone! You will kill him. (But it is too late) Atiba! (Realising Atiba is

dead, she begins to cry) (Yerima 2007, p. 27).

The practice of viewing women as an object to be possessed in patriarchal societies remains a significant issue in Nigeria. Women especially in marriage are often seen not as individuals, but as extensions of a man's property. In many traditional African communities, the wife is the first suspect after a man's death. After verifying that she is not to blame, the belongings of the deceased including his wife are shared among male relatives.

Aetu inherited the role of a new wife to the brother of a deceased family member on two different occasions. This is because she chose to challenge the will of the gods by her purgation of emotion. A major step Aetu took to not escalate her purgation was to plead with Gbade to permit her to return to her paternal home. "I had only one child for your late brother. Let me go, my lord. My brother and mother just died, and my father's sight is going bad. I am the only child left, let me return home, I beg you" (Yerima 2007, p. 34). This statement shows a desperate attempt to avoid the patriarchal ways of the people, and an attempt to allow her father to benefit from being the patriarchal head of his home. However, her plea is met with a response like;

Did you hear the voice and the concern of a good woman? Young in age but tender in everything else. Otedola, today I make my choice of my brother's properties. First is the land at the riverside, good for the planting of rice. The cocoa farm at the centre of the village to the left, the two houses at Ije, the kolanut farm at Oke Oko, and of course for the sake of my impending old age, I shall take this Tapa woman to enrich my bed. If I die with her by my side caring for my every need, let no one blame the gods for loving me. I am not a greedy man. Otedola take your desires and let the children have what is left. Our brother lived well, it is our right to enjoy his wealth after him. Thank you (Yerima 2007, p. 34).

Women being inherited as property has become a norm, especially in the rural areas of Nigeria. Interestingly, some women envy Aetu's experiences and believe she is favoured. They see her receiving what they described as benefits from her many husbands when some cannot even get one.

The consequences and aftermath of forced marriage go far beyond what is visible in *Aetu*. Aetu's heavy experiences lead her to Esu's shrine, where she lays a curse on both her husband and her children. The psychological impact of this decision transforms Aetu into an embittered spirit roaming around restlessly in death. Aetu's youngest child (Obajimi) is an old man trapped between life and death as a result of his mother's revolt against the patriarchal norms of her people.

Baba mi, wake up. Hear the stories that can untangle your mystery of pain. Baba mi... (Goes to him.) There he goes again shutting his eyes to the world he belongs, to prepare himself for the cold world his mother wished for him. O ma se o. (Pauses) Oh, I am carried away again. Forgive me, Mama. Even my father does not know all this about his mother. (Goes to him) Oh, he is asleep again.

OLD WOMAN: Let him be. His story is almost complete (Yerima 2007, p. 36).

The old woman understands the history behind Baba's predicament. This is because she is the spirit of Aetu reliving the consequences of visiting Esu's shrine, and laying a curse on her lineage. The generational curse placed by Aetu affects both the male and the female gender in the play. Aetu frowns against patriarchal experiences that have given her cold-blooded instincts to destroy her entire lineage.

Indeed, *Aetu* is a compelling exploration of the tension between tradition and personal freedom in a patriarchal society. Even though other women find Aetu's situation a favourable one for her,

she is embittered beyond expectation.

AGBESU: Sister, you flatter her. And it is unfair. An Opo ... a forced widowed wife... that explains her bitterness. And what is good about that?

AGBEBI: Why should she be bitter? It is good for a family to find a woman useful. She should thank her head. My mother was thrown out with the last bathwater of my father. We suffered till she died. You remember, Sister. All we inherited is how to deliver children, which she learnt from her mother before her. This woman should jump for joy. Look how expensive her wrapper is. She is spoilt by the favours from Olodumare (Yerima 2007, p. 48).

Yerima uses Aetu's journey to shed light on the struggles faced by women who seek to carve out their own identities within the constraints of cultural expectations. One man's food can indeed poison another. Being frustrated from being relegated to the lowest levels of the patriarchal society, Aetu stabs herself immediately after the birth of her third child (Obajimi).

Patriarchal Norms and Gender Roles in *Queen Amina*

Ahmed Yerima's *Queen Amina* is a portrayal of the historical figure of Amina, recognised as one of Africa's most notable female leaders. Although historical documentation regarding her life is limited, Amina is revered in Hausa folklore as a symbol of female empowerment and resilience. The play brightens the values attributed especially to women and expressly highlights the objectification of the female child. Denial of the presence of a personal agency in matters that concern the girl child serves as the foundational theme in Yerima's artistic expression. The play opens with Marka expressing that patriarchy had just won against the innocence of little Amina.

Haa... the sound of the innocent cry draws closer. I hope the

hymen was not wrongly cracked? She comes here. Why? (The shrill is heard again.) Nearer. She must be a victim then... not a loved one. And this victim searches for a pacifier. Now old, and as Magajiya, I am the ordained pacifier, chosen to relive my anguish by being assaulted for the umpteenth time, with the tales of fresh forceful inflicted insertions. (AMINA staggers in, crying.) Poor girl, indeed, a scorpion has had it. The smell... the sight of fresh blood crawls into my nostrils.

AMINA: Grandmother. (Crying. She falls into her arms.)
He stung me, Grandmother.

MARKA: Stung? The Scorpion?

AMINA: Yes (Yerima 2019, p. 9).

Amina has just been raped by her betrothed. She stumbled into her grandmother's arms crying bitterly as Marka could only soothe her into accepting the realities of her experience. This is because the ancient society is generally perceived as a men's world, nothing could be done to the rapist:

MARKA: I warned you. These days, blood bonds have no meanings. The head rules men. How did it happen?

AMINA: We were wrestling.

MARKA: Wrestling?

AMINA: And I told him it was going to be dark. I wanted to break away, but he held me firmly. Then he rolled me over. And soon, I felt him. Suddenly, he grew into a wild animal. Grunting... breathing heavily. He tore at my wrapper. Yanked my feet apart, until they shook of raw pain. Then a sharp anguish set in. (Begins to cry again.)
The wild animal. Kaka the Scorpion bit me.

MARKA: I know. I warned you... step away from him, I said. When his beady eyes started to roll around your neckline. and he won't take his eyes from your twisting bottom. I

warned you even more (Yerima 2019, p. 10).

Young Amina is overwhelmed by the pain felt. She vows to take revenge against her betrothed but Marka cautions her, insisting Amina should understand that it is every woman's lot to feel love in one form or the other. Marka advises Amina to forget about her feelings and be strong.

Marka explains the cultural norms and traditional roles expected of women in Amina. She goes on to inform Amina that her new course is already tainted. "It sends shivers down my ageing spine. Your mother, Bakwa Turuku, never tried it with my son, your father. The men own the world, the gods gave it to them. Amina, you can never change a lot of women" (Yerima 2019, p. 11). It is observed that women have been conditioned to be submissive to the patriarchal norms of society. Marka further tells Amina to calm down. She emphasises that;

by the break of dawn, you will want more, you will see. It is like childbirth, the pain comes and goes, and leaves behind a sense of lust. A desire of want. You will look for the Scorpion for more stings before the wedding in the new moon.

AMINA: Wedding? Tafdin!

MARKA: That is the culture ... the men always take at will. It is the curse of womanhood, Amina (Yerima 2019, p. 12).

The rape experience diminishes Amina's feeling of passion for men. This feeling further fueled by her suspicion that Tafidar, her late brother's shadow also killed him escalated her need to eradicate any form of feminine feeling within her. This is why she stated "I need two days to reveal my decision. Let them leave my brother's body as it is. I still have questions to ask it" (Yerima, 2019, p. 16). In retaliation, she enjoys killing Tafidar in an attempt to revenge and equally expresses her stand against the people's patriarchal norms.

Furthermore, Amina also expresses her point of view, stating

she believes the men are not fully in support of a woman ruling them to Isikulu. "When our mother, Queen Bakwa of Turunku, ruled ... the men hated it... oftentimes, I would hear them whisper how it was sacrilegious for a mere woman to sit on the throne of Zazzau as a ruler" (Yerima 2019, p. 19). This point of view motivated Amina to fortify her heart especially because the experiences of Queen Bakwa of Turunku, her mother reminded her to be strong against any form of oppression. Amina went to extremes by sougning for more power from Shagu, so she could truly flourish as Queen. Amina will do anything to secure a powerful position that no man will challenge.

SHAGU: (Murmurs at the mirror.) It is done. The elevation you seek shall be achieved. You shall be queen like your mother. You shall surpass all the queens and kings of Zazzau. You will never be forgotten. Men shall tremble at the mention of your name (Yerima 2019, p. 22).

To make the above real, Amina had eradicated any form of womanish feeling that could portray her as less of a man. "AMINA: Well, Shagu. (Slowly, she rises. takes off her male clothes; the lawani, the babariga, the beard.) I am who I am now. Shagu... I feel an uncanny movement within me" (Yerima, 2019, p. 24). Amina seeks extra power to carry the weight associated with the role of the patriarchal head.

And soon the stupid men of Zazzau gave up their throne to embrace slavery. They gave up their trousers in exchange for wrappers. And gave up their manhood, in exchange for the shrill voices of women. Now the women sleep on top of the men in Zazzau and the coy Zazzau men cover their unbraided heads in bright coloured... clownish veils. Ha! Let me ask, who pounds the gero for breakfast now in Zazzau? Men! (Yerima 2019, p. 31).

Yerima uses the character of Amina to carry the community women along. He represents the harsh realities women are exposed to in a patriarchal society. Through Amina, women generically started

moving up the social hierarchy. In one of her experiences in court:

came these people. A man from Zazzau who lives outside the wall of the city had lived with his wife whom he treated like a beast of burden. He dislikes her because she has eight children, all daughters for him. With them lived the wife's younger sister. He beat, starved, maimed and treated her as a slave (Yerima 2019, p. 34).

From these statements, it is expressed that patriarchy gives room for gaps in which the mother can be blamed when the sex of a newborn child is female. This is partly why the birth of a male child is mostly more celebrated than that of a female child in African societies.

Amina is a dynamic character whose wings carry other women beyond the stereotyped resentment generally received from men with subordinative characteristics. She insisted that; "Men are users of women. They do not respect us or value us, so do not give yourself cheaply to them. I know that our culture gives the world to them. I know our culture says we should worship and pamper them, but pamper with sense" (Yerima 2019, p. 35). The experience of being subjected to the state's patriarchal norms is exemplified by Bilikisu. The prevailing cultural framework not only empowers men but also neglects girls during their most challenging times. Bilikisu expresses that:

I was raped by four brothers who worked in a farm close to that of my parents. They threatened to kill me if I uttered a word. When my parents saw that I was pregnant, they drove me from the house in order to avoid the shame and gossip of the neighbours (Yerima 2019, p.38).

Amina frequently experiences nightmares connected to the themes discussed by Bilikisu, which significantly impact her role as the patriarchal leader. In these recurring dreams, she highlights some of the secrets surrounding her rise to power. It serves as a reminder of the vulnerabilities she faces due to societal expectations placed on her as

the female gender ruling over a patriarchal society. She has been queen for thirty-four years “and all I have are nightmares of heads chasing after me. Do my people know what I go through? Do they know what I have to do? I must be just a bloody sacrifice” (Yerima 2019, p. 42).

Amina grows in strength as she continues to win wars that reinforce her kingdom. However, her chiefs become petty regarding the politics of power, insinuating that the deaths of some of their soldiers are because Queen Amina is a woman leader. They indirectly criticise Queen Amina with their words, despite her successful reign. Amina killed Kuda's sons just to “keep her vain and arrogant power. (Chuckles.) It is not her fault. First, we allowed her mother to rule, then named our great city after her sister... and now we allow her to sacrifice our poor children” (Yerima 2019, p. 45). In contrast to Amina's kingdom, Yerima presents a perspective on another realm where the notion of female leadership is largely dismissed. The prevailing cultural norms dictate that if a woman aspires to ascend to the throne, she must enter into marriage with a man who will assume the role of King while she occupies the position of Queen. According to the elders of the land,

Zangon Gabas expects the return of their princess. The elders want you to return... The King is dead.

ISIKULU: Impossible. My late uncle stayed too long on the throne, I thought he would never die... Your throne does not hold much for me now.

ELDER: You are the heir to the throne.

ISIKULU: A queen then?

ELDER: No. Our culture is different, but must be followed. An heir who is a woman can pick the man who becomes king, and she his queen consort. (Yerima 2019, p. 48)

Isikulu's aspiration for leadership faces significant challenges from the prevailing patriarchal structures within society. They assert

that she is permitted to serve only as a ceremonial figurehead and not the ruler of the people.

Isikulu endeavours to assert her fundamental rights as an individual with emotions, however, she encounters substantial resistance at the moment she chooses to advocate for her position. Isikulu decides to stand firm against any form of oppression on either her person or her office.

And when you avenged our king and father's death, we allowed you to remain and learn more about valour, but now I wonder if we did well by you.

ISIKULU: Wait. You confuse me. I am not a stone... but a human like you. I like what I have seen here in Zazzau. A woman queen ... not a support puppet to some strange male stooge chosen by me.

ELDER: What you desire is not us. A woman is a woman with us, you can only sit next to a man... to earn our bows. (Yerima 2019, p. 51)

She emphatically states that she is no puppet in the hands of the puppeteer. Amina was brought down by the schemes of Madawaki and Isikulu. Isikulu betrayed Amina out of a lustful desire for a stranger who shared their geopolitical space. Madawaki conspired against Amina due to complaints from other chiefs and his ambition to become the next king. Unfortunately,

MADAWAKI: (Turns to AMINA.) My Queen, it is done. You may now sleep. The gods have punished the traitor. (AMINA does not answer. She remains transfixed.) My Queen. (MADAWAKI moves closer to her and notices that she is dead. They both move back. As they greet her, one knee on the floor.) Here stands a true general, and a great queen. We shall not mourn her, instead, we shall celebrate her (Yerima 2019, p. 64)

Amina's relationships with other characters reveal the conflicts she faces as a woman ruling a patriarchal setup. The sacrifices she must make to fulfil her role as queen ruling a patriarchal society are unfathomable. Ahmed Yerima effectively portrays the burdens women go through in coexisting with their male counterparts. *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* underscore the tension between traditional gender roles and the agency of women fighting against the people's patriarchal structures within their society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historicisation of patriarchal norms and the representation of gender roles in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* provide a vital frame capable of capturing gender dynamics in Nigeria. In response to historical and cultural forces, Yerima's works continue to contribute to issues relating to ongoing discourse on gender, power, and identity crisis. His perception challenges behavioural traits subjugating women and seeks to possibly transform Nigeria's patriarchal systems for equality against the mirage of this contemporary age. While some plays focus on the oppressive aspects of patriarchy, Yerima's *Aetu* and *Queen Amina* detail the resilience of women. This diversity of representation allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of gender relations in Nigeria. *Queen Amina* intricately represents the success of women in leadership roles, while *Aetu* celebrates the inheritance culture mostly associated with Nigerian societies. Through historicising patriarchal norms and gender roles in Nigerian plays, we, therefore, recommend that Nigeria's cultural bodies in operation should find a balance in the kinds of opportunities offered to both the male and the female gender. Finding balance will ensure a proper exploration of the people's patriarchal past and effective positive dynamics of social change. At the same time, reflecting on gender-sensitive movements already standing against patriarchal norms and the present projection on

gender roles are also influenced by ancient patriarchal norms even in contemporary times.

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