

**THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED  
PLAYS OF AHMED YERIMA**

**BY**

**BALA, IBRAHIM KANTI  
P14AREN8019**

**NOVEMBER, 2018**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES,  
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER DEGREE (M.A) LITERATURE IN  
ENGLISH**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,  
FACULTY OF ARTS,  
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY,  
ZARIA, NIGERIA**

**NOVEMBER, 2018**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation entitled “THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED PLAYS OF AHMED YERIMA” has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of this dissertation was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other Institution.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Bala, Ibrahim Kanti

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## CERTIFICATION

This dissertation entitled “The Representation of Female Characters in Selected Plays of Ahmed Yerima” by Ibrahim Kanti BALA meets the regulations governing the award of Masters of Arts (M.A) degree in Literature in English of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my friend and course mate, late Miss Florence Maigari who died after completion of our coursework. May her gentle soul continue to rest in perfect peace.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All thanks are due to God Almighty for his love, grace and mercy and for giving me the strength, knowledge, ability and opportunity to undertake this research study and to persevere and complete it satisfactorily. Without his blessings, this achievement would not have been possible. I sincerely appreciate my supervisors Professor Ezekiel Solomon Akuso and Professor Sani Aliyu Abba, whose intellectual guidance and critical views helped in sharpening my perspective about Literature. To my lecturers and the entire staff of the Department of English and Literary studies, I am grateful for their scholarly motherly and fatherly advice over the years.

To my father; Late Alhaji Bala Kanti and my mother Hajiya Habiba Aliyu Babajo, the best gifts ever, I am eternally grateful for their dedication and sacrifice to parenthood. You are the best. I have great pleasure in acknowledging my loving brother Alhaji Danlami Dahiru Kanti, who takes the place of my father for his prayers, encouragement and support financially and morally. I remain indebted to my Islamic teacher Alh. Kabiru Dallami Na`annabi, without his support and encouragement I would not have achieved this feat.

I sincerely appreciate the love and support from my brothers and sisters Usman Bala Kanti, Alaramma D. Lawal, Umar Albarka, Aunty Aisha, Aunty Mama, Kabir Ibrahim, Aliyu Bala kanti, Umar Bala Kanti, Maiwada Bala Kanti, Ismail Bala Kanti, Musa Bala Kanti, Sabo Bala Kanti, Shuaibu Bala Kanti, Falalu Bala Kanti, Sabitu Bala Kanti and Yusuf Bala Kanti. I dare not forget my uncles and aunties who are too numerous to mention. I thank you all.

My gratitude will not be complete without acknowledging my friends and colleagues who stood by me all through the period of this programme. To Stephen Ajinomoh, Moses Aule, Tahir Abdullah Usman, Musa Abdullahi Sulaiman, Muhammad Iliyasu, Herbert, Gloria Bitrus, Femi

Adegun, Shuaibu Umar, Obinna, Kingsley Madu, Abdulkareem, Scholar Chinyere Jacob, Solomon, Haruna Hassan, Christine, Murna Iliyasu, Blessing mojowa, Victoria Oladira, Godiya, Chiamaka, Sadiqa, Isma`ila Musa, Terfa Gabriel, James Ubeg, Paul Epempakapa among others.

Thank you all and God bless you.

I must not fail to appreciate my nieces and nephews Rukayya Dahiru Kanti, Nafisa Dahiru Kanti, Umar Faruk Idris Kanti, Aisha Adamu Kanti, Ibrahim A. Dangarinmu, Amina Adamu Kanti, Mahmud Abba, Aisha Dahiru Kanti, Habiba Shuaibu Kanti, Maryam Dahiru Kanti, Abdullah Dahiru Kanti, Lubabatu Dahiru Kanti for their support, love and encouragement. May God reward them abundantly. Amen

Finally, I am immensely indebted to any person who helped me in one way or the other whose names are too numerous to be mentioned here. Thank you and May God reward you all. Amen.

## ABSTRACT

Ahmed Yerima, is one of the few male playwrights who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of the female protagonists in Yerima's plays are strong, assertive, educationally empowered women who have transcended the private life to the fore of public life where they contribute to the economic and human development of the nation. But what specifically is the economic and social status of these female characters? How does the playwright characterise them? What is his intention for assigning them the roles they play? And what implication do both have for human development? This study therefore offers a critical analysis of the images of empowered female characters in the drama of Ahmed Yerima and the methods used by the playwright in representing them so as to determine the implication of the playwright's style on both the theme of the play and the audience's response as well as the implication of the theme and technique to human and national development. To achieve the above objectives, the study uses womanist perspective to read selected plays of Ahmed Yerima – *The Wives*, *The Sisters*, *Titu*, *Owiwi*, *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks* which lay emphasis on how professional female characters are critically analysed to unravel the intricate relationship of subject matter, character and style in determining the overall message of the plays and these enhance the image of women. The study therefore finds that Ahmed Yerima is one of the few Male writers that shows great concern to the cause of women and does justice to the representation of female characters in his works.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background to the Study

This research explores the representation of women in selected plays of Ahmed Yerima as a way of interrogating the relationship between womanism and the representation of women in Nigerian drama. There have been critical efforts particularly by feminists aimed at situating male writers as male-chauvinists over the years. This study therefore investigates the portrayal of women in Yerima's plays in order to repudiate the claim that he is a chauvinist like most male writers are accused of being. There is a tendency in the criticism of African literature to critique African male writers as male chauvinists. Contrary to this notion however, Yerima has been described as a feminist writer by many critics because in most of his plays, he presents women in a positive light. Ezenwanebe (2011:14) describes this in detail when he states that:

Ahmed Yerima is more of a scholar of gender studies than a womanist or a liberal feminist.....He is one of the few African writers who devote their art to urge for an evolutionary change in filial relations especially as regards man and wife. Many of his works explore the cultural oppression of women, especially widows and the less privileged women in the society.

This implies that Yerima through his works question gender roles as a means of checking cultural excesses that amount to the oppression of women. Ewejobi (2012:266) like Ezenwanebe's observes that "from his other plays, Yerima has proven to be neither a male chauvinist, nor a biased playwright" Like any other movements, feminism can be diverse in its issues, immediate goals, and adopted methods. It enables women to campaign against oppression in a male dominated society. Thus, the general understanding of feminists schools of thoughts are structured by the vision of a new society, a society where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent, a society where women's contribution will be recognized and appreciated. Molaria Ogundipe Leslie (1980:45) states that: "What

we want in Africa is a social transformation. It is not about warring with the man, the reverse of role or doing to men whatever harm that men have been for centuries.....the transformation of the African society is in the interest of both men and women”. Looking at the literary development in Nigeria from pre-colonial to post independence period, it is obvious that the literary scene like most other spheres of life has been dominated by men. Male writers, such as: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola and many other male writers have been accused by feminist critics of portraying female characters in their works as mere caricature. That is to say, feminist critics argued that male writers presented the female character in a negative light. Thus, Acholonu (1995:3) is of the opinion that:

The presentation of the African woman as oppressed, suppressed by a male dominated culture in which she has no right, no respect, and a status subordinated to that of the man, is a dangerous misrepresentation of the true state of affairs, a negation of the diversity and variety of issues surrounding her position and experience in the different cultures in which she finds herself.

In the light of this conception, a vision for the society is meant to be a dual one. Strategies may therefore be needed to breakdown structures of inequality and the barriers between genders. As a result of that, Nigerian women have always striven to rise above societal norms. Feminist critics also argue that Nigerian male writers in most of their works presented women as caricature despite the important role they play in ensuring the continuous survival and existence of the society but still all their lives activities are controlled by men. Hawthorn (2001:145) argues that:

Feminist critics have also done much to show the ways in which male views of reality have dominated much fiction, especially, of course, that by men, and especially their views of women are typically portrayed in relation to men, and are often seen in certain stereotyped ways, as passive, hysterical, emotional, ‘bitch’ or ‘goddess.’ Thus it seems fair to say that it is only as a result of the effect of feminist critics in recent years that the portrayal of women in D.H Lawrence’s major novels has been questioned and criticized, and that many other authors have been looked at with new eyes.

The literary circle like many other human endeavor worldwide have been dominated by men. However, the efforts of women movement in the sixties and seventies in the world have culminated in the emergence of the female writers. African feminist writers such as Flora Nwapa, in her text *Efuru* (1966) for example, believes that even within the traditional setting and cultural structure there are provision for the economic empowerment of the womenfolk. She challenges the traditional place of the African woman as perceived by the society at large by giving a strong projection to the womenfolk in order to show that women too have something to contribute toward to the development of the society.

However, unlike most Nigerian male writers, Yerima in most of his plays takes side with the feminist critics through a positive projection of the image of female characters. The feminists advocate the believed that it is essential for women to be allowed and encouraged to fulfill their potential if they are to make an effective contribution to nation building. In other words, feminist scholars accuse male writers of giving women roles that end purely in the kitchen, bedroom and as child rearers while men serve as authority figures whose orders have to be obeyed by the woman. Acholonu (1995:18) also explains: “the presence of men, their roles, their gender, often received greater projection in the society’s eye. The men were viewed as the figurehead of the family, the kindred, the village group, the captains of the ships, while the women who are the firemen, the caretakers at the home base, retained their positions of discreet power”. But the peculiar thing about Yerima is that, in most of his plays such as *Little Drops*, *The Sisters*, *Owiwi*, *The Wives*, *Idemili*, *Yemoja*, *Heart of Stone*, *Mu`Adhim`S Call*, *The \Portrait*, *The Mirrow Cracks*, *Agudu*, *Wiwi* and other plays women are presented with high qualities whose voices are very powerful in the society; these qualities are directly opposed to the attributes of the male characters that do not have much recognition in the texts. The women portrayed in the aforementioned texts command authority and men obey.

Nigerian drama has been subjected to several studies over time. It has been looked at on the basis of several theoretical frameworks. For instance, UgwuIfeanyi (2011:25) suggests that 'Reader's response is the best theory to apply to Nigerian drama on the premises that the idea, the meaning, quality and value of a play text depend largely on its interpretation by its critics, the readers who are conceived as the recipients of the text.' Fosudo (2010:74) also applied an ideological approach in the study of Nigerian drama in order to analyze the social consciousness and ideological vision in Ahmed Yerima's plays. On the other hand, Lisa (1999:1) cited that when feminism is applied to Nigerian drama it analyses the inequalities that exist within the Nigerian society. Another critic Yessibo (2013:77) also uses gynocriticism in the study of Nigerian drama. He argues that gynocriticism is the only aspect of feminist theory which helps the male author to portray women characters in a positive light. He explains that: "there are a few male playwrights however who portray women in their plays as talented and capable of achieving great things. These playwrights are termed gynocritics." Benedict (2012:146) asserts that Nigerian drama when subjected to feminism examines the contribution of female dramatists to research in contemporary African drama. It also helps in bringing out the issues that continue to rejuvenate the women's ideology and movement today. The emancipation of women from patriarchy, women's empowerment, women's clamor for new identity and solidarity in the face of male dominance strongly embody these issues.

Even though various theories have been subjected to the study of Nigerian drama including feminism, there are still some aspects of feminism that have not been applied to the study of Nigerian drama. In other words, critics have been applying feminism to Nigerian drama but womanism an aspect of feminism has not been fully explored in the study of Nigerian drama. It is on this basis that this study adopts African womanism which is one of the strands of feminism in Africa as a theoretical tool to examine how Ahmed Yerima as a dramatist is able to present female characters in a positive light. This

implies that Yerima, through his works, questions gender roles as a means of checking cultural excesses that amount to the oppression of women. As a means of exploring the womanist strand of feminism, this study deploys womanism, a strand of feminism in Africa, as a means of examining how Yerima –against the background of patriarchy – is able to present female characters in a positive light.

## **1.1 The Concept of Nigerian Drama**

Critics are divided as to what constitutes the origin of Nigerian drama. Some scholars suggest that the origin of Nigerian drama is not different from the origin of European drama as both evolved around religious activities and traditional performances. While others are of the view that Nigerian drama originated from ritual and festivals, which were essentially oral, to the literate tradition celebrated with the arrival of Soyinka in 1960. Critics such as Yemi Ogunbiyi, for instance, are of the opinion that Nigerian drama draws its elements, form and content, from the oral tradition and the rich artistic cultural heritage of the Nigerian people. The subject matters are drawn mainly from history, myth, legend, traditional values, belief system as well as contemporary issues. Thus, he explains that:

Nigerian drama arose out of fundamental human needs in the dawn of human civilization and has continued to express those needs ever since, Which is to say, Nigerian theater and drama originated with the Nigerian himself, embodying his first preoccupations, his first struggles, successes, set- back and all...the origin of Nigerian theater and drama lie in the numerous traditional, religious and functional rituals to be found practically every society.' (Ogumbi 1978:65)

Clerk (1981:57) on the other hand, argues that the origin of Nigerian drama very little is known, that is reliable and precise, for the simple reason that no comprehensive study has been made so far of the subject either by the old government, sociologist or by the government of today... contrary to what some seem to think, Nigerian drama did not begin at university of Ibadan, the root go beyond there.

Nigerian drama therefore, emerged from Nigerian traditional practices, religious activities and cultural performances.

The arguments on the specific origin of Nigerian drama also brought about another argument of the definition of the term 'Nigerian drama', that is the reason behind the absence of the single definition of the term Nigerian drama. Rotimi (1981:77) for example, explains that: "the standard definition of the term drama, within a cultural setting, at any rate implies "an imitation of an action...or of person in action" the ultimate object of which is to edify or to entertain sometimes to do both,, ritual displays the purpose of presentation of their style, and value, evidences of imitation, enlightenment, and or entertainment can be said to be drama" While Ogunbiyi (1978:3) defines Nigerian drama as an expression of the relationship between man, society and nature. The term 'Nigerian drama' therefore, can be considered as a piece of dramatic that is written or co-ordinate by a Nigerian or non- Nigerian but focuses primarily on issues that are peculiar to Nigeria and Nigerians but which however, may carry universal Africanism.

## **1.2 Characterization in Literature**

Characterization can be considered as an inseparable constituent of a literary work used by critics and writers. The concept of character has been critically elaborated since the emergence of the first theoretical texts that aimed to explore and explain the nature of literature, literary text, and its components. An historical survey of the employment of literary characterization and its subsequent criticism, extending all the way from the classical ages to present times, shows that literary characterization has undergone radical technical and thematic changes in the course of literary history. For example Ream (2015:4) defines characterization as "any action by the author or taking place within a work that is used to provide the description of the character. Martin (2004:10) also explains

that “characterization is the stylistic and narrative techniques for the representation of human features, action, intention, desires and traits in the novel form and how these interact with reader`s cognitive strategies for recognizing and developing knowledge about the other people”.

Based on the definitions above, Characterization can therefore be described as a literary device that is used step-by-step in literature to highlight and explain the details about a character in a story. It is the initial stage in which the writer introduces the character with noticeable emergence. After introducing the character, the writer often talks about his behavior of the characters as the story progresses. Therefore, characterization in relation to literature is a veritable tool or technique that allows us (readers/audience) to relate with the characters of the play as the plot unfolds. It is the technique the writer uses to reveal the personality of a character. There are several tools deployed by writers in actualizing characterization. These tools include: Speech/ Dialogue, thought and action.

Action is one of the tools of characterization which reveals who we are. A character`s actions inside a story reveals who they are. Action here is defined as anything a character does as a primary act. Characters` thought is also a technique of characterization which gives useful insight into characters personalities, desires and goals. Another important tool of characterization is Speech/Dialogue. A character or the Dialogue between characters form a medium between the action and thought. How they communicate with other characters can establish not only how they feel, but also descriptors such as where they come from and their relationship with the character to whom they are speaking.(Reams, 2015:711)

Characterization can be seen in two ways; direct and indirect characterization. Direct characterization tells the audience what the personality of the character is. While indirect characterization shows things that reveal the personality of a character. Jays (2013:45) explains that Characterization can be direct and indirect. Direct characterization has to do with the author telling the audience what the personality

of the character is. While the indirect mode allows the audience to actively find out the personality of these characters. Jays further argues that:

The indirect characterization is most explored by most playwrights because it reveals subtly the personality of the characters. It makes use of any of the five tools or a combination of the five. The five tools that are used in the development of character are speech, thought, effect (of one character on other character), action and looks.(P.76)

Jays here argues that Ahmed Yerima in most of his plays uses indirect mode of characterization in order to expose to the readers/ audience the personalities of the characters. Yerima (2011:34) on the other hand, explains that “Direct characterization is a kind of characterization that takes a direct approach towards building the character. It uses another character, narrator, or the protagonist himself to tell the reader or audience about the subject. He further argues that indirect characterization is a more subtle way of introducing the character to the audience. The audience has to deduce for themselves the characteristics of the character by observing his/her thought process, behavior, speech, way of talking, appearance and manner of communication with other character, as well as by discerning the response of other characters. Yerima, also explains the principles that inform the creation of characters in his plays. Thus:

I create characters and look for reason why they exist, what is going on in their minds. I believed when you wear an agbada, it means that you have no problem, but I believe that if you look deep, then you will emptiness. My plays strip all characters of their outer coverings, leaving the audience with the real beings that form the inner human psyche. That is what I always like to do. I use my plays to examine situation because I believe the human mind is always the most complex machine. (2004:64)

Therefore, the character(s) development is crucial to the construction of good literature. Understanding the role of characterization in storytelling is very important for any writer. It helps us make sense of the behavior of any character in a story by helping us understand their thought processes. That is why this aspect of the study explores the importance of characters as both the vehicle and as means of enhancing understanding. This way the writer is able to convey what he wants the audience to read or

feel in the character. A good use of characterization always leads the readers to relate better to the events taking place in the story. Ahmed Yerima in this regard, uses the technique of indirect characterization in most of his texts. Three tools are however identifiable in most of his plays. They include: Speech, Actions and Thought.

### **1.3 Statement of the Research Problem**

Over time, some feminist critics have accused male writers of misrepresenting female characters in their texts. They argue that female characters are often poorly represented in the works of male writers. To them, men expose their propensity to suppress women through the negative portrayal of the female in their works, in the purely male authored works women are seen as responsible for all ills of the society, they are also presented as mere caricature and sex symbols whose role are only recognized through their husbands. For example, a critic such as: Chukwuma (1989:1) argues that “female characters trained ambition revolved around marriage and procreation. Her other obligations ranged further from cooking the family meals to honoring her husband’s bed, on invitation”. Yeseibo (2013:77-78) also observes that “women are poorly represented in contemporary male texts...women are seen as responsible for all the ills of the society. They are noted for moral bankruptcy, loose tongue, gossip, flippancy, rumor mongering, hypocrisy, treachery, and many more.” Ikechukwu (2013:10) comments that “the image of women in the predominant male literature turned out to be one sided, stereotyped and negative to the advantage of the domineering gender.” Banham, Martin, James and Osofisan (2002: xiii) on the other hand, stated that “in the raft of mainly male-authored plays, women are seen as either angelically virtuous or more often, as dangerous, duplicitous and rapaciously greedy”. Both critics in one way or the other condemned all the male writers and accused them of poor representation of female characters in their works.

Since Feminism has often been used to interrogate the suppressive representation of female characters, this study repudiates these numerous claims by tapping into womanism; an aspect of feminism that has scarcely been used particularly in relation to the works of Yerima. This study deploys the womanist angle of Feminism as a means of bridging the conceptual gap in the application of feminism to Nigerian Drama, particularly in relation to the works of Yerima. Thus, through a “womanist-feminist” critique of selected plays of Yerima, this study questions the tendency within the African literary tradition to classify every male writer as a male chauvinist. The study therefore proceeds on the basis of the assumptions that:

1. The dialectics of character formation and representation along gender lines constitutes a vital part of African Literature.
2. Yerima`s works capture issues that border on the role of men and women within the African society.
3. Yerima`s works present the female character in a way that negates certain feminist claim against male playwrights.
4. African womanism is a viable means of exploring the representation of female characters in Nigerian Plays.

#### **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to repudiate the feminist claim that African male writers are male chauvinists. It shows that Yerima is a playwright whose works portray female characters in a positive light. On this basis, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Illustrate that character formation and representation is not entirely influenced by the sentiments of gender war in African Literature.
2. Explore the extent to which Yerima is objective in the representation of gender issues.
3. Show how Yerima`s works correct the misconception of feminist critics, that women have been negatively portrayed and poorly presented in the plays authored by male playwrights.

4. Show that African strand of feminism is a viable means of exploring the representation of female characters in Nigerian Plays.

### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

There is a great argument within the context of gender war in Nigerian literature over the representation of female characters in male authored texts. The argument of misrepresentation of female characters in male writers has attracted and still attracts the attention of many critics' especially feminist scholars. Feminist writers like John Ebimobowei, Helen Chukwuma, Osita C. Ezenwanebe, Molara Ogundipe Leslie among others have accused male writers of foregrounding a bias for and against female characterization through a poor representation of women in their works. Yessibo (2013:82) states that: "the overriding focal of male playwrights has always been to foreground the physical, prurient, negative nature of women. By their negative portrayal of women, men expose their propensity to suppress women." Therefore this study titled *The Representation of Female Characters in Selected Plays of Ahmed Yerima* is justifiable in the sense that it will be valued and utilized in many ways: Firstly, it repudiates the feminist notion that women are poorly portrayed in all male authored works. Secondly, this study is very necessary at this moment, because this kind of assertion poses a track to the whole concept; many critical studies have always generalized and seen male authors as wicked in their representation of female characters. This work is very important because it makes scholars and students of literature know that feminist discourse has gone beyond the idea of a male or a female writer because there are many male writers that show great concern on the cause of female. Writers' such as: Femi Osofisan, Olu Oba Femi, Ahmed Yerima, Bode Sowande and a host of others. All the aforementioned writers have ensured a near balanced representation of both male and female genders. This debunks the feminist claim within African literary tradition and shows that there are writers in Nigeria who empathize with the plight of women in a patriarchal society such as Nigeria. Thirdly, it will serve as contribution to researchers in the related field,

with the hope that with this study, therefore, people will begin now to look at the feminism from broader perspectives than what was initially conceived.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

This study titled *The Representation of Female Characters in Selected Plays of Ahmed Yerima* in relation to feminist criticism adopts a qualitative research approach. Basically, there are two types of research, qualitative and quantitative research. The Qualitative research according to Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research (2008: xxix) “is designed to explore the human element of given topic, where specific methods are used to examine how individuals experience the world.” He further explains that, qualitative research is often described as opposed to quantitative research because qualitative method is central to research conducted in education, nursing, sociology, information studies and other discipline in the humanities, social science and health science. On the basis of these, this study employs the method because the selected texts of Yerima form the primary materials for analysis and are supported by other relevant materials such as: *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, text books, literary critical works, journal, articles, encyclopedia and internet materials in order to show the relationship between the Nigerian dramatists and the feminist critics.

## **1.7 Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

This study borders on the works of Ahmed Yerima because he is a renowned playwright not only in Nigeria but also across Africa. Although, there are other writers that show concern for women but in modern times, he seems to be the most prominent of all the writers that have shown interest and written much on women. Thus, because of the context of this research, and Yerima’s treatment of women, this research focuses on his works as primary materials. Some of his works includes: *Three Plays In Transition* (1980), *The Silent Gods*(1990), *The Bishop And The Soul And Thank You Lord* (1996), *The*

*Trials Of Overamwen Nogbaisi (1998), Karffi Last Game (2001), The Sick People (2003), The Lottery Ticket (2004), (2003), The Twist (2004), The Liman And Ade Ire (2004), The Angels And Other Plays (2004), The Sister (2001), The Wives, Hard Groud (2006) Mu`Adhim`S Call, Otello (2003), Aetu, Yemoja, Heart Of Stone, Abobaku, Agudua, Owiwi, No Pennies For Mama, Mojagbe, Tuti, Attahiru (1999),* among others. In order to clearly explore Yerima`s presentation of female characters, this study selects six plays out of his more than three dozen plays. The plays include: *The Sisters, The Wives, Titu, Owiwi, The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks*. The selection of these six texts is based on the fact that they promote the female cause more than the others.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section of the research reviews critical and empirical materials that are related to the study as a means of locating the gap that this study sets out to fill. It also provides theoretical framework which discusses the concept of African Womanism; an afrocentric alternative to feminism, and opines that the womanist strand of feminism in Africa stands as literary tool for the analysis of the texts under study.

#### **2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The manner in which female characters are portrayed in literary works has continued to receive critical attention across the globe, especially since the emergence of feminism. The postulation that many male writers tend to relegate the representation of female characters to the cultural and ideological boundaries of patriarchal societies has been the crux of the gender war within the literary space. Critics have continued to argue that male writers often portray women as supporting characters in literary works. Stralton (1990:98) for example, argues that female characters have been portrayed in various ways, some of which are gender stereotypes and gender inequality. She explains that the woman is seen in literature as mother whose responsibilities ends in the kitchen. Peter (2010:14) also points out that many male writers are unwilling to portray female characters in their totality and in their true complexity, and resorted to the use of stereotypes. De Beauvoir (1949:89) is of the view that humanity is male, and man defines female not as she actually is in herself, but as one who is relative to him, she is actually regarded as an autonomous being. She further claims that man is the subject; he is “the absolute” while the female is “the other.” In a discussion on male domination African literature Adeleke

(1996:89) argues that “African literature is a male created, male- oriented, chauvinistic art”. Many critics in Africa have extensively examined the place of women in literature in order to analyze their representation in texts. Critics such as Yeseibo Ebimobowei, Ikechukwu, Catherine Acholonu, among others, argued that women are poorly represented in male authored works. Yeseibo (2013:77-78) also, emphasizes that “women are poorly represented in contemporary male texts...women are seen as responsible for all the ills of the society. They are noted for moral bankruptcy, loose tongue, gossip, flippancy, rumor mongering, hypocrisy, treachery, and many more.” Ikechukwu (2013:10) also argues that “the image of women in the predominant male literature turned out to be one sided, stereotyped and negative to the advantage of the domineering gender.” Banham, Martin, James and Osofisan (2002: xiii) on the other hand, state that “in the raft of mainly male-authored plays, women are seen as either angelically virtuous or more often, as dangerous, duplicitous and rapaciously greedy”. They argue that male writers misrepresentation of the actual nature of women in their works in other words, they are not sympathetic towards the position of women in general.

Although, women play important roles in the development of the society both in rural and urban societies, but their contribution is not given the credit it deserves and they are seen as victims of oppression in its various manifestations: exploitation, discrimination and general social prejudice. Acholonu (1995:3) further explains this thus:

I am of the opinion that the presentation of the African woman as oppressed, suppressed by a male dominated culture in which she has no right, no respect, and a status subordinated to that of the man, is a dangerous misrepresentation of the true state of affairs, a negation of the diversity and variety of issues surrounding her position and experience in the different cultures in which she finds herself.

Acholonu’s position on the representation of female characters in male authored works shows the conscious efforts of male writers to distort the image of women through their chauvinistic attitudes. Furman (2012:1) cited in Yeseibo captures this ugly scenario when she says “in a world defined by

men, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange value on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between.” (As cited in Yeseibo 2013). In support of Furman, Yeseibo, (20013:77) blames male writers that “women are poorly presented in contemporary male authored texts. Nigerian male writers rarely point positive images of women in their fiction. If they are not depicted as docile wives whose identities are recognized through their husband, they gain identity through motherhood.” Similarly, Nnolim (2001:130) states that:

Right from the endemic myth to modern times women have been depicted as angel with feet of clay, as purveyors of unhappiness both for themselves and for their male counterpart” the image of women in African literature is a gloomy one compounded by unhelpful hand of tradition and patriarchy.

Nnolim’s position above shows that women are poorly presented not only in Nigerian male authored texts but also in African literature at large. In this regard, Blamire (1991:24) explains that “the stereotyping of female roles in male produced literature has a negative influence on women readers in imposing traditional roles upon them.”

On the other hand, Yeseibo(2013:77) argues that “Nigerian male writers rarely paint positive image of women in their fiction, if they are not depicted as docile wives whose identities are recognized through their husbands, they gain identity through motherhood”. Adewuji (2009:130) validates Yeseibo’s claims, when he posits that:

Among all Nigerians but to a larger extent among rural, urban, poor, illiterate and non-illiterate ones, a woman, just like a little child, should only be seen and heard. In fact, within the pervasive extended polygamous network, she is regarded as a little higher in esteem than household chattels.

The image of women in Nigerian literature is the same with the image of women in literature of other parts of the world. Saadawi (2007:520) supports this claim when she states that:

Among the male authors I have read, both in the west and in the Arab world; Irrespective of the language in which they have written, or of the region from which

they have come, not one has been free him from this age-old image of women handed down to us from an ancient past no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defense of human right, human values and justice, and their vigorous resistance to oppression and tyranny in any form.

Saadawi's argument in the above sentences generalizes the portrayal of female characters in both the Africa and the West as negative that is to say she agrees with the views of Nnolim, Blamare, and Yeseibo that in literary works of men, the female characters by the male are presented very poorly. In early Nigerian fictional works, female characters were usually portrayed in negative light or not given any major role. Osofisan (2001:4) further explains this assertion thus:

As far as the women are concerned, the bulk of our literature is secretly a weapon of male propaganda of an agenda to keep the female under perpetual domains. They mention works like Soyinka's the lion and the jewel, Achebe's things fall apart, Clark's song of a goat, wale Oguijemii's the divorce and so on, as example of this sexist agenda.

The negative portrayal of female character by the male authors reflects the highly patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society dictated by the traditional cultural beliefs. Thus, Yerima (2008:59-69) explains this further:

The masculine traditional cannon have always dominated the African consciousness concerning beliefs and existence. The culture, the tradition, the language, the names, the types of vocation, even the biological and physiological structure of the human as determined by this environment and nature, have always emphasized the dominance of the male Man grew with such cultural beliefs, believing in it, guided through life by the society, and practicing such beliefs even in later stories he created to his death the female counterpart was made to accept it as the only way women was indeed a stereotype, a symbol of life cocooned by cultural beliefs.

Despite the fact that Yerima is a male writer, he still supports the notion that female characters are misrepresented in the world of male dominated society. Yerima is seen as one of those few male dramatists who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigeria. Ezenwanebe (2005:190) argues "Yerima is the outstanding male playwright in the Nigerian theater that centers his plays on the female question." The aforementioned statement by Ezenwanebe is very close to what this

study sets to do because it provides a clear way to debunk the claims of that all male writers are male chauvinists because Ezenwanebe (1999:185) describes Yerima “as one of the few male playwrights who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of female protagonists in Yerima’s plays are strong, assertive, educationally empowered women who have transcended the private life to the fore of public life where they contribute to economic and human development of the nation. Ezenwanebe (1999:2001) asserts that “many of his works explore the cultural oppression of women, especially widows and less privileged women in the society.” She further describes him “as more of a scholar of gender studies than a womanist or a liberal feminist.” This is to say that Ezenwanebe sees Yerima as neither a womanist nor a liberal feminist critic but a scholar of gender studies.

Ezenwanebe believes that the female protagonists in some of Yerima’s plays are economically self-reliant. She argues that in his plays *The Sisters and The Wives*, Yerima projects the image of female characters while their male counterparts are either absent or dead in the play. Ezenwanebe (2005:190) also explains, “*The Wives and The Sisters* exclusively have female characters with only reference to male. While *The Mirror Cracks and the Portraits* portray men and women in battles of position and supremacy and the consequent effect on themselves and their children” According to Ezenwanebe, Yerima *The Sisters and The Wives* deal with women’s relationship among themselves. Ezenwanebe (2005:191) again argues that:

The play *the wives*, portrays the plight of women as senseless victims of men’s wicked, sexual freedom. The same theme is explored in *The Sisters*, another play that focuses wholly on women. But in the play *the wives and the sisters* Yerima is concerned with the plight of women and their struggle to get freedom in their relationship with men.

Female characters in *The Sisters, The Wives, The Portraits and the Mirror Cracks* have been highly projected by the playwright through themes and style that celebrate women. Yerima

empowered all his female characters economically, educationally and socially. Ezenwanebe (2005:192) captures this better when he states that:

All the main female characters in the four plays are empowered through formal education, except for Angela, chief's first wife in *The Wives*. In *The Wives*, Dr. Cecelia Olowookered is a banker and Tobi, the third and last was an "air crew executive" (Yerima 25) and Auntimi (chief's sisters), we are told is "well educated" (41) In *The Sisters*, the three sisters are all well learned and are professional women: Barrister Funmi, her Excellency the wife of president Dipo is a lawyer ...*The Portrait* the main female character, justice Adetola Beyioku is a high court judge while her sister Funmi works in the national arts gallery. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Justice Tunden Adegabi is a judge of the appeal court.

On the contrary, Yerima, in both the plays, portrays male characters as second class citizens without any vital role. Ezenwanebe (1991:195) affirms this when he states that "their husbands have lost grip of active economic life. They are either dead, dying or crushed". This could be seen in the character of Chief Theophilus Gbadegeshin in the wives and Dipo are indeed even dies in the cause of the play while Ayodele is a crushed man. Ezenwanebe also blames the playwright for representing the women of high learning which amounts to the failure in their marriage and affects their husbands and children. Ezenwanebe (2005:194) examines this contention thus:

The wives and the sisters present empowered women as fools. Their economic empowerment and education do not help them positively in their marriage. In fact they do not recourse to them in their married life. Both Tobi and Funmi are childless and are not even shown practicing their careers in the course of their marriages.

Contrary to Ezenwanebe, Ewejobi critiques Ahmed Yerima for his lack of the use of women in re-telling history. Ewejobi (2012:267) in this regard, posits thus: "I will like to say that Ahmed Yerima is guilty of not portraying women characters in his play, *Attahiru*". In this excerpt, Ewejobi blames the playwright of *Attahiru*, Ahmed Yerima for not presenting the women in a positive light, compared to what he did in his other plays. Though, he was able to achieve his

creative ambition by writing a sixty three paged play, twelve scenes and twenty- two characters with lines. In all these, Yerima did not give female characters any positive role. Ewejobi, (2012:260) explains this in details:

Yerima did well in retelling history with his play *Attahiru*, but did not do too well in refusing to utilize his power as playwright in creating female characters. The only times we have the females referred to in *Attahiru* were in pages, 15, 16, 25, 37,40 and 41 Yerima gave women an action in page 48 but throughout the entire play refused to give line to a woman.

After all her accusation, Ewejobi finally, praises Yerima for not being a biased playwright or a dramatist that portrays the negative nature of women in his works. Ewejobi (2012:266) therefore explains that from his plays, Yerima has proved to be neither a male chauvinist, nor a biased playwright. She clarifies her arguments by bringing some examples from Yerima`s texts on how he portrays his female characters. For instance, in *The Sisters*, *The Wives* and *Idemili*. In all these three plays, according to her, Yerima projects the image of female characters by giving them important roles to play. Ewejobi`s approach to Yerima`s works is somehow similar to what this study sets out to do, the only difference being that this is like a response to some of the wrongly conceived notions or claims of some feminist critics and at the same time prove them wrong for generalization of all male writers as chauvinistic while Ewejobi on the other hand, describes Yerima as not a bias writer, she sees him as a writer who had sympathy to the women course. Ewejobi, (2012:267) further clarifies this understanding thus:

In the play *The Sisters*, Taiwo takes the lead role; she is the vibrant, passionate, Strong willed one of the three sisters..... in the play *The Wives*, we see Sistami taking the lead role....His play *Idemili* looks at the concerns of a woman. Her desires are towards her husband, her hopes for her children and her fear for the future.

Ewejobi, therefore, is of the opinion that Yerima is not a male chauvinist. She claims that in some of his works he proves to be a writer who shows sympathy or concern toward the plight of

women. Ewejobi`s argument here has created another argument in generational classification of Ahmad Yerima.

Ewejobi, also argues that history and drama cannot be separated because one cannot work without the help of the other. Therefore, she calls on all the dramatists and playwrights to do justice to their portrayal of genders. To her, a playwright cannot or will never achieve the aim of a dramatic work if s/he decides to present women negatively in their work. Ewejobi (2012:267) further explains that:

Philosophically, drama is a function of history. History is the wings on which the eagle of playwright soars. Although, they are still faced with the storm of subjectivity and objectivity; how well the dramatist can be objective in playwriting determines on how high they soar in the storm of the theater. Yerima`s deliberate attempt to achieve this point in *Attahiru* failed. Largely because there is no reason big enough for a playwright to represent women negatively in his or her play or not represent them at all.

Fosuda (2019:78) also describes Yerima`s *Hard Ground* as a play, “that depicts the lack of infrastructure which pervades the entire Niger Delta region as a major cause of the rebellion.” He argues that Yerima in *The Sisters*, portrays the manner in which women are maltreated in their matrimonial homes and how society consider them, because he captures all the four sisters in the play as subject of exploitation by either their husband or the society. Fosuda (2010:80) writes:

In *The Sisters*, Yerima depicts infidelity in marriage as a misnomer all 4 sisters in the play are in one way or the other, exploited by their husbands. After marrying for about 30 years, Funmi gets to know about the 5 children given birth to, outside the wedlock, after her husband`s death. Taiwo`s husband, Joe was killed after participating in coup which he never informs his wife about. Taiwo lost her leg when she tries to save her husband from the soldiers. And for Toun, her husband, Segun, impregnates her best friend and subsequently bribes the judge to rule the case in his favour. Nana, endures invisibility for 62 years which is a product of male conspiracy.

Fosudo sees the portrayal of female characters by the playwright in *The Sisters* as an exemplification of the nature of diverse women in the society. Since the spread of feminism in

the country, many women have started re-asserting themselves and never to be regarded as extensions of men. Taiwo stands as belonging to this category, while the other sisters (Toun, Nana and Funmi) still believe and act the traditional roles that the society ascribes to them. This could be seen in the play when Taiwo refused to wear the black cloth in the mourning of Dipo's death as society and tradition required. This shows that Yerima juxtaposes Taiwo's feminist views and the other sisters African traditional positions as relates to the death of a family member. Fosudo (2010:82) concludes that:

As for *The Sisters*, Yerima condemns in its entirety, excessive love for position and shows that power is transient. In the same play, the patriarchal hegemony in marriage to the detriment of women is lampooned. He advises that fidelity in marriages should be held in high esteem since all lies and deceit are almost certain to be exposed and brought to the fore at one's death.

Ezenwanebe (199:185) describes Ahmed Yerima "as one of the few male playwrights who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of female protagonists in Yerima's plays are strong, assertive, educationally empowered women who have transcended the private life to the fore of public life where they contribute to economic and human development of the nation.

Yerima is seen by Ezenwanebe as a playwright who devotes his art to urge for an evolutionary change in filial relation especially as regards man and woman. In many of his plays, he presents the plight of women in African societies and projects them in a manner that challenges the oppression and exploitation of male domination. Ezenwanebe (1999:201) asserts that "many of his works explore the cultural oppression of women, especially widows and less privileged women in the society." She further describes him "as more of a scholar of gender studies than a womanist or a liberal feminist." This is to say that Ezenwanebe sees Yerima as neither a womanist nor a liberal feminist critic but a scholar of gender studies.

Ezenwanebe's stance in a paper titled *The Image of Empowered Women In Yerima's Drama* is that the female protagonists in some of Yerima's plays are economically self-reliant. She argues that in his plays *The Sisters and the Wives*, Yerima projects the image of female characters while their male counterparts are either absent or dead in the play. Ezenwanebe (2005:190) also explains, "*The Wives and the Sisters* exclusively have female characters with only reference to male. *The Mirror Cracks and the Portraits* portray men and women in battles of position and supremacy and the consequent effect on themselves and their children." According to Ezenwanebe, Yerima's *The Sisters and the Wives* deal with women's relationship among themselves. Ezenwanebe (2005:191) again argues that:

The play *the wives*, portrays the plight of women as senseless victims of men's wicked, sexual freedom. The same theme is explained in *The Sisters*, another play that focuses wholly on women both in the play *the wives* and *the sisters* Yerima is concerned with the plight of women and their struggle to get freedom in their relationship with men.

Female characters in *The Sisters, The Wives, The Portraits and the Mirror Cracks* have been highly projected by the playwright through themes and style. Yerima empowered all his female characters economically, educationally and socially. Ezenwanebe (2005:192) captures this better when he states that:

According to Adeoti (2007:1) "a generational classification may be quite problematic to make in the case of Yerima among contemporary Nigerian dramatists." He is considered as a playwright of two periods in the history of Nigerian drama; the second and the third generation of Nigerian dramatist respectively. This is because some critics like Ogunbiyi (1981:36) mentioned him as part of second generation of contemporary Nigerian dramatists, alongside Femi Osofisan, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Osanyin, and a host of others. In contrast to Ogunbiyi's classification, Fosudo,(2010:74) labeled him as belonging to the third generation, "the name of Ahmed Yerima

performs the same role just as the name of Soyinka, Clark and Osofisan do during the first and second generation of Nigerian dramatists respectively.” In support of Fosudo, Jays, (2013:3) clarifies that “the third generation dramatists boast of Ahmed Yerima, Tess Onwwe and Stella Oyedepo as leaders of this generation”.

Both Jays and Fosudo disagreed with the Ogunbiyi`s classification. Fosudo (2010:74) also insists that, “this is due to Yerima`s disappearance from the literary scene after writing *Three Plays In Transition* (1980) and sudden reappearance in the mid-1990`s.” Jays, (2013:2) adds that, “The generational classification often used for these dramatists is based on ideological commitment and dramatic style.” Fosudo and Jays argue that though Yerima has written three plays before he disappeared from the Nigerian literary scene but most of his plays were written during the third generation and Yerima as a dramatist concerned with thematic preoccupations of the third generation. Ogunbiyi, Fosudo and Jays` views on where Ahmed Yerima belongs to in regards to the generational classification of Nigerian dramatists are all correct. Ogunbiyi`s classification for example, is based on the period in which a person started writing, and of course Yerima appeared and has written plays during second generation. Jays and Fosudo`s opinion on the other hand, are based on ideological and thematic preoccupation of the text and most of Ahmed Yerima`s plays concerns with contemporary issues.

Critics also fail to bring a standard classification to Ahmed Yerima`s plays, in the sense that his plays have been categorized and described into different perceptions by different scholars. Adeoti (2007:2-3) for example, argues that Yerima`s plays “are categorized according to their thematic and aesthetic concerns, contemporary politics, religion, history and myths, adaptation and comedy. In support of Adeoti, Jays (2013:9) adds that Yerima`s plays can be studied under three groupings; Historical realist plays, Religious realist plays and Socio- political realist plays.

In his attempt to discuss Yarima's plays based on contemporary politics and dramaturgy Adeoti (2007:3) further explains that:

The nature and character of the Nigerian state, especially in terms of power recess and recurrent subject in Yarima's play of relevance here are; *The Silent Gods*, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *The Sisters*, *Ade-ire*, *The Angel: Uncle Venyil* and *The twist polity* addressed in these plays is the post –independence Nigeria, with its unstable account of prolonged military rule.

In this respect, Adeoti categorizes the above mentioned texts under plays with political and contemporary issues. To him *The Silent Gods* was inspired by the political crises that attended the annulment of 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1993 presidential election. The playwright uses the succession tradition in Yoruba kingship institution to address the issue. Uwasomba (2003:67) throws more light on Adeoti's argument, thus he states that:

Yerima *The Silent Gods* is an ideological attempt to mark the state In fact, it is an ideological 'mystification' project aimed at spiritualizing the state. The state exists to direct the course of political life of the citizenry, ensuring that the dominant forces remain in charge of course in *The Silent Gods*.

Yerima discusses the socio-political crises in contemporary Nigerian societies, because by critical study of the text one can easily argue that Yerima got his inspiration from Nigerian politics of June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1993 Nigerian general election.

In the same vein, Adeoti (2007:7) describes Yerima's *Kaffir's Last Game*, which is published in 1998, as a play that captures the political issues of contemporary Nigeria. "The play deals with two important issues: the then souring relationship between Nigerian and South Africa and declining fortunes of higher education in Nigeria." Jays (2013:6-7) on the other hand, categorizes. Ahmed Yerima's *The Silent Gods*, *Kaffir Last Game*, *The Sisters* and *Little Drops* under plays concerned with socio-political and economic conditions of Nigerians. He continues that "Ahmed Yerima is a dramatist of socio-political realism who uses the medium of drama to

comment on the prevailing socio-economic and political situation in his own country Nigeria and indeed, in Africa as a whole. Embu (2003:73) also argues that Yerima's *The Kaffir's Last Game* "is quite topical and relevant to the Nigerian society because of the way it treats the brain drain issue on the one hand and the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa." In support of Embu, Jays (2013:181) also submits that "the major issues discussed in *The Kaffir's Last Game* are brain drain, betrayal and patriotism." Yerima in this play indeed dramatizes the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa in order to bring unity between the two countries. The play also celebrates the freedom of South Africa from white minority rule and at the same time comments in the socio-economic and political issues of both Nigeria and South Africa. Jays (2013:147) on other hand, argues that Yerima's *The Loteery Ticket*, *Kaffir's The Last Game*, *The Sisiters*, *Mojagbe*, and *Little Drops*, are socio-political realist plays because they represent the reality of the country where they emerged in the same manner as the previous plays. To him, these plays are inspired by the social, political and economic reality of the Nigerian state. In the author's note of the play, *Kaffir's The Last Game*, Yerima writes that the play is his "reaction to the relationship between two great countries, South Africa and Nigeria...The essence...is the love-hate relationship between both countries." Jays therefore, categorizes the aforementioned plays as socio-political because their thematic preoccupations are current issues within Nigerian society.

In agreement with Adoeti (2007:25) "Beside contemporary politics, religion constantly engages the attention of Yerima. The challenges posed by foreign religions to indigenous ones and vice versa sometimes generate conflicts that are explored in his drama" Jays (2013:12) states that: "Yerima chooses religious and moral themes to covertly discuss socio-political issues in *The Angel*, *The Twist*, *Uncle Venyil*, *Mirror Cracks*, *The Bishop and the Soul* and *The*

*Wives*. "However, whether directly or indirectly, religion is given prominent attention in most of Yerima's Drama. Adeoti (2007:26) adds that:

In *the Bishop and The Soul, Thank You Lord, The Liman And Idemilu*, Yerima attempts to negotiate personal and universal experience of man as a social and spiritual being. Religion has become one of the significant site for the manifestation of identity and pluralism. The identity has caused its own burden and privileges. The ineluctable clashes between these two ends provide the basis of conflict presented on stage.

Ideoti in this regard, is able to explain how religious issues play important roles in Yerima's drama. He explains that the plays *The Bishop and The Soul*, discuss the reality of everyday clashes with the Utopian ideals of religious faith While in *The Liman*, the practice of Islam provides the backdrop for a discourse of the interplay of politics and religion as well as the problem of identity in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society like Nigeria.

Closely related to literature is history. History is a significant source of literature, like most other African dramatist, Yerima draw the sources of his dramatic texts from history and myth. As Adeoti (2007:33) asserts that: "History and myth are important subject matter in Yerima's drama." On the question why he draws the materials of his drama from history, Yerima answers "I had to depend on history to understand where the society was coming from and where it might go beyond...That is why history becomes an instrument for me. I use history to establish precedence in my work" Soyinka (2006:6) on the other hand, states that "the purpose of existence, we insist, is enquiry, and enquiry encompasses past, present and future". Another critic, Akinjogbin (1977:7) explains that: "to know the past, one must be very firmly rooted in the present, a knowledge of the past, far from keeping one ignorant of what goes among us today, indeed, enhances an understanding of present". Jays, furthermore, asserts that history, as material for dramatic text, is often distorted for aesthetic reasons because the creative

imagination (fiction) of the playwright presents the action they have experienced to the audience, yet the underlying message is never lost. In this justification of the choice of history as a subject for drama, Yerima (2003:61) writes that:

The relationship between history and drama is one in which the playwright attempts through his play to offer explanations to a historical event even while forcing on the historical event in his thematic preoccupation..... History is an integral part of the soil of the community. And like myth and folk stories, they form that rich aspect of the cultural heritage which serves as material sources for playwright.

In the above statement, Yerima himself believes that history is part and parcel of literature and literature is an integral part of the soul of the community. This of course makes history material sources for every playwright. Yerima (2003:60-61) as cited in Adeoti (2007:143) also adds that: “Across time and place, history has always provided materials from which playwrights draw inspirations. In fact, as a form or a type, historical playwriting is not entirely a `new fashion`, despite the attention that is increasingly being devoted to it” In support of Yerima’s view on history. Adeoti (2007:34) further explains that:

His historical plays not only seek to dramatize history, but also to redefine it, interrogate it, draw a connection overtly or covertly between the past and the now with a view to shaping the course of the future action. Sometimes, the stage presentation tries to redress the perceived gaps and omission in a particular strand of extant history, while paying attention to the artistic and entertainment goals of drama of much interest is the colonial history of Nigeria, which has inspired plays like Rotimi’s *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Soyinka’s *Death and the king’s Horseman*, J P Clark’s *All for oil* and Mathew Umukero’s *Nana Oloma: A historical play*.

Adeoti clarifies how history became a significant source of drama explored by Yerima and how Yerima’s concern with history draws the attention of other playwrights like Soyinka, Clark, Mathew and Rotimi. Adeoti (2007:34) also argues that Yerima “pursues the colonial issues in *The Trials of Oba Ovairamwen*, which deals with the clash between the imperial forces of Britain and the empire of Benin under Ovonramwen at the end of the nineteenth century.

According to him the play *Attahiru* focuses on the colonial encounter between the colonialist led by Lord Lugard and the Sokoto caliphate under the sultanate of Muhammed Attahiru in the early twentieth century and *Erelu Kuti* captures Lagos history between 1760 and 1805 during the reign of Oba Akinsemoyin and Oba Ologunkutere.

Adeoti, describes Yerima's *Yemoja and Ameh Oboni, The Great* as part of historical rendition of Ahmed Yerima. Adeoti, (2007:36) States that: "another effort at historical dramaturgy is *Ameh Oboni, The Great*, a play based on Igala colonial history. Aside from history is reinforced with myth in *Yemoja*. The myth of *Yemoja* is modified to explain the trans-continental manifestation of the Yoruba (African) goddess in the religious worship. History has played important role in Yerima's drama; some critics refer to them as "re-creation of historical event." In other words, some of his plays are historically inclined. For instance, Jegede (2003:83) asserts that the play *The Trial of Oba Oronramwen* "is a dramatic re-creation of an historical event, in order to give a voice to the Benin monarchy."

Adeniyi on the other hand, tries to compare Yerima's *The Trials of Oba Ovanramwen* and Rotimi's *Ovanramwen Nogbais*, agrees with Jegede and Adeoti, that Yerima's *The Trials of Oba's* correct the misrepresentation of African history. Adeniyi (2003:99) further explains that "Rotimi's *Ovanramwen Nagbaisi* and Yerima's *The Trials Of Oba Ovanramwen*, dwell on the coming of British officials to the Benin empire between 1888 and 1897 and the turbulent reign of ovanramwen, the Oba of the Benin during those years." Adeniyi, (2003:102) also argues that "apart from historical mode of representations, the plays have political relevance. The plays somewhat fulfill the goal of post-colonial text". Similarly, Akoh (2003:18) shares the same sentiment with Adeniyi as regards the focus of Yerima's *The Trials*. According to him the play is a response to ola Rotimi's *Ovanramwon Nobaisi*, which paid little attention to historical details

in favor of artistic creativity. This, however, does not make Rotimi's play less acceptable." Yerima's *The Trials Of Oba Ovanramwon* can be said to be an extension of Ola Rotimi's *Ovanramwen Nogbaisi*, though it seems as if the events of both plays are built around Ovanramwen. Rotimi is not interested in the specifics that engage the attention of Yerima. Jays (2013:82) explains the relationship between Yerima's the trial and Rotimi Ovanramwen is that: "Yerima's Ovanramwen's story is slightly different from that of Ola Rotimi.... Rotimi deals with a long period in life of the monarch...Yerima's play focuses on the state of mind of the monarch in the twilight of his reign."

In his comments on *Attahiru* as historical play, Akoh (2003:120) believes that *Attahiru* is the first dramatic work on the collapse of the Sokoto caliphate under Attahiru Ahmadu in 1903. He further says, Yerima does not only set out to 'right' the historical events of 1897 and 1903, which he believes have not really been accurately told, he also sets out to commiserate with and exonerate the historical figures, especially *Ovanramwen and Attahiru* who were involved in the crises. Yerima indeed, discusses the cultural clashes in his plays, when commenting on these crisis, Jays (2013:82) also argues that: "*The Trial and Attahiru* chronicle the collapse of the African traditional institution just at the beginning of colonialism in Nigeria, this situation also marked the collapse of defense against British imperial subjugation in many part of the country."

In support to Jays, Uwatt (1981:23) suggests that: Ahmed Yerima has contributed to the corpus of African historical drama through *The Trials of Oba Ovanramwen and Attahiru.... The Trials* is the Yerima's first attempt at writing a historical play, it seems to be more successful than *Attahiru*"*The Trial* is more successfully developed not only than *Attahiru* but also Rotimi's *Ovanramwen Nogbaisi*.

In view of Ahmed Yerima's historical representation, Buratai (2003:151) states that: "Yerima's *Attahiru*, is a play drawn from the history of the fall of Sokoto caliphate into the hands of British colonialists in the early twentieth century." It is a clearly dramatic representation of the subjugation of the caliphate by the British colonial forces. In line with Buratain, Idegu (2003:159) asserts that "In *Attahiru* Yerima marries the past and its historical materials with his desire to treat the past with a meaning of modernity having chosen the theatrical form to tell the history of the war of 1903 that led to the collapse of the Sokoto caliphate". Both Buratain and Idegu argue that Yerima's concern for history in his dramatic work is indefinable. As Yerima (2003:3) clarifies that:

By giving life to the historical fact and using his power of imagination he endows history with character, dialogue to create an environment, so that history moves from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century in visual without losing its original essences.

The playwright uses history without losing its originality in terms of meaning and factuality because the details are evident in most of his plays. Yerima wrote *The Trial* and *Attahiru* to celebrate the achievement of historical figures of Nigerian society. Jays (2013:107) agrees that in these plays, Yerima projects a balance in valour among historical figures from different geographical compositions of the present day Nigeria.

Furthermore, Yerima's texts are also categorized based on their aesthetic of adaptation. Adaptation or re-working of other authors' work to suit one's personal interest and desire without compromising the aesthetic didactic and entertainment of the original work. A large number of African plays are products of adaptation of Western texts. Adeoti (2007:44) explains this in details:

Quite noteworthy are Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex): Soyinka's *The Bacchat Of Euripides* (Euripides

Bacchae) and *Opera Wonyosi* (John Gay's the beggars opera and Bertold Brech's three penny opera), Femi osofisan's *Who's Afraid Of Solarin* (Nioli Gogol's the government inspector) and *Midnight Hotel* (Georges Feydeau's L'hotel paradiso), Dapo Adelugba et al's that scoundrel suberu' (Moliere les fourberies de scapin); Biodun Jeyifo's *Haba Director* (Bertold Brechis puntila and his man matti) Ahmed Yerima's *An inspector calls* '(a play of the same title by J B priestley), *'Sakapin Sarkin Wayo* (a bilingual adoptation of maliere'snles fourberies de scaping and *Otelo* (Shakespear's Othello).

In relation to the adaptation of a dramatic play, Yerima (2003:122) explains that "the strength of adaptation lies in the originality that the new playwright has brought to bear on the old text and the relevance of the adopted versions to the new socio-cultural milieu and in his responses for adapting Shakespeare's Othello. Yerima's (2003:122) also explains that:

Otaelo retains some essential details of some characterization, themes and plot of Shakespeare's text, but the African socio-cultural setting adopted accounts of much of the charges, differences and originality notable in the new product, the familiar elements of Renaissance tragedy like music, spectacle, coincidence, dramatic irony and premonition are employed to achieve entertainment.

Yerima also suggests that a playwright who adapts other people's work to suit his/her interest should be very careful to maintain the original choice of themes and subject matter of the old playwright, because a writer who adapts must pay respect to either the original playwright or his work. Yerima (2003:121-122) says:

Three major levels of relationship affect good adapted plays. First, the playwright intending to do an adaptation of an original Work must have some respect for either the older playwright or his work. There is dignity in the rule of the adopting a playwright, but this sense of dignity could be hurt if the younger playwright does not respect the older playwright, not in most cases as a better Playwright or a great play, but a play worth the trouble of adapting.... It is with these three factors- respects for the older playwright feeling and meaning, understanding of the work and the closeness to aesthetic values- that the initial choice of the work of art for adaptation can be made.

Yerima's *The Sisters* has been categorized under Yerima's most elicited plays because of its ability to touch human social conditions. Sotimirin (2003:173) explains that "*The Sister* can be

described as one of Yerima's most interesting plays. Not only does it illustrate the importance of social structure, it also lays emphasis on human condition." He further says that:

In the play *Yerima* studied the behavioral tendencies of members of the upper class and how they respond to the challenges of their class in a highly stratified society. The play depicts most common problems that affect people of the upper class using three sisters- Funmi, Taiwo and Toun- as a case study (Sotimiri 2003:174)

Sotimiri, also believes that *The Sisters* is a socio-political play considering the fact that the political value and the artistic attraction of the play cannot be over-emphasized. Yerima draws the attention of his readers to such problem of post-colonial Africa, especially Nigerians. Jays (2013:148) studies Yerima's *The Sisters* based on its socio-political reality because it presents the reality of the country from which it emerged. Thus he says "in *The Sisters*, there is the unraveling of the vanity and deceit that characterize the lives of the high and mighty in the Nigerian society. The play stresses the impermanency of life, political power and social status.

Fosuda (2010:75) describes Yerima "as one of the most prolific and internationally recognized playwright, in the third generation of Nigerian playwright" He further explains that, his plays have transversed the entire length and breadth the country in terms of socially related thematic preoccupations. Most of his play have a focus on the Nigeria after independence they touched every angle of life such as history, culture, religion, and so on. In an interview with Nwagbo Nnonnylike. Yerima (2003:13) explains this in detail thus:

In my plays, I find out that i have to make a social comment I look at contemporary Nigerian and I find that for instance, the tragedy that exists is no longer that of Aristotle and even Soyinka. Theirs is the tragedy of the forth wall they have been overtaken by contemporary society's tragedy. Break in social order and ideological factors created tragedy in these days when I want to write a play I have to open up the ill of the society. I also have to comment on why I think the society has fallen rather than my feelings that such particular thing happen.

From the above statement, Ahmed Yerima believes that playwrights like other members of the society are affected by social issues and concerns. He also believes that dramatic creativity can contribute towards positive and political social changes in the society.

In relation to the use of language, there is no doubt that Ahmed Yerima and other Nigerian or African dramatists before him as well as his contemporaries borrowed European language in order to communicate with their audience. The use of language in drama, especially with regards to Yerima's plays is given prominence because like other playwrights, he imbues each character in his plays with a unique language, unlike some other Nigerian dramatists. Jays (2013:97) asserts that "Ahmed Yerima whose gift is simple and localized language and not obscurantist poetry, creates characters with both expressionistic and impressionistic speeches laden with traces of African indigenous languages and thought, yet he renders them in beautiful English language". Jays (2013:96) further states that in contrast to Soyinka, who is often accused of obscurantism, Yerima enriches the reading and comprehension of his historical drama by using proverbs, wise- saying and metaphors. Yerima (2007:358) explains that he uses proverbs and idiomatic expression because he finds "that all Nigerian languages, no matter who is speaking, have rich proverbs and idiomatic expressions if you stick to those, you will cut across language barriers".

Similarly, Odebunmi (2007:216) posits that Yerima's style of handling proverbs naturally shows that his plays are accessible to readers, local and foreign, who desire to come to term with Nigerian culture and tradition through the proverbs and are indispensable materials for proverbial pedagogy. The consistent use of figurative expressions in Yerima's drama helps him to handle the multi- lingual and multi- cultural nature of Nigeria. Jays (2013:97) captures this thus:

In his plays, language is used to represent the multi-layered Nigerian society; he gives expression to a sense of increasing disgust and unrest within its population. The language in *the lottery ticket*, is the popular Nigerian Pidgin English or NFE, a synthesized or creolized style of the English language. It is popular in Nigeria because it is spoken by almost all of the population. The language allows for the inclusion of indigenous language into a simplified English language in order to give the speaker ease of expression and comprehension of communication among the various strata of the Nigerian society.

When he was asked in an interview conducted by Julius Adeoye in 2006 about why he used proverbs through simple and straight language in his plays. Yerima, cited in Adeoti (2007:357) responds thus:

I want to write plays that would affect different cultures. I do not write about Yoruba people because I was born in Lagos. I do not write about Hausa people because I am originally Hausa. I don't want write about Edo people because my mother is Edo. I don't want to write about Delta people because most of my friends are from Delta. I want to write about different cultures. When you read *Attahiru*, you will know that I am Muslim. When you read *The Bishop and Soul*, you will think that I am Catholic or a Christian. By the time, you read *The Sick People*, you will think I am Urhobo.

He further comments on his consistent use of proverbs in drama. Yerima (2009:357) also continues that:

There is a beauty in Nigerian languages. I found out that each one has its own pattern, its own images and symbols. What I love doing is using proverbs and I want to use proverbs in such a way that they make sense within the context. So, when a proverb in *Attahiru* is said, you will hear images like Camel hooves. When the one from *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen* is being said, there are images of red, blood, indigo, forest, and e.tc. You will find that most of the images in the languages are interwoven and I hope that I use that to break the language barriers.

In this regards therefore, Ahmed Yerima could be seen as a dramatist who uses simple and straight forward approach to create deeper meaning. He also combines European languages and African indigenous languages in order to communicate to various parts of his society.

Having reviewed how several scholars have deployed feminism in exploring gender issues in literature, especially in relation to African drama. This study opts for the womanist strand of feminism

to repudiate claims (that all male writers are chauvinistic) that feminists have used feminism to justify. While the study acknowledges that Yerima`s plays have been studied from various perspectives, it also identifies the womanist perspective as a dimension that has not been explored which this study seeks to investigate. It is on the basis of this, that this work explores the representation of female characters in selected works of Yerima in order to show how Yerima portrays female characters to correct the erroneous notion that female characters are constantly being mis/under represented by male writers.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Literary theory is a vital aspect of literary studies. It is the analytical tool deployed by critics in the appreciation and interpretation of literary texts. This research work adopts Womanism; African Womanist theory in particular, an Afrocentric alternative to feminism as a critical tool for the analysis of Yerima`s selected plays. A womanist analysis of the selected plays of Ahmed Yerima is justified because womanism functions as a variant of African feminism, which emphasizes the basic idea of the survival of both males and females. It can be argued that Ogunyemi`s womanism is just one of the many forms of African feminism. African feminism can be subsumed under the term “womanism” which has gained recognition among some African female writers. For example, Acholonu (1995:88) explains that “recently, black and African feminists are adopting the term womanism as a replacement for feminism”. Womanism is a term coined by Alice Walker an African American writer and also a feminist activist. Walker (1984:87) defines womanism or a womanist as “a woman who loves other women sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women`s culture, women emotional flexibility, and women`s strength Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually”. Hudsonweens (1989:245) also observes that:

African womanism is neither an outgrowth of feminism nor an addendum to it but an ideology created and designed for all women of African decency. It is

grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles needs and desire of African women.

Womanism does not only include African American and African women but also women of colour as well. However, womanism when considered from both Alice Walker and Ogunyemi's overlapping notions of the term has an extensive reach and does not only include African and African American women but also women of colour as well. So womanism is a social change perspective that is not only rooted in the unique and specific experiences of African women but African American women and women of colour as well. Ogunyemi claims to have developed her womanist theory without being aware that Alice Walker had propounded the theory along the same lines as she did. Mary (1997:27) explains that:

Walker's womanist theory embodies both the frustration and promise of black feminist criticism. It shows black feminists readiness to reframe the sexual debate around culturally specific differences between white women and women of color. The major themes of womanist epistemology within Walker's theory are: audacity, woman centeredness and wholeness or community-centeredness. These three core womanist values help to fashion a framework of feminist resistance to patriarchy.

On the other hand, African womanism is solely focused on the experiences of African women and how to engender social change by involving both men and women. Womanism does not only dwell on sexism and racism but also incorporates cultural, national, economic and political considerations in challenging oppressive patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is therefore not just sexism but racism, cultural, national, economic and political subjugation of Black/African people by white patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is the oppressive reality she encounters, first as a woman in relation to her Black/African male counterpart and second, together with her counterpart, as a people subjugated and taken advantage of politically and economically by the white race. Womanism is therefore appropriate in an analysis of Yerima selected plays in the sense that it can be applied

within an African as well as an African American context without generalizing the experiences of women because the experiences are varied.

Quite a number of the African women writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Molar, Ogundipe Leslie, Catherine Acholonu, among others have refused to be referred to as feminist; this largely based on the perception that feminism, especially as it is being practiced in the western world is quite radical and a bit extreme to the African culture, society and experience of African women. For example, Acholonu coined the term motherism which arises as an African alternative to the female model of motherhood. Acholonu (1995:10) argues that “an Afrocentric feminist theory, therefore, must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has the basis of the survival and unity of black race through the ages.... the African alternative to feminism is MOTHERISM and motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture. Ogundipe Leslie, on the other hand, termed the concept of ‘Stiwanism’ as an African centered feminist which comes from the acronym STIWA, ‘social transformations in Africa including women’ Stiwanism and motherism are actually subdivision of womanism because they have the same goals. Ikehukwu (2013:65) explains that Motherism and Stiwanism achieved the same objectives as womanism, they are branches of womanist theory because they emphasize certain aspects of womanism and tries to develop them. Viewing Buchi Emecheta’s arguments in “feminist with a small f”, it discusses issues surrounding the African woman, her family and immediate society. Thus, she says

I did not start as a feminist I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be the statement of a coward. But it is not I thought before that I would like to be one but after my recent visit to the united State, when I talked to the real `Feminists` with a capital “F”, I think we woman of African background still have a very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women..... So my sisters in America, I am not shunning your

advanced help, in fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men. (1989:3)

She also posits that:

I will not be called feminist here, because it is European. It is as simple as that I just resent that..... I don't like being defined by them..... It is just that it comes from outside and I don't like people dictating to me, I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism because , you see, you Europeans don't worry about water, you don't worry about schooling, you are so well off I buy land, and I say , `Okay, I can't build on it , I have no money, so I give it to some women to start planting'. That is my brand of feminism. (1989:5)

Emecheta here, tends to distinct herself and her kind of writing from that of the western feminist, this also shows that African feminist writers are different from the western feminists. But the obvious connection between African and western feminism is that, they both identify gender related issues and recognize the global positions of women as the "other", the "second sex" and seek to correct these postulations. The failure of the western branch of feminism to deal with the issues of race and their tendencies to sensationalize others create the misunderstanding African feminism understand the interconnectedness of race, class and sex oppression. It acknowledges the fact that there are white men and women and also black men who seek to overthrow the oppressive structures of their societies, thus, it breaks a socialist orientation. As Mugo (1976: 23) asserts, that:

In capitalist system, women tend to be exploited by the very nature of the society, particularly the working and pleasant women just as men are exploited. Then you have forms of abuse such as raping and wife beating by males in the society.....I am not fostering the illusions that these crimes don't happen in socialist society, but statistics will bear me out that the degree of such abuses is less than in capitalist societies.

For these reasons she proposed a system where all the oppressive institutions are destroy and dismantled, politically and socially for the sake of women and embrace a society which

encourages collective social responsibilities African feminism is a ‘hybrid’ formulation which seeks to combine African concerns with feminist concerns.

For the purpose of this work, the study employs Ogunyemi’s womanist theory as the framework for a womanist analysis of selected plays of Ahmed Yerima. Ogunyemi captures the focus of her theory in the following words:

Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand (1985:62).

In her view, womanism serves as the tool that binds black/African women together in seeking for the freedom that ultimately makes men realize that women are humans just as men are by challenging oppressive modes of thought and behaviour by men. It is however, embracive of men and children and seeks for a union between men, women and children. Ogunyemi espouses the idea that a womanist writer recognizes the reality of incorporating racial, cultural, national, economic, political considerations along with her consciousness of sexual issues in her philosophy (1985:64). Womanism is therefore grounded in the racial, sexist, political, cultural and economic realities of African women. It calls on African women to have a holistic approach towards patriarchy and female subjugation and rejects the primacy of sexism as the main focus of female struggle against male domination. She challenges the intelligent black woman writer to be conscious of the helpless state of black people within the face of white patriarchal culture and empowers her male counterpart because she believes in him; as a result, the books of the womanist writer end in integrative images of male and female worlds (1985:68 –69). Ogunyemi captures the difference between radical feminism and womanism she says:

If the ultimate aim of radical feminism is a separatist idyllic existence away from the hullabaloo of the men’s world, the ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women (1985. 72).

A womanist vision is radically conscious of the positive aspects of black life and also raises questions defined by the humanity of black African women. Ogunyemi (1985:72) concedes that “her notion of meaning of the term womanism overlaps with Alice Walker’s, that is, a term which refers to the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself as a woman. For her, a womanist means a woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female.” The depiction of womanist characters by womanist writers can be regarded as an anti-patriarchal statement on the author’s part. Womanist writers demonstrate concern for the family, not for the Western nuclear family, but for the black extended family. Womanist writers also fill their texts with an affirmative spirit that is packed full of female achievement and this is as a result of the quest to grow independent black women. They also explore past and present connections between black America and black Africa. Womanist characters in womanist texts can be found in the mold of amiable co-wives with invisible husbands as they work together for the good of their people. Ogunyemi captures this in details:

In womanist novels, polygamy is seen as a positive practice as the demands of culture are put above those of sexual politics. Matrilineal and polygynous societies are dynamic sources for the womanist novel. Bad men are sometimes eliminated in womanist novels so that men and women can live together harmoniously. Also, ostracism and ethnicism rather than sexism cause the development of the strong woman (1985: 75-76).

In addition, womanist writers prefer to tell of life as it is, sometimes of life as it is thought to be and rarely of life as it ought to be. Womanist novelists therefore concern themselves with the ethics of surviving rather than the aesthetic of living. Yerima selected plays will be analyzed within a womanist and the ethical universal framework with the aim of finding out how he has

projected the image of female characters in his texts in a way that contradicts how female characters have been portrayed in male texts.

However, African Womanism can stand as appropriate alternative of feminism in African but for clearer understanding it is good for us to explain the concept of western feminism. The word feminism came into usage in the 1880`s in France and 1890`s in English and it has meant different things to different people and the different parts of the larger feminist community, have had different goals. The global idea of this word Feminism refers to the believed that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect and social life in general. Cater (2006:91) states that: “Long before Feminism came into existence women have attempted to resist the dominance of a patriarchal society” Hawthorn (2001:145) on the other hand, asserts that: “the feminism`s goal is to change the society`s views of women so that all women will realize that they are not an insignificant other, but that each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man”.

On the other hand, Lawal (2009:25) defines Feminism “as a social movement whose goals is raising the status of women. In many times and places in the past, men and women have proclaimed women`s capabilities and have tried to better women`s social position. As an organized movement, however, feminism rose in the nineteenth century in Europe and America. It is necessary to understand that there are different views on feminism. The focus of feminism is to create awareness among womenfolk and provide ways in establishing the rights of women” Habib (2005:667) also posits that “feminism has antecedents going all the way back to ancient Greece, in the work of Sappho and arguably in Aristophanes` play *Lysistrata*, which depicts women as taking over the treasury in the Acropolis, a female chorus as physically and

intellectually superior to the male chorus, and the use of sexuality as a weapon in an endeavor to put an end to the distinctly masculine project of the Peloponnesian War.

In other words, Feminism as the name implies has to do with a movement spearheaded by the womenfolk. It is geared towards liberation of women from some traditional roles they play in their societies. The movement has political, economic and cultural implications. The movement also has different concepts and perspectives; it is totally against the patriarchal society, which perpetuates the superiority of the position of menfolk over the womenfolk. Some critics who are seen as women fighters however, object to the use of term feminism. For instance, Lucy (1982:34) objected to the word also, she sees feminism as a word by which the social system designated the struggles of women while reveals a plural and polymorphous character'. All she is saying is that feminism should be a rally point for both male and females to fight and struggle for the female rights.

Such arguments have not been successful in burying the word in question and to a large extent women and men fighting for women's right have been happy to call themselves feminists. However, doubts about the word have remained. The term feminism is generally treated as a term to describe those men and women who think that it is necessarily to struggle against the oppression of women both socially, economically, ideologically and culturally. Feminism as socio political movement experiences resurgence in the 1960s and early 1970s especially in Western Europe and United States, a resurgence which have not been without effect in the developing world. Feminist criticism is difficult to define because of its several shapes and directions which varies from one country to another or even from one critic to another. The one premise that unites those who call themselves Feminist is the assumption or belief that western culture is a fundamentally patriarchal one, creating an imbalance of power that marginalizes

women and their works. These Feminists work expose such ideology and to change it, so that the worth of everyone can be fully realized and appreciated.

It also necessary to note that feminism as a theory has various branches and strands which includes Marxist, Liberal, Cultural, Social, womanist, Radical feminism among others. Each of these strands respond to women`s oppression in a different ways, positing different causes and different solution. However, this study deploys womanism as a strand of feminism to analyze the representation of female characters in selected plays of Yerima.

### **2.2.1 The Interface Between Feminism and Womanism**

A common characteristic of womanism and Feminism is their goal and opinion. Both the terms the Womanist and the Feminist refers to the struggle of women to obtain equality. Therefore, the womanism and the Feminsm are the reaction of women to patriarchal injustice, subjugation, oppression and repression. The term Womanism was coined by Alice Walker an American author. It grows because many scholars felt that the feminist movement has traditionally bed in middle class while women`s movement. Womanism focuses more on celebrating womanhood, the movement is not issue based because issues change and die but rather on acquiring a maintain and the inclusion of women in the culture, nation and the world. It focuses on how to make woman powerful and viable alongside her counterpart. Feminist campaign has achieved women suffrage, gender neutrality in English and reproductive right for women because feminism sees gender equality as the necessary point of feminism and that men are also harm by sexism in gender role. In this regards edger defines feminism as:

A word that stands for all efforts made by women and their male sympathizers to correct all injustices meted out over the centuries to women because of their sex. It began as a movement in the late sixties aimed at the awareness of the injustice

perpetrated by the patriarchal society and the urgent need for a change in the status quo. The feminist critique, which began in the university, is a socio-political and cultural theory, which opposes oppressive and repressive patriarchal systems. As a literary critique, feminism analyses texts on the basis of Gender. It aims at politicizing Literature with the goal of deconstructing patriarchal cultural hegemony. (1987:54)

Allen (1987: 2278-305) supported this idea when she explain that “the two ideologies are identical in terms of struggle for economic, social, legal and political equality of the female and male sex.”

African womanism is an afrocentric alternative to feminism because feminism in Africa has often been seen as a western concept, so African female writers redefined it to suit their own purposes. That why many scholars from Africa often disassociate themselves from feminist struggles despite the fact that they suffer the same oppression and marginalization like other women around the world, however, they believe that there is need for them to articulate a common ideology for librating African women based on African ideas. Womanism as an Afrocentric alternative to feminism is slightly different from western feminism in some aspects. For example, it does not seek a total departure from the men’s world like western or European feminism that practice homosexuality. Ezenwanebe (2002:186) explains that:

Womanism, unlike western feminism, aims at a general social and cultural transformation. womanism opts for an evaluation of men and women that will enthrone complementarity, instead of equality of the sexes. Complementarity implies an awareness that neither men nor women can exist in isolation.

Womanism is therefore a call for and a protest against the subjugation of women. It is the quest for freedom from all forms of social and cultural oppression of African women. It makes available to that gender, ways of asserting her dignity and of gaining self actualization. Unlike feminism, womanism in terms of gender conflict can through dialogue and characterization of gender make reconciliation. Since womanism is family-oriented, it preferred that one can

imagine the African femininity and awareness by a circuitous frame. This approach is different from the dialectical method of logical disputation. The womanist action and attitude are no exceptions in our globalized world. In politics, for example, it is preferable to apply diplomacy today. They talk frequently of the conference and the round table, the opponents and the partners can negotiate contrasting themes. Problem-solving should be a two way street. The more approaches and perspectives are adopted, the more successful the negotiators become. The skill of the negotiators and their willingness to make concessions are equally needed. This argument is also pointed out by Mary (1997:36-37)

A dialogic perspective is more wholesome and valid to the African woman. Much within African belief systems is predicated on this philosophy of life as a negotiation of values, as a continuum, an intersection between the past, the presence and the future. The world is conceived as a negotiation of diverse convictions and so heteroglossia is more valid to any African thoughts as opposed to monovocality. This underscores the plurality of perspectives as a logical sequence from the African nego-theory. The valences of conceptualization of human values are therefore multiple and sometimes assume a metaphysical importance. African womanist ideology derives from this dialogic outlook. This approach accommodates all perspectives to the problem, as bearing some relevance to the solution. It is not based on tension or arguments but on a recognition that diverse approaches can exist side by side.

Clenora Hudson Weeds, (1993:1) argues that white Feminism is not just adequate to express the reality of black women coupled with their different experience of exclusion especially by white feminists. She says thus:

For years African Women have found themselves in a serious ideological predicament. In the absence of viable organized women's groups they have been invited to embrace feminism as an instrument of emancipation and as a new-found source of empowerment and status-building. Unfortunately, the majority of Africa women on public platforms have rejected feminism for a multiplicity of reasons. First there is the unquestionable need to reclaim African women; second,

they are perplexed over the racist origins of the feminist movement, third, they have found little solace in the doctrines and mission of the feminist movement, the realities, struggles and expectations of the two groups remain on different planes. The privileges and advantages still belong to the dominant group. (1993:1)

While feminism is incorporated into womanism, it is also instinctively pro-human kind. The focus of womanist is not only to end gender inequality but also race and class oppressions, sexual preferences and physical ability.

In relation to the objectives of feminism and womanism they are significantly distinct. First, the Womanists want a complete package of sexism and racism as a holistic and comprehensive program. In her opinion, sexism and racism are two sides of the same coin and are not mutually exclusive: in one case it has to do with colour, in the other case it pertains to sex, but in both cases it has to do with discrimination. But while womanism can understand the connection between racism and sexism, the Western Feminists prefer to excise racism from their program. However, it must be considered as hypocrisy if one discriminates against others and at the same time complains with trembling about discrimination and oppression. The reason for this ambivalence and equivocation in the praxis of Western feminism can be seen in her previous strong participation in racism. Mary (1997:34) believes that with the advent of colonialism, racism was intensified. The womanist sees herself and her children as victims of racism in the U.S. and in Europe. To the Womanists, it has become clear that even their Western allies and comrades have their antecedents coloured with racism. As a result of this betrayal, it appeared that the Womanists have good reason to develop their own contextualized and customized solution. Mary also argues that:

Since the colonial era, African women have continued to experience such a close link between racism and sexism and this informs their rejection of any claim by feminists to fight their cause. African women are struggling against multiple disadvantages; some of these are caused by tradition, and patriarchal

set-up. In some specific ways colonialism did not remove the gender inequality but widened it as education created new forms of inequality to crown the existing ones. So African women are contending with all these on their own terms of reference and no single ideology can be trust on them as the solution to these hydra-headed problems. Some of these are gendered while others are inclusive. Several approaches have been adopted by African women in confronting their reality. Some are more radical than others but no dogmatic imposition of an external 'ism' can be sufficiently inclusive or endogenous to address the problems... Each approach has some logical argument, validity and relevance.(1997:34)

Ogunyemi, (19987:69) asserts that “the ultimate difference between the feminist and the womanist is thus what each sees of patriarchy and what each thinks can be changed”. She gives a clear boundary between feminism and womanism. Feminism focuses on sexism as the only patriarchal system that subordinates and subjugates women, and by women, radical feminists mean white middle class educated women. This of course leaves out Black/African women. And so for the western feminist, if sexism is challenged and changed, that is the victory for all women all over the world in different cultures. Apart from this shortcoming, western feminism’s aim is a separatist idyllic existence away from the men’s world. Womanism does not just focus on sexist treatment of black/African women. Womanism does not only dwell on sexism and racism but also incorporates cultural, national, economic and political considerations in challenging oppressive patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is therefore not just sexism but racism, cultural, national, economic and political subjugation of Black/African people by white patriarchal systems. What the womanist sees of patriarchy is the oppressive reality she encounters, first as a woman in relation to her Black/African male counterpart and second, together with her counterpart, as a people subjugated and taken advantage of politically and economically by the white race.

In addition, womanism does not aim for exclusivity but togetherness in the sense that it advocates a sense of wholeness and unity which includes both men and women, and even

children. It is not separatist and antagonistic towards men as radical feminism is. Womanism echoes African feminist thought by highlighting the oppressive plight of African women and both have a complementary approach towards handling women's oppression. They are both complementary in the sense that African feminism includes female autonomy from dominant oppressive male control and cooperation with men if need be, in the same way as Ogunyemi (2003) and Walker (1984) advocate a womanism that is geared towards the universal survival of both males and females. This view is contrary to radical feminists' notion of explaining gender in terms of biological differences and psychological differences between men and women.

It is important to note that, African womanism is a strand of feminism that developed some aspects of feminism within the African context. In other words, both the feminist and the womanist are the reaction of women to patriarchal injustice, subjugation, oppression and repression. Many critics felt that feminist movement has traditionally in middle class while women's movement. While the feminist movement focused on ending gender-based oppression, it largely ignored race and class-based oppression. But womanist theology stands against all oppression on the basis of race, gender, class, sexual preferences and physical ability.

### **2.2.2 Origin of Womanism**

Womanism is the name of the socio-cultural awareness of Africans existing, which highlight both the negative and the positive experiences of African women in Africa and in the Diaspora. Womanism is holistic, and in this sense it stands for the liberation and welfare of women and the holistic liberation of the whole of the African and colored people on the African continent and in the Diaspora: woman, man and child. A need for the term "womanism" arose during the early Feminist Movement which was mainly led by middle-class heterosexual white women advocating for social change in the form of women's suffrage. While the Feminist Movement

focused on ending gender-based oppression, it largely ignored race and class-based oppression. The height of this academic discourse occurred during the late 1980s when scholars such as Alice Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems, and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi began to share their findings with the world.

During this time, womanism was embraced, debated, and dismissed by academics, mainly due to its perspective on the African-American experience. The 1990s presented a new kind of challenge with the proliferation of black feminism within women's studies. As a result, womanism fell beneath the radar of the public eye, but academic discourse progressed, and scholars continued to contribute to and explore the discipline. By the early 2000s, womanism had resurfaced as a unique social change perspective. This was further cemented by the publication of *The Womanist Reader* in 2006, a collection of womanist essays and critiques.

### **2.2.3 Proponents of Womanism**

Alice Walker is one of the proponents of womanism. She is an Author, a poet and the first person to use the term "womanist" in her work, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. She explains that the term womanist is derived from the southern folk expression "acting womanish." "The womanish girl exhibits willful, courageous, and outrageous behavior that is considered to be beyond the scope of societal norms. She then goes on to say that a womanist is:

A woman who loves another woman, sexually and/ or non sexually. She appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility... [she] is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health... loves the spirit... loves struggle. Loves herself regardless. (1987:23)

According to Walker, while feminism is incorporated into womanism, it is also instinctively pro-human kind. The focus of the theology is not on gender inequality, but race and class-based

oppression. She sees womanism as a theory/movement for the survival of the black race; a theory that takes into consideration the experiences of black women, black culture, black myths, spiritual life, and orality. Walker's much cited phrase, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender", suggests that feminism is a component beneath the much larger ideological umbrella of womanism. Walker's definition also holds that womanists are Universalists. This philosophy is further invoked by her metaphor of a garden where all flowers bloom equally. A womanist is committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women can coexist, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. This inclusion of men provides Black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression without directly attacking men. A third definition provided by Walker pertains to the sexuality of the women portrayed in her review of "Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson". Here, she argues that the best term to describe Rebecca Jackson, a black Shaker who leaves her husband and goes on to live with her white Shaker companion, would be a womanist, because it is a word that affirms the connection to the world, regardless of sexuality. The seemingly contrasting interpretation of womanism given by Walker validates the experiences of African-American women, while promoting a visionary perspective for the world based on said experiences.

Another important proponent of the term womanism, is Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi who is a Nigerian writer and literary critic. In 1985, she published the article "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English", where she describes her interpretation of womanism. She asserts that the womanist vision is to answer the ultimate question of how to equitably share power among the races and between the sexes. She arrived at her interpretation of the term independently of Alice Walker's definition, yet there are several overlaps between the two ideologies. Rather than citing gender inequality as the source of Black oppression,

Ogunyemi takes a separatist stance much like Hudson-Weems, and dismisses the possibility of reconciliation of white feminists and black feminists on the grounds of the intractability of racism. (<https://encyclopedia.org/womanism/theory>) Ogunyemi claims to have developed her womanist theory without being aware that Alice Walker had propounded the theory along the same lines as she did. Walker's womanist theory embodies both the frustration and promise of black feminist criticism. It shows black feminists readiness to reframe the sexual debate around culturally specific differences between white women and women of colour.

Clenora Hudson-Weems is credited with coining the term Africana Womanism. In 1993, the publication of her book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, sent shockwaves through the Black Nationalist community and established her as an independent thinker. Hudson-Weems rejects feminism as the theology of Africana women, that is to say women of the African Diaspora because it is philosophically rooted in Eurocentric ideals. She further asserts that it is impossible to incorporate the cultural perspectives of African women into the feminism ideal due to the history of slavery and racism in America. A large part of her work mirrors separatist Black Nationalist discourse, because of the focus on the collective rather than the individual as the forefront of her ideology. Hudson-Weems refutes Africana womanism as an addendum to feminism, and asserts that her ideology differs from Black feminism, Walker's womanism, and African womanism. She also argues that white feminism is not just adequate to express the reality of black women coupled with their different experiences of exclusion especially by white feminists: For years, African Women have found themselves in a serious ideological predicament. In the absence of viable organized women's groups, they have been invited to embrace feminism as an instrument of emancipation and as a new-found source of empowerment and status-building. Unfortunately, the majority of Africa women on public platforms have

rejected feminism for a multiplicity of reasons. First there is the unquestionable need to reclaim African women; second, they are perplexed over the racist origins of the feminist movement, third, they have found little solace in the doctrines and mission of the feminist movement, the realities, struggles and expectations of the two groups remain on different planes. The privileges and advantages still belong to the dominant group. That womanism can and should stand on its own feet.

#### **2.2.4 Tenets of African Womanism**

There are various tenets of womanism but the basic ones that this study adopts include:

- Womanists emphasis on fairness and equity in the relationship of men and women in order to have the society where men and women survive in equal dignity, mutual respect and self-actualization.
- It is totally against all forms of cultural, social and economic oppression of African women.
- Womanists are interested not only on sexism and racism but also on culture, nationality, economic and political consideration in challenging oppressive patriarchal system.
- The focus of Womanists is on the experience of the African woman and how to engender social change by involving both men and women.
- The Womanists are interested in independence, togetherness and survival.
- It focuses on how to make women powerful and viable alongside her male counterpart.

Therefore, this study uses the aforementioned tenets to critically analyze the representation of female characters in selected plays of Yerima. A womanist analysis is justified because womanism stands as a variant of African Feminism, which emphasizes equality and fairness in the relationship of men and women in order to build society where men and women co-exist in equal dignity, mutual respect and self-actualization. So many reasons could be adduced for the preference of this theoretical frame work in the analysis of the texts but the most cogent of these reasons is the fact that these texts in a certain

way and fashion challenge some patriarchal structures especially with regards to the role of the women in the society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN AHMED YERIMA'S *THE WIVES AND THE SISTERS*

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a synopsis of Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* and *The Sisters* and analyzes both plays from a womanist perspective. It also pays particular attention to the treatment and/or portrayal of female characters in both plays in order to explore ways through which Yerima bestows his female characters with responsibilities that contradict the traditional notion that male authored texts are often set to relegate women to the background in order to uphold the patriarchal political order. Thus, this chapter provides a contrary position by showing how Yerima in *The Wives* and *The Sisters* represents female characters as backbones of their families.

#### 3.1 Synopsis of *The Sisters*

The play was written in 2001. It can be described as one of Yerima's most interesting modern plays because it does not only discuss the social life of men and women but also captures the role of women in family, political and social life of their society. The play revolves around four sisters (Funmi, Taiwo, Toun and Nana), all of whom are daughters of ambassador ... The play opens with them mourning the death of Chief; the president and Funmi's late husband, who died as a result of uncertain cause as various reasons ranging from heart attack to the Fatigue of being suffocated in his sleep among others were adduced as possible cause of his death. Funmi, the eldest of the three sisters and the late president's childless widow suddenly comes to the realization that her late husband fathered five other children from different women out of wedlock during their thirty five (35) years of childless marriage. As she puts it, she is "a woman who goes through thirty years of marriage, and ends up inheriting five children from her

husband`s concubines, on the eve of his burial, deserves a stiff drink” (p.23). The sisters also learn about their late father`s secret or rather discover that their father was no different from the president as he also had a daughter with a different woman because as Nana reported, his wife was unable to conceive in time and he was eager to have a child. In her words: “at the time papa wanted a child at all cost, but also wanted to keep his marriage. He met this lady, I cannot remember her name now, but she died at childbirth (p.45).

The plays further unravel how these four sisters experience many challenges in their relationship with men. Taiwo the cripple and second daughter of ambassador, for example, reveals the way she loses her husband Joe, because he participated in a coup staged to overthrow the president, Funmi`s husband. It is because of this that Taiwo hates Mr. president, her biological sister`s husband. Thus, she describes him as a inhumane dictator. Toun also narrates her experience during and after her failed marriage to Segun and how, as a result, she decides to remain single. All the three sisters, (First lady Funmi, Barrister Taiwo and Toun) are not aware that Nana who they believe was a maid is also their elder sister. Nana chooses to hide her identity even when she is aware that she is the first daughter of ambassador. The sisters assume that Nana is a common maid who chooses to serve the entire family as a maid, that is why they see her as an outsider and call her all sort of names. For example, when Funmi brought some clothes for the burial of president Nana`s is different from the other sister`s as she is considered an outsider. The play reaches its climax when the three sisters learn that Nana is not a maid as they had always believed, but the eldest daughter who Ambassador mentions in his will.

### 3.2 Synopsis of *The Wives*

The hypocritical nature of man and the dilemma of African women are the major thematic preoccupations of Ahmad Yerima's play, *The Wives*. The text first published in 2007. It opens a day before the burial ceremony of Chief Gbadegasin Olowookere, the husband of three women. The play revolves around the sharing of inheritance of chief – the central character, by his three wives: Angela, Cecelia, Tobi, and his incestuous sister, Autinmi. The corpse of the deceased is placed at the center of the sitting room from the beginning to the end of the text. It remains unburied and foul-smelling while they discuss the possible cause of his death.

Theo, also known as Tiger, is a very influential figure in the society and a traditional title holder who is highly regarded in the church, even though he is married to three wives. However, his second wife, Cecelia, left his house for over ten years. She works in one of the commercial banks in the community and helps Theo to get a loan from the bank where she works. The only thing that brought her back to Tiger's house, she claims, is to retrieve the loan. As a traditional chief, Theo is to be buried according to traditional rites. Hence, two elders; Baba Adage and Ifagbemi come from the village in order to investigate the cause of his death and also to perform their traditional duties over the body.

As tradition demands his will has to be read before he is finally interred. After his will has been read, it is discovered that the cause of Theo's death was as a result of the incestuous act he had with his blood sister Autinmi when she stayed with him after her failed marriage. Barrister Solour Akande turns out not only as the deceased personal lawyer but is also his first son, the product of an incest with his own sister, Autinmi.

### 3.3 A Depiction of the Representation of Female Characters in Yerima`s *the Wives and the Sisters*

Yerima in *The Sisters* and *The Wives* presents the female characters from an unusual perspective. This perspective repudiates the claims of some feminist scholars who argue that women are often silenced in male authored texts. This representation contravenes the claims that African male writers are chauvinist and their texts hold women in contempt. Conversely, Yerima has privileged female characters in his texts by giving them prominent roles. In these plays, for instance, all the actions are performed by female characters. In other words, female characters play a vital role in the development and extension of the plot.

This could be seen at the opening of the play when *The Sisters*, Taiwo; the cripple, refuses to wear black cloth as the tradition demands during the mourning period of Dipo`s death. Assigning such rebellious attribute to a female character is a great evidence of Yerima`s intentional deviation from traditional submissive roles often assigned to female characters. This also shows Yerima as a typical womanist writer because the womanists always lay claims not for equality but a balance in relational dealings between the male and female genders. This could be seen in the way and manner he presents his female characters such as Taiwo which contradicts the way society describes women because the attitude displayed by Taiwo shows that women too have the right to make decisions particularly on issues pertaining them. Despite Funmi`s disapproval, she refuses and even speaks without reservations at the president`s residence when Funmi questioned her choice of color. She out rightly responds thus:

**Taiwo:**

I can`t be you, can I? No one has a right to force me to do what I do not want to do. Tonight, I was physically shoved into the car and brought here because the first lady wanted to be with her sisters. No one has the right and certainly not Funmi, to make me come here and set eyes on her late husband and definitely not before her sanctimonious self (p. 15).

The character of Taiwo in this text represents the group of people who believe that women are as important as their male counter-part and also reject the place assigned them in traditional societies. Fosodo (2013:81) expresses this view on Yerima`s portrayal of women thus:

The portrayal of the character by the playwright exemplifies the nature of diverse Women in the society. Since the spread of feminism in the country, many women Have started re-asserting themselves and never to be regarded as an extension of Men. Taiwo stands as belonging to this category, while the other sisters (Nana, Funmi and Toun) still believe and act traditional roles that the society ascribes to them. She (Taiwo) does not wear black as the usual practice in the mourning Dipo`s demise.

Yerima also presents Barrister Taiwo, the cripple and second daughter of late ambassador as a very strong willed and dedicated widow of Joe who turns out to become a social critic. He does this by making her to express her personal views against the dictatorial leadership of her late in-law Mr. President throughout the play. In corroborating this position, Jays (2013:158) observes that Taiwo "...is a lawyer, novelist, poet and fearless character. She advocates for the oppressed people in the society. She allows herself the liberty of pointing to the readers/audience the various short- comings of each of her sisters and the men in their lives. When the president died, Taiwo out rightly expresses her views thus:

I have heard enough, I have seen enough, and that is enough for me. The whole Country went agog with joy after the announcement of his death. There were Celebrations as if Christmas had arrived early this year (chuckles) bright future indeed. (P.19)

From the above quotation, there is no doubt that Taiwo, as presented in the play, is not sentimental as she equally criticizes the leadership of her sister`s late husband in strong terms.

Womanism teaches togetherness and fairness particularly in the relationship between the male and female genders. From Yerima`s treatment of gender related issues, one can easily understand the question he raises as far as the relationship between man and woman is concerned. He

magnifies this view in the relationship between Chief Oluwooke and Cecelia in *The Wives*. Cecelia is the second wife of Chief who did not find fulfillment in her husband's house and left the marriage for ten years. This is evident in the text as still is not only able to on her own but in the way she stand for chief as a guarantor at the bank where she works when he comes to get the loan of one hundred and fifty million Naira. This incident alone expresses Yerima's ideological stand about gender which suggests that man and woman ought to play a complimentary role which womanism advocates.

Yerima in *The Sisters* also uses the character of Taiwo to portray the womanist view. By depicting her as a strong figure, who despite the fact that the actions of her late husband Joe in participating in the coup is bad, still struggles with the soldiers to the point of losing her legs, he shows his support for womanist strands of feminism. Though she is a woman, she still struggles with the soldiers to save her husband Joe and as a result, loses her legs and still continues to love him even after his death. Thus, she says:

Yes. That was when I started to cry. I was torn between my fear of the Loss of my Sister, the death of the one I loved, and the sad fact that my child may never know their father. All day, I locked myself in, crying (p. 29).

From the above statement, therefore, the choice of womanism as an aspect of African feminism is highly justified because Joe was responsible for Taiwo's agonies but still cares about him and cries when he died. This also applied to the other sisters, especially Barrister Funmi who, after discovering her late husband's hidden secret (fathering five children with other women out of wedlock), overlooks it and is ready to welcome and take good care of them. She responds thus:

Yes. Dipo's children can all come. Oh nothing it is just that I have changed my mind on the issue. Nothing, it seems the right thing to do in this circumstance. You will inform them right away.... Why if my father a man I loved and trusted can inform me about his bastard child on my sixtieth year on earth, and also Make this bastard

child an equal beneficiary to his estate, then I have no moral justification to turn out Dipo`s bastards. They can all come. I don`t care anymore (p. 43).

It is ironical therefore, that Ambassador whose children love and trust very much would keep the status of Nana, his daughter, away from them for more than thirty years.

Another important perspective of the womanist is the portrayal of female in the way that contravenes place of women in society. This he does by projecting women in positive light in order to show that women too have can contribute to nation building if given the opportunity. Yerima in *The Sisters* portrays all the female characters in positive light because they are seen as capable, obedient, innocent and enduring. Yerima achieves this by exposing the way women are exploited in their matrimonial homes and how, in spite of the subjugation, still hold themselves high especially when their family`s peace are threatened. This can be seen in the character of Nana, for example, who endures and pretends as a maid to hide her real identity in her father`s house for sixty two years. Nana knows full well that she was not a maid but she acted as one because she wanted to cover her father`s hidden secret. Consequent upon this, Jays (2013:159) argues that:

Nana is the illegitimate daughter of Ambassador. At age sixty-two, She is the eldest of four sister, however, her identity as blood member of the ambassador`s family is unknown by the other sisters who believe her to be a maid until the end of the play. She is docile and dedicates forty-three years of her life to the service of her other sisters without complaints, having promised Ambassador`s wife shortly before her death that she would take care of them. Nana is symbol of uprightness and the strength of her sisters. Nana happens to be the source of defense and encouragement to all the sisters. One of the characters refers to her as “rock” Fummi says “she has been my rock”

The exploitation of the female character can also be seen in the case of Toun who happened to be Segun`s wife. Segun impregnates her best friend who later bribes the judge to rule the case in his favor. As she puts it, “his getting my best friend pregnant was the last straw. He got his lawyer to

bribe the judge, and I lost almost everything” (p.39). The humiliation and exploitation of the female character is further depicted in the story of Mrs. Ibah as reported by Toun. Thus:

I am sorry Funmi. I swear you don't deserve this. His Excellency had no right to hurt you this much, no right at all. But you are still better than the case of Mrs. Ibeh Yours had his kids scattered. Mr. Iben in his lifetime had kept two perfect homes, one with seven kids at Enugu, and the other again with seven kids at Aba. He had great family photographs taken, and as he was loving to both of them, neither of them suspected. On the day of his burial, both wives came with their children, cursing Ibeh's corps as the church proceedings took place..... After the service, the two women found a convenient place and fought each other until they were both naked. I had come with the Mrs Ibeh of Abbranch, I quietly took a night bus back to Lagos. You are lucky Funmi, at least Dipo's was a bit discreet (p.22).

The playwright presents his male character as people who are untrustworthy and unreliable especially in the way they relate with their wives. Based on this, Yerima silences the male characters. In the play, to be specific, no single man is given a slot in the ensuing dialogue. Hence, all male voices are reported through the women characters who keep pointing to the greed and inconsistencies of the male figures in the texts.

Similarly, Yerima's view on the place of women and his reflection of womanism is also expressed in *The Wives*. In this play, Yerima presents a mourning scene typical of African societies where the bereaved wives are faced with multitude of challenges. In the same vein, the play exposes the plight of women in polygamous African society as regards to inheritance. In *The Wives*, one of the female characters (Angela) voices out her marital plight, thus:

**Angela:** I can. (Pauses) which is the sad part of it all. But he didn't listen to me. In thirty years of marriage he never listens to me..... Well, see him now... dead and gone and see her (she looks at Tobi's photograph.)The temptress, the she-devil and her keeper are kicking and alive. Waiting for the next victim (p. 15).

The above quotation justifies Yerima's total departure from the notion that it is the men's world. This he does in order to expose marital problems that confront African women. This debunks the

claim that African male writers always misrepresent their female characters. Yerima in this text uses the character of Cecelia as a strong weapon against male domination; she represents the womanist notion that to ensure fair society, men and women should ensure a mutual understanding in a relationship. Cecelia who is one of the chief's wives is presented by the playwright as the chief executive officer of a successful commercial bank who despite the fact she left her husband's house, still helped to get the loan from the bank where she worked. This incident shows Yerima's interest in mutuality of relationships among and between both genders. He is therefore a writer who is not gender bias in his creative affinity. Cecelia in this text stands as a strong character because she represents the empowered woman. Ibrahim (2014:237) argues that

Cecilia, one of the Otunba's divorced spouses, is portrayed as an apt emblem of radical feminism with all its semantic nuances. She opts out of her matrimonial home and vows never to marry again. As a result of her inability to condone chief's matrimonial excesses, Cecelia, for instance: Vows not to belly excesses of chief's people which she tags as fetish.....Cecelia is fire brand by all standard, she is unrelenting in pursuing her Self- independent and unforgiving on matters affecting her personality.

Similarly, Yerima dwells on the trials, pains and tribulations of African women in the play *The Wives*. This is done by creating female characters whose conditions unravel the pains of women as necessitated by socio-cultural factors. The polygamous struggle for marital superiority leads to envy, greed and baseless accusation among the wives of the deceased character; Chief Olowookere comments thus:

I can't remember what I said. I am a cuckold first wife, so I am in pains. But if your mind wondered to the... the killer animal my husband mistook for a Wife, who is also now in the police custody, then we understand each other perfectly (p.16).

The aforementioned lines expresses Yerima's view on polygamy and its consequences. Although Yerima is not totally against polygamy marriage he cautions that care should be taken before

marrying more wives. Thus the death of Chief Olowookere brings with it countless accusations and counter accusation; all in the quest to display true love and affection by his wives.

Yerima also portrays women`s as educated, dependent and career women. Thus,

**Tobi:**

The magazine, people and styles. The May issue. We... all three of us shared the Centre spread. You, for the most achieved women of the month, I, the most beautiful Dainty wife of the month, and Tiger, was the oldest most influential figure of the month we were the perfect couple. Do you remember now? (P.33-34).

The above quotation as expressed in the play shows that women can be great achievers when given an enabling environment to blossom. Thus, Yerima`s representation of women characters countermands the assertion that African male writers only project the image of male characters in their works.

Moreover, in *The Wives*; Yerima also expresses dejections with the total abuse of polygamy which is one of the problems of marriage in contemporary African societies. Through his female characters, Yerima exposes the ills associated with the conjugal system as captured in the exchange between Cecelia, Angela and Auntimi:

**Cecelia:** Good afternoon, everybody! (She goes to each women, she hugs and kisses them on the cheek. When she gets to Tobi, she still has her hand covering her mouth.) Oh dear, i don`t know this one. What a beautiful child. (She stretches her hand for a handshake.) My Doctor Cecelia Olowookere. May I know who you are? (Tobi points to Auntimi.) You still look vaguely familiar. As if we have met somewhere before. I can`t seem to place my finger on where and how. (Tobi is still pointing to Auntimi who is also finding all this amusing.) Oh, she is dump too. Pretty and dump. What a sad combination of sadness. Poor child. Now listen everyone. Who is this child? Theo`s bastard kit?

**Angela:** I wish she was.

**Auntimi:** She is Theo`s third wife (p.32)

In this play, Yerima foregrounds a typical African polygamous setting –a marriage institution that is characterized by frequent abuse, naggings, domestic violence, sexual harassment and

sexual assault. To Yerima, therefore, the assault, exploitation and prejudice are not only linked to men. That is to say, women also breed numerous domestic problems for themselves.

Notwithstanding, Yerima presents a portrait of ideal African women and sues for equality and fairness in the relationship between men and women. This call is essential if Africa is to build a society where men and women will co-exist in equal dignity, mutual respect and self-actualization. These are the main objectives of womanism.

Furthermore, the theme of self-realization/actualization is visible throughout the play. This theme is captured in the manner in which Angela introduces Cecelia:

**Tobi:** (the room is tensed up) please permit me. Who are you? (To Cecelia)

**Angela:** she used to be his favorite pumpkin after me. Young lady, I present Chief

Cecelia Aboikeola Olowookere, the most successful female banker in this country. Mother of two children for our beloved Tiger. She courageously left this house ten years ago, and has never looked back. A powerful figure for women empowerment, self-reliance, advocacy for women, time for change for women etcetera etcetera. Presently unmarried and may remain so till death do her part, still looking young and radiant as ever. She had the courage to leave your precious Tiger, when my courage failed me. And with her hand firmly on the hoe of progress and success, she has never looked back (p. 36-37).

The above quotation restates Yerima's view on womanhood and projects his concern with the advancing the cause of women. He is of the opinion that men and women are meant to be together in the sense that one of them cannot survive without the other.

As is typical with the womanist who rejects all forms of social, economic and cultural oppression of women, Yerima questions all forms of social, economic and cultural oppression in these texts. This could be seen in the manner in which he presents the relationship between Cecelia and Chief Olowookere. Yerima presents Cecelia as a successful career woman who, because of the

uncomfortable nature of her matrimonial home, leaves her husband and eventually finds fulfillment in her worship of Christ as well as the banking job. According to her, "I have given my life to Christ. I am born again. I am washed in his blood. I am now married to Christ and I have eternal peace (p.48). Even though she leaves her husband, she is presented with an amiable strength that enables her to continue with life in spite of all odds. This is a criticism of the age long tradition that values women only in relation with men and as tools for sexual gratification rather than human beings with abilities and capabilities.

Her survival alone as single person in the play suggests that if marriage is characterized with maltreatment divorce is no doubt, a possible way out. The position is that in the face of oppression women could opt out of marriage in order to save themselves from such oppression. What this implies is that marriage is contrary to certain African beliefs that oppression is a normal experience in marriage, and that woman should be submissive even in the face of oppression, women have the ultimate choice to make where their lives are endangered. By making Cecelia to leave yet remaining successfully out of wedlock, he has proven that divorce or separation is not a bad choice after all

On the other hand, Yerima's presentation of Toun in the sister further indicates that he allies with the womanist view. The character of Toun in *The Sisters* can be compared with Cecelia in *The Wives* because she also goes through series of oppression in her matrimonial home. So, she decides to remain single and by doing so, she eventually gets fulfillment. By making Toun to leave her husband's house and become a successful independent woman, Yerima is totally against all forms of oppression. What this suggests is that Yerima distances himself from all forms of male chauvinist proclivities.

As a protest against, and quest for freedom from all forms of cultural oppression against African women, Yerima's female characters are seen staging a protest against cultural domination:

**Ajagbee :** Ogun O! Women! Ewo! Women! (The women see them and they all kneel. Auntimi runs to switch off the radio player.)

**Auntimi:** Baba, you have come. Welcome! ... Your son's wives greet you. Women...

**All:** welcome Baba.Ajagbe: Haa. (in amazement.) By the name of our ancestors, see them .Ifagbayi, See what the women of our son are doing by his body. The world has really change a whole Araba of Itesi Odo. Women dancing by the third in command of the village Headship. You are not supposed to even see his body or dance for three years after His death. Haa, I have failed our ancestors in my time. May they forgive me (p.38).

In the quotation above, the old man (Ajagbe) is seen confused at the sight of women dancing amidst a dead body of their lovely late husband. Bewildered and confused, he quickly refreshed their minds on the traditional norms of the society in which they live. However, the female characters disagree with him and remind him that times have changed. This position is a salient protest against all forms of repressive cultural domination.

### **3.4 Image of Empowered Women in *The Wives* and *The Sisters***

Yerima's *The Wives* and *The Sisters* are symbolic representation of the predicaments of women in Nigerian society. This is because Yerima, in these plays, uses literary aesthetics to question the patriarchal order by presenting an idealistic world where women have a say. This is in contradistinction to the traditional patriarchal setting where women are relegated to the background. The playwright achieves this by the way and manner he presents and empowers all his female characters in the plays. *The Wives* presents the story of Auntimi and the three wives of her late brother Chief Theophilus Gbadegeeshin Olowookere. There is no doubt that all the four female characters in the play are economically and educationally empowered.

Education plays an important role in the empowerment of women. It serves as the platform on which women liberation and exposure can be achieved. Education liberates the woman's mind and also helps them to understand and appreciate the reality of life. Yerima's *The Sisters* and *The Wives* are in essence concerned about women and their multiple problems in the society. Ezenwabe (2008:189) suggests that Yerima's drama presents female characters as economically self-reliant. The playwright economically empowered his female characters through western education. In *The Wives* Yerima portrays four prominent female characters, three wives of Chief Olowookere; Angela, The first wife, Cecelia, the second and the successful banker, Tobi the youngest one and his sister Autinmi. Among the four female characters in this text, only Angela is not educated but the rest are well educated and economically independent.

Dr. Cecelia is the second wife of Chief Olowookere, who is presented in the play as an economically and educationally empowered woman because she went to the university and obtained a doctorate degree. An independent woman who is seen as successful despite the fact that she left her husband's house for ten years and vows never to come back because of the antics of chief and his family. She only came back to chief's house after his death to collect the money he borrowed from the bank. Ezenwabe (2008:189) observes that Dr. Cecelia economic empowerment through formal education is clearly emphasized. She is a banker and has an honorary doctorate degree. Yerima portrays Cecelia as a strong successful young lady. This is captured in Angela's words when she explains thus:

She used to be his favorite pumpkin after me. Young lady, I present chief Cecelia Abiokeola Olowookere, the most successful female banker in this Country. Mother of two children for our beloved Tiger. She courageously left this house ten years ago, and has never looked back. A powerful figure for women empowerment, self-reliance, advocacy for women, time for change for women etcetera etcetera etcetera. Presently unmarried and may remain so till death do her part, still looking young and radiant as ever. She had the courage to leave your

precious Tiger, when my courage failed me. And with her hand firmly on the hoe of progress and success, she has never looked back (P.36-37).

From Angelia's comment on Cecelia therefore, one can easily understand that Cecelia is presented by the playwright as a woman who has courage to leave her husband's house for good ten years. This projects her as a young lady who is intolerant with any form of domination from men. In order to empower her, Yerima imbues in her such qualities and characteristic that places her as an outstanding female character who is capable of surviving all webs of societal restrictions. These qualities are directly opposed to the attributes of the male characters, such as: her late husband Chief Olowookere. In short Cecelia in this text stands as a good example of empowered woman.

Tobi, the third and last wife of chief on the other hand, is also seen as a successful, but naïve young woman of nineteen years who falls in love with a 75 year old man. Like her co-wife. Cecelia, she serves as an agent of female advocacy and an epitome of a liberated woman. The playwright projected her in different ways. First, she is seen as a lovely wife of her late husband and a successful Air crew executive. Tobi is well educated and was working as member of an Air crew before she eventually meets with and marries chief. She is given a splendid role as she is empowered economically, politically and educationally. This is evident in her response to Autinmi's question after the death of chief when she says:

I guess I shall have to go back to my old job..... Air crew executive... But that is how we met. Tiger and I, He was on my flight to London. My first international flight. And behold there was this handsome elderly man, singing Christian praise song. He has been scared that day, because the flight was very turbulent. I offered him tea Coffee or... (p.25).

From the above quotation one can therefore, say that Tobi is portrayed as an independent woman given that she is a working class woman even before her encounter with chief Olowookre. The

reason for this is to warn that African women should not be helplessly dependant on their husbands for survival as this will lead to their emasculation and domination.

Another woman that the playwright empowers in this text is Autinmi, Chief's younger sister who is eventually discovered to be the mother of chief's first son. Autinmi is presented as a committed woman and hence, a source of courage to other female characters in the play. She is also a symbol of empowered women because "she is well educated" (p.41).

In *The Sisters*, Yerima adopts an accommodationist-womanist stance by empowering and representing women in a positive light. All the female characters in the play are not only well educated but are also professionals. For instance, the character of the first lady, Barrister Fummi is a typical example of an empowered woman as the writer depicts her as one in an elevated position. As the wife of the president of the country and the eldest daughter of Ambassador, she is powerful and influential. Her resolve to invite her sisters against their wish during the death of her husband is enough to show how powerful she is, even though she did not attend the funeral of Taiwo's husband. In this regard, Taiwo laments thus; "that is why we have been bundled like criminals against our wishes by state security to come and mourn our late brother-in-law Mr. President" (p.12-13). Fummi's display of power and authority is clearly informed by her status as the first Lady. Since "Fummi is the first lady ... she has everything. She is her Excellency. She needs no one. She commands and we mere mortals must obey. And she dumps us in small government planes to obey her very wish" (p.14). Therefore, Fummi is seen as a woman who is educationally, economically and politically empowered as a result, she involves herself in every state function and family affairs as well. Her love for power is best summarized in Taiwo's poem thus:

Dark embers of my inner soul  
The drink lobe of sadness pours.  
Melting, pelting..... Dropping drops of tears  
Wrapped once in stately glory,  
Now naked in cloves of sorrow ... Pity  
(Pauses, looks around)  
Oh the drink lobes of the rich and powerful  
Must now tilt to pour out... pour out  
The innocence of a shaded life  
Now searching for pity  
Where there is none... Pity!

Yerima uses this poem not only to show Fummi's love for power and authority but also to project her character as one who displays influence and affluence. This is done in order to satirize those women in the society that always complain about their male counterpart who are said to have occupied all positions of power to be very careful with politics and stop wasting their time because life in general is transient as we can see in the character of Fummi the first lady.

Barrister Taiwo the crippled and youngest daughter of Ambassador and the widow of Joe is yet another female character that benefits from Yerima's empowerment in *The Sisters*. Yerima imbues this powerful female character with maximum level of human traits. He does this, first, by empowering her through western education. Hence, she is a writer, a poet and a Barrister of law whose education helps her to stand strongly against injustices. Her dialogue with the other sisters about Fummi's complains that people are happy with Mr. President's death also expresses her great concern about humanity. Thus she says:

What future? The man has ruled this country for twenty years. Four terms, four four rotten terms, and he was still looking ahead to the future? What future? Whose Future? I always wonder why you people never learn. The people were praying for you to leave, and you had the grand illusion that we love you and wanted you to stay for another term? Did you have no yes? Were you so much in love with power that you became blind? The whole country went agog with joy after the announcement of his death (p.19)

In the lines above, Yerima shows how powerful Taiwo is in the play, since she can face the first lady of the country and tell her the bitter truth about her and her late husband. The beautiful thing about the character of Taiwo is that she symbolizes healing, strength, and courage. Also, she is projected as a woman that represents the liberal feminist.

Taiwo's use of language further exemplifies an empowered woman who speaks without any ounce of fear. She speaks in protest of the role the society has assigned women thus:

Why must we always do what they want? He hated any form of smoke, did he? I did not ask to come, and no one is going to tell me what to do. Dead husband or no dead husband (P. 10).

This attitude shows the level of confidence imbued in some women who are not only educated but are also economically empowered. Unlike Nana who, despite her education, still respects the status quo as she speaks with some tune of respect, Taiwo is not only arrogant but she is also sarcastic. This sarcasm is expressed in her song below:

Nobody knows the troubles I have seen  
Nobody knows but Jesus  
Nobody knows the troubles I have seen  
Gory hallelujah! (P. 10).

Toun, on the other hand, is the second daughter of Ambassador from his legally married wife. She is also empowered by the playwright through education because she tells us she is a teacher in the play. "Both of you are lawyers. I am the teacher remember?" (p. 24) Yerima clearly empowers all the three sisters in this play. Ezenwanebe (2008:192) observes that:

In *The Sisters*, three sister are well learned and professional women; Barrister Fummi, her Excellency the wife of the president Dipo is a lawyer; Barrister Taiwo Fummi's crippled sister, is also a lawyer and Toun is a teacher. ....on the contrary their husbands have lost grip of active economic life. They are either dead, dying Or crushed- chief Thoephilus Gbadegeshin Olowookere in *The Wives* and Dipo, the President, husband of Barrister Fummi are dead before the play starts and their remains lay in the state throughout the dramatic action.

In the above quotation, Ezenwanebe agrees with the fact Yerima`s plays: *The Wives* and *The Sisters* have contributed in the process of empowering women because all the three female characters in *The Sisters* are well educated and are professional women too. On the contrary, the men are not fully presented or adequately portrayed in both plays. They are either seen dead or dying, for instance, both Fummi and Tobi`s husbands are dead from the opening of the texts. By doing so Yerima expresses the view that men and women need to be together and help one another. It is in this light that he depicts his female characters as capable as their male counterpart unlike other African writers that depict women as dedicatedly subservient to men and/or their husbands.

Yerima`s use of predominantly female characters in these plays is intentional. It is an attempt to give voice to women so they can address their plights to the patriarchal society like Nigeria. The female character in *The Sisters* and *The Wives* are not only used to debunk some of the feminist scholars claims about male writers in Africa but also to satirize the hypocritical nature of human beings no matter his or her position in the society. Yerima`s play texts under study show that it is possible that many people in the lower class of society are more fraudulent, ambitious and greedier than the political elite whom they blame for their present status.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE IMAGE OF EMPOWERED WOMAN IN AHMED YERIMA'S *OWIWI, TUTI, THE PORTRAITS AND THE MIRROR CRACKS*

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the signification of women in Ahmad Yerima's *Owiwi, Tuti, The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks*. The aim is to open up various angles through which these texts project womanhood not as the other but as the self in the binary opposition that defines power and power structure in gendered discourses. To achieve this, the chapter is divided into the following subheadings: "The Struggle for Political Empowerment of Women in Yerima's *Owiwi*" "The Empowered Woman in Yerima's *Tuti, The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks*," and "Yerima's Tactics in the Presentation of the Empowered Woman: The Womanist Ideals". Through these subheadings, the chapter not only x-rays the various ways Ahmad Yerima presents women and womanhood but show his works as medium of reconstructing socio-political realities in modern Africa.

#### 4.1 The Struggle for Political Empowerment by Women in Yerima's *Owiwi*

The play *Owiwi* is a mythical portrayal of the belief that the owl is bad and evil. It is, among other things, about culture clash between old and fetish practices. The story relates the experiences of and brings to the fore some radical minded women characters who challenge the received and existing culture and traditions that privilege certain institutions and men above women. In the play, Yerima uses women characters to challenge the age long notion that leadership is the preserve of men. The idea is that African women are shut out of and kept away from participating in the struggle for leadership. The woman, in this regard, cannot be elevated to fill her rank due to the traditionally held notion that she is the weaker sex, "mindless, weepy,

passive, and helpless creature” (Bressler 2003:144). Providing a contrary perspective, Yerima’s *Owiwi* presents women who are not only conscious of but actually involve in power struggle.

The play opens with women showing their supremacy over men in terms of leadership:

**ADUNNI:** (Ignores her.) Fadelola’s reign was good for us. We swooped and swooned. Shook the very roots of the iroko trees. Even the stupid king himself, Oba Idele, on bent knees, begged us for his life. Yet, we drove our fangs into his succulent chest, and licked his ribs to his soft heart. And hand in hand with Esu, we installed a woman-man, a wimp, our glorified buffoon, as king. Ha! ...When Iya Agba stands, you knew a queen sat on her revered throne....(P.70).

This position shows that womanhood is endowed with instinctual leadership prowess, yet sidelined in the political arena. To this end, Yerima privileges women in the play to quarrel their deliberate exclusion in politics. The argument here is to show that the traditional practices of shutting off women in politics has paved the way for second-rate-men or what Adunni calls “woman-man” (70) to have a place in leadership rather than allowing women with excellent leadership skills to take up leadership roles in a society. In line with this position, Salami-Agunloye (2006:17) argues that, “cultural practices have their roots in ancient traditional and religious beliefs. Some of these practices, which are handed down through succeeding generations, are generally detrimental to the health, psychology and social well-being of women and girls”.

Of great challenge to women and womanhood is cultural practices that have defined roles of both men and women in the society. Culture, according to Acholonu (2000:165), is

A systematic and integrated whole. Culture is an abstraction from the body of learned behavior which a group of people who share the same tradition transmit entirely their children, and in part, to adult immigrants who become members of the society. It covers not only the art and science, religion and philosophies... but also the system of technology, the political practices, the small intimate, habits of the daily life, such as the way of preparing or eating

food, or of hushing a child to sleep, as well as the method of electing the prime minister or changing the constitution.

One thing stands out from the above definition; the fact that culture is learned, it is a social construction, transmitted from generation to generation. This follows that as a social construction man can deconstruct it as well. This is important to this study in that it tasks the society on the need to reconstruct a cultural ideology that would allow women a place in society. By doing so, inhibiting cultural practices would give way to structure that would allow women social mobility and social relevance in their society. This argument runs through Yerima's *Owiwi* especially as he gives women the capacity to take over the throne and enshrine themselves in leadership position. This is seen in the dialogue between Adunni and Saura thus,

**ADUNNI:** Yes, how? Oba Idele made a promise to us. And in the very first year of his reign, he failed to fulfill his promise. We were livid. Our conclusion was that he did it because we were women. We heard that he called us common women, with petty powers. This angered Iya Fadelola so we decided to teach him a lesson.

**SAURA:** You decided to pull his ear, until you cut it off...(P.88).

The issue in contention here is that, on the day of his coronation, Oba Idele asks the entire people under his rule to say what they desire he does for them for peace to be achieved in his time. The women, through Fedelola, ask that they too should be allowed to rule the kingdom for a month.

To quote Fadelola:

...all we want is one month of the year...You as king will reign for eleven months, and for one month, we shall rule with all the powers of a king. You will give me, the Iya Agba, the horse whip of the king. The Opa Ase, too. We shall reign not as regent, but as king (P.85).

The Oba, after conferring with Otun and the other kingmakers, granted them their wish. Promised to hand them over the throne yet decided to rescind his decision. As a result, they, women, decided to kill the Oba.

The reason these women were denied the throne was that they were women. This is expressed in the conversation between Oba Idele and his chiefs

**IDELE:** You have heard it. The Iyas demand that they must rule this kingdom, my kingdom, for a month, starting tomorrow. Last night, Iya Fadelola appeared to me, dressed in agbada, sokoto and with shoes to match, demanding for the crown. A classic case of madness.

**MAYEGUN:** Forgive me, kabiyesi. All the three kingmakers present at the ipebi on that day should be brought out at the shrine of Ogun, and their buttocks laced with whip. A hundred stroke each.

**OSI:** And grown-up chiefs agreed to that? Custodians of the tradition agreed to that? (P.89).

This is expected giving that the society portrayed in this play, the Yoruba, gives little place for women to function in terms of leadership. In this society, leadership is the sole property of men. When a woman challenges this property right, she is assumed to be intruding in the male domain and this is seen as an abomination. This is the case in this play as Oba Idele and the other elders could not understand why women should seek to take over power – the property of men. To him, this drive can only be understood if seen as “a classic case of madness” (P.89).

The reason for this age old rejection of women in the political space is that in many African societies, the public sphere is regarded as the male domain while the women are restricted to domesticity. Hence, breaking through the vicious cycle of this patriarchal arrangement is not without a fight. This fight is seen in Yerima’s *Owiwi* as the women in the play put up fierce resistance to overturn the decision of Idele who refuses to keep his words.

**IDELE:** I thank you all. I shall not waste time of you all. We know why we have come. Our forefathers say, that if I say that the masquerade of my ancestors will dance today at the village square, I have the right to say I change my mind. Because of the impending rains, my masquerade will not dance again. This is why we are here.

**FADELOLA:** Oba Idele, you push my patience with your silly joke...

**OTUN:** Haa, Iya!

**FADELOLA:** Yes. Any common man can change his mind and has nothing to lose. Not a king...not one addressed as second

to the gods...not you Oba Idele, not you. What you will lose today will be more than your crown, if you insist on changing your mind (P.93).

The above exchange is a prove to the statement that women are fast coming out of docility. The author, through Fadelola, is therefore saying that women have long broken out of the niche society have carved for them. They have become independent and can decide on their fate in life. In light of the above, and taking the argument from the perspective of women especially in Africa but Nigeria in particular there is, according to Sarki (2015:215), “there is endless list of those whose posterity will continue to adjudge as ‘sheroines’ of themselves, their families and the society in which they made their marks”. For those women, Alkali (2012:11) tells us that:

History is indeed with the contributions of Nigerian women to national development. Great and powerful women who made sacrifices, mobilized groups and formed societies and organizations in order to make meaningful changes in society through women’s wars, protests, riots and uprisings in South-East, South-West, South-South of Nigeria between 1950-1986.

The actions of these historical brave women and especially the rising wave of women presence in global politics have given women renewed impetus to seek inclusion in leadership position. In the case of these women in *Owiwi*, their decision to rule cannot be overturn. They may sound pushy or even desperate in the way they remain resolute about their quest to occupy the throne but they know that, like women of old in the likes of Queen Amina of Zauzau, Queen Kambasa of Bony, Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Nana Asma’u who are paradigm of women achievers, they have to recreate possibilities that would encourage other women to negotiate a place in their society. Considering this bravery, Saura says of these women that:

**SAURA:** ... It is just interesting to see how the mothers have grown. I

remembered them as timid women from the world in search of powers. Big breasted ... bushy haired ...timid dirty women, and now they, through the help of Orunmila and I, have perfected the use of the powers Olodumare gave them, and can now face a king and force

sweat to rise from his brows. Interesting. Oba Idele, even amongst thieves, there must be honor (P.94).

The significance of Saura's words above lies in the fact that he, one of the custodians of the patriarchal order, has witnessed firsthand how women have come of age in their agitation for a rightful place in society. Recognizing the need to allow women to take part in the community as a way of finding lasting solution to societal problem, Saura advises Oba Idele thus:

...I am for both sides. A promise is a promise. Do not let power ruin your agbada Etu. You will soon throw up on the dress, and regrets will follow. Kabiyesi, give them at least this month once, and then when they destroy the town, we will have a reason to tell them to kill their desire. Give it to them (P.95).

Yet, Oba Idele, underestimating the power of women and propped up by the ill words of other chiefs, refuses to heed to Saura's advice. This refusal creates twist in the play when Fadelola brought the pot of life which symbolizes the soul of Oba Idele.

**FADELOLA:** You see, Idele, we have brought your pot of life.

**OTUN:** Haa! The sacred Oru of the king. This must stop, Iya Agba!

**IDELE:** But you were to keep this with all secrecy until the day I join the ancestors. Why bring it here?

**FADELOLA:** To show you that I am serious.

**OTUN:** Haa...women!

**MAYEGUN:** This matter has not gotten to the point of bringing to the king his sacred pot of life. If it as much as cracks, then it is all over for us all.

**FADELOLA:** We have brought it. Now the king will know how serious we are. His smile will be wiped away for good. Do we get the crown or not? (Pause.) Answer!

**IDELE:** I was going to accept, but with this threat, no, I shall not give up my Crown, not for a day or even a second. I see your wickedness has no limits. Fadelola...Iya Agba Eye, I shall not give you the crown. Do your worst.

**FADELOLA:** Indeed...then you shall taste the bitterness of gall

To make true their threat, PAGA, in one movement, raises the pot and hits it on the ground to the surprise of all.

The plot of this play revolves around the struggle for right. One area of importance in this study is about the dialectics of who controls power in society. In most societies, power is the preserve of the majority or the most powerful members of the community. As Ekwierhoma (2009:238) argues, minorities can be termed the opposites of majorities, or individuals or group of individuals who are less visible in any landscape and who are inferiorised or made not to have major stakes in any geographical or socio-political terrain. Minorities exist in different forms and can exist under the social categories of age, sex, occupation and ethnicity. For most feminist critics and writers, minorities exist under gender and sex and the woman is the one mostly affected. Thus, these critics show women, girls and men enmeshed in a politics of determinacy and survival, where the need for self-actualization is crucial. For this minorities therefore, rights, which “are the indispensable liberties and privileges that every human being, irrespective of status, sex or age is entitled” to, are in most cases denied them. In such kind of situation, therefore, the struggle for right becomes a dividing indices. As seen in the play, the struggle becomes a very destructive phenomenon capable of causing death of people at untold level. This is the experience in Yerima’s *Owiwi* as is seen in the exchange below.

**IDELE:** (Shaking with anger)

Fadelola, you broke my pot of life?  
You broke me into shattering pieces.  
And my placenta no longer holds  
Even to the centre of thr earth  
(raises.)

Fadelola, Fadelola, Fadelola  
(The CHIEFS prostrate.)

**ALL:** Kabiyesi!

**OTUN:** Kabiyesi, please, don’t.

**IDELE:** Step aside, Otun, you have escorted me far enough.

It is now between me and the Iya Agba  
Fadelola, Fadelola, Fadelola...  
Let me be. You all saw it. In her name,  
Fadelola, my supposed mother  
Iya Agba mi, Osorong, shattered my reign...  
The very death that takes me, must wait and take you  
too. You shall be scraped into your grave (P.96-97).

The important aspect of empowerment captured in this study is not only about the death of Fadelola, the heroine that sacrifices her life for women to get position of leadership. It is also about the raising awareness of women about their right to get position of leadership in their society. Hence, this wave of awareness by women and their enthusiasm to follow through with their quest for inclusion in leadership is beginning to redefine cultural realities in African societies. Thus, custodians of culture should begin to loosen the restriction placed on women especially as it affects their right to self-actualization. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Onwueme summarizes this idea when she points that:

The African woman is truly alive and kicking and seeing and loving and hurting and dying and growing and losing and gaining and all that any “sheman” does in reality...The African woman is not a piece of furniture that remains fixed and standing to be sat on by any willing behind, programmed to push up and down at will. No, the African woman is dynamic. She is a stream: she flows with her own rhythms dictated by the currents in the rise and fall of the tides...she is thriving as time and tradition permit her, to reach her destination, attain her goals: happiness and fulfillment in freedom and equity. Should anyone begrudge her those dreams? (2001:13)

#### **4.2 The Empowered Woman in Yerima’s *Tuti*, *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks***

In *Tuti*, *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks* Yerima presents professional women in order to enhance the image of womanhood. In *The Portrait* for instance, he presents Tola, a sixty-four year old judge of a High Court and in *The Mirror Cracks* he presents Tundun, a distinguished lady in her 50’s and a judge of the Court of Appeal. In *Tuti*, he also presents the character of *Tuti* as yet another lawyer. These women are offered to the reader as highly educated and very

successful professional women in order to place them at the same social status with their husbands. This shows that education of women, as the cliché goes, is power. It is the crossroad to the development of women. And hence, the power of liberation can be achieved if women are exposed and allowed to receive quality education. The use of education in these plays as a motif provides these female characters with a vantage position to show that school provides women opportunity to develop their minds and ultimately, contribute to society. In *Tuti*, the situation is clear as Tuti is able to help Ayo, her husband who is presented as a loafer; a totally dependent on her. Describing Ayo in this direction, Tuti's father calls him as "a loafer...who scrounges on your love, your person and your spirit. He keeps taking and gives very little or nothing. A loafer!" (p. 17).

He further presents these women as complete women in African perspective as all of them have a child. Tola in *The Portraits* is empowered with Supo, a male child and heir apparent, Tundun in *The Mirror* has Segi, a female child and Tuti in *Tuti* has children, of which is a male child. All these are significant as they provide the African woman with the required ego to claim the place of relevance both in the home and society. As observed by Okocha and Akinwole (2015:88),

One cannot overemphasize the notion of presentational motherhood, whose immediate impact is to deepen temporary and widen spatially the scope of the institution. In the Yoruba cosmic ideology, humans exist in three worlds; that of the unborn, the living and the dead, and motherhood is present in all three realms and motherhood is present in all these realms.

Consequent upon this, they are seen as respected women much more advantageous when compared with Tobi in *The Wives* and Funmi in *The Sisters* who are presented as barren women.

The relevance of this portraiture is that these women are empowered through education, status and childbirth. In terms of education, they acquire elite education which is respected in society.

In terms of status, they occupy rare positions in the society where positions such as Judges and

lawyers are seen as male preserve. This representation of women by Yerima is aimed at elevating womanhood in order to undermine the assertion made by Sarah Grimke that:

All history attests that man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his self-gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill (Afolabi 2002:129).

In terms of child birth, Yerima presents these women as productive women whose wombs have yielded fruits enough to occupy the seat of womanhood. Understanding the significant of the empowerment of women in Africa through child birth, as Kure (2011:36) says; “childbearing was considered central to the worth of a woman”. Hence, the worth of a woman was measured by the number of (male) children she had. This is so because, as cited in Kure (2011:36), “(male) children were regarded as economic assets and with this a childless woman was considered incomplete”. By doing this, these women are shown as those who do not only know their rights but also ones who have regained their voices through education, social status and childbirth.

In addition, Yerima presents Tola, Tundun and Tuti as women who have lost feminine traits such as gentleness, tenderness and care associated with womanhood. The reason Yerima refuses to lace these women with such feminine qualities is to show that women can function both as wives, mothers and career women respectively. In this regard, Tola, Tuti and Tundun display what Ezenwanebe (n.y: ) calls the “iron-lady” syndrome”. This is because they exhibit the traits associated with judges and lawyers as they lack capacity for emotional feeling and are projected as arrogant, proud, stubborn and swollen-headed. This is seen especially in the character of Tuti who, as her father says, has “... so much power, you have even taken over his own” (p. 23). Because of this, Tola’s husband, Ambassador/chief Adetunji Beyioku in *The Portraits*, Tundun’s husband, Ambassador Ayodele Adegabi in *The Mirror Crack* and Tuti’s husband, Ayo in *Tuti*

have it tough with their wives. This creates a gap especially between Tola in *The Portrait* and her husband as they are seen addressing each other as “His Excellency” and “Her Lordship”.

Yerima further presents Tola in *The Portraits* not only as stubborn and proud but also as autocratic and petty. As a result of this, Segi, her daughter prefers to call her “The rock of Gibraltar” (p.158). This trait is demonstrated at her daughter’s birthday party where she insists that food will not be served until they have had the photos taken. The reason, to her, is because “food before the photographs could smear my make up” (p. 156). In similar vein, Yerima presents Tuti as yet another stubborn woman who, because of her status, has little regard for her husband. This is seen in the way she talks to Ayo and displays in the open her dominance over him.

**Tuti:** Yes, until, Papa. (The phone rings. She answers the phone with a Changed countenance.) Yes. I know who is speaking. Just talk. I am with my father. Pick the children from school today. For once, make yourself useful. He needs me, too. I will come home when you see me. I have told her what to cook for you. Do not go out until I return. Watch television or play television games if you must do something. He is fine. Just a bit tired... (p. 15)

This disposition is not far from the fact that these women are so empowered that they feel they could survive without men. This is seen in the way both women opt for divorce. Tola in *The Portrait* files a temporary divorce which lasted for thirty years and is brought face to face with her husband at Segi’s (their daughter) birthday. Tundun in *The Mirror Cracks* walked out of her matrimonial home, leaving behind her six-year old son, Supo, and only comes back at the eve of his burial.

### 4.3 Yerima's Tactics in the Presentation of the Empowered Woman: The Womanist Ideals

Yerima's presentation of women is not without understanding the excesses of some empowered women. In his plays he interrogates the issue of failed marriages among the empowered women. The reason for this is to point to certain areas where the empowered woman is lacking. Hence, he begins by showing some of these women as people who cannot stay in marriage because they lack the capacity to love, tolerate and endure whatever comes. This failure has consequent effect on children. In both plays as in others by Yerima, highly educated women are blamed for the failure in their marriages. Tola in *The Portraits* files for separation because, according to her:

I wanted to be free. I like my freedom. I did not want a man telling me what to do. I hated ...making love when I did not want to... (*The Portraits* 170).

Freedom for her includes freedom from her husband's intimidating personality as an Ambassador thus, she says:

I wanted to be myself not hide under the folds of your long flowing dress... I wanted to be me. We had two huge egos. The spotlight was always on you and all I did was to step aside (P.166).

In as much as Tola's reason is unacceptable, her husband, Adetunji, equally has an unacceptable view about marriage:

You were supposed to complement me, not establish your own personality to rival mine" he says (P.166).

Yerima's authorial subjectivity is clear to the extent that he uses Adetunji's words to show that the home is not the place of competition. To him, marriage entails complementing each other. Hence, his portrayal of Funmi in *The Sisters* who did not employ the powers available to her by virtue of her education in her marital life to compete with her husband is deliberate. She and her husband complemented each other especially in the way she helps him to succeed in his political career. It is obvious therefore, that both Tola and Tunji her husband, need to change their views for a successful marital union.

Dr. Cecelia Olowookere could not equally continue to stomach the confusion in chief Theophilus' family in *The Wives*. She is firm and wise enough to leave his home before the madness that erupts after his death. Yet Yerima undermines her reasons for the divorce through the reason she gives. According to her, she detests "cooking, making love and seeing the in-laws ... I wanted my space, and I wanted also to choose my moments" (*The Wives* 40).

And she insists she has no regrets. However, she becomes overwhelmed by reality of life when she leaves chief Theophilus's house.

The playwright further blames women for the failure of their marriages, and its effects on their husbands and children. Even Angela in *The Wives* blames Cecelia, her co-wife, for leaving:

I think Theo started dying from the day you left... as he read the divorce letter from the court, he cried... (*The Wives* 41).

In *The Mirror Cracks* Yerima shows the effect of divorce on children. In the play, playwright, through the husband, tries to heap the failure of their marriage and its consequent effect on Tundun. Adegabi, Tundun's husband accuses her by saying repeatedly that it is her leaving that dislocates Supo, their son's life and led to his eventual death. Ha says:

Maybe all this would not have happened if she had stayed (*The Mirror Cracks* 117).

This is yet another way of showing that women are the life wire of their families. Their role as caregivers is central in that it gives them power over men. This is the case of Adegabi in *The Mirror Cracks* and Ayo in *Tuti*, as both men could not bear the burden of catering for the children in the absence of their wives. This means therefore, that wielding power is not just about breaking tradition but using ones advantage to uphold tradition. This is why, to Onwueme, in an interview with *The Guardian* maintains that women must go back to tradition, to redefine it and wield the power it once gave them. The point here is that women with new awareness should use such to the advantage of their families knowing that "marriage is supreme" (Lawal 2015:139).

Although it is not clearly established how the mother's absence turns Supo into "a certified, self conceited, wild, brutal coldblooded animal" (35), the fact remains that the absence of the mother affects the wellbeing of most children.

The overall image of the women of letters that emerge from the plays is summarised by Auntimi in *The Wives* in her elaborate introduction of Dr. Cecelia to Tobi:

I present Chief Cecelia Abikoola Olowookere, the most successful female banker in this country. Mother of two children for our beloved Tiger (her husband). She courageously left this house ten years ago, and has never looked back. A powerful figure for women empowerment, self reliance, advocacy for women, time for change for women...Presently unmarried and may remain so till death do her part, still looking young and radiant as ever... And with her hand firmly on the hoe of progress and success, she has never looked back. (P. 36 -37).

The above remark is also an indictment of women by Yerima of what he disapproved of with regards to the empowered woman. To Yerima, a successful woman is one who, despite her achievement, still upholds the virtue of motherhood – patience, tolerance, and perseverance. Hence, for Cecelia to have left her house as with Tola and Tundun, and "has never looked back" is a salient indictment on their character and a subtle call on women to respect the sanctity of marriage no matter their position in society. The reason is that progress and success can only be quantified in relation to the proportion to which such is seen to have transformed the home. The real message of Angela's words is that work to Cecelia, in the context of other so called career women should be placed beyond marriage and that marriage or married life should not be allowed to interrupt their quest for glory at work place. This attribute does not represent success as success is marked by one's ability to be successful in all facets of life – work, family, relationship.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the study. The essence is to wrap the study up by pointing out some salient points and by doing so, emphasize the contribution the study has made to the body of knowledge. To achieve this, the study is broken into two parts, namely summary and conclusion. The summary part undertakes a chapter breakdown. Hence, the summary segment gives a rundown of each chapter. The part titled conclusion wraps the study up by justifying that the study adequately shows how Yerima empowers his female characters in his plays on the one hand, and emphasizes that the theoretical lenses adopted in this study is a viable means of reading the selected plays of Ahmed Yerima.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This study comprises of five chapters. Chapter one provides general background to the study, it also foregrounds the research problem, the research objectives, justification of the study, scope and delimitations of the study, among other things. Chapter two provides theoretical frameworks and review of related literature. The essence of this is to provide spectra of voices that have shown how several scholars have deployed womanism in exploring gender issues in literature, especially in relation to African drama. The overall aim is to capture the manners in which female characters are portrayed in literary works written by male authors. The review unravels the argument that many male writers tend to downplay their female characters in order to uphold the cultural and ideological subjectivity of patriarchal societies. This is done, on the one hand, to look for distinct discursive angles

that support the present study and on the other hand, to open up gaps which the present study is set to fill. This would enable us to define the relevance of this study to the body of Literature.

Chapter three explores the portrayal of women in Yerima's plays. It pays particular attention to the treatment and/or portrayal of female characters in *The Sisters* and *The Wives* as both plays explore ways through which Yerima bestows his female characters with responsibilities that contradict the already held notion that male authored texts are often set to relegate women to the background. Thus, the chapter provides a contrary position by showing how Yerima in *The Wives* and *The Sisters* represents female characters as backbones of their families

Chapter four explores the signification of women in Ahmad Yerima's *Owiwi*, *Tuti*, *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks*. The aim is to open up various angles through which these texts projects womanhood not as the other but as the self in the binary opposition that defines power and power structure in gendered discourses.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

This dissertation explores the selected plays by Ahmad Yerima with particular interest on how he projects women. The essence is to show his consciousness and concern about the development of women and how it affects their place in patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. This is achieved by deploying the Womanist strand of feminism; an African alternative of feminism in analyzing the selected plays. In the study of Nigerian drama, like every other genre, there is no doubt the prevalence feminist tendencies that label male writers as chauvinistic and ego centric. This feminist's claim(s) or criticism more often than not focus on identifying male authored texts that poorly portrays and/or negatively present female characters.

The implication of this is that a literary work carries the image of the society within which it is set. Hence, Yerima's plays analysed in this study show that women are not completely muzzled by patriarchal order as there are those carry themselves above such social order. Yerima's portraiture has helped in conditioning his audience to respond positively to and by so doing give women a better place in society. One thing that stands out in Yerima's plays is the way he imbue his heroines with those qualities that, on the one hand, attest to our aesthetic preferences and on the other, give women a better place in society.

It is no doubt that women in the 20th century have been given a robust consideration, not only in literary works but also in society. Hence, Yerima's portraiture has yielded to the need to reconstruct them in line with the existing social significance they have attained in society. Hence, this study sees the need to deploy some tenets of womanism to further the propositions that guide the reconstruction of African women so that women are not alienated from society. To this end, the women in *The Sisters*, *The Wives*, *The Portraits*, *The Mirror Cracks* and *Owiwi* are good examples of the "new eve" envisaged by the womanists.

Even though Yerima, like other African writers are interested in the preservation of African culture, he has carefully crafted his women and developed them in a way that will not make them pervades but suitable to the African reality. His effort is to show how, despite the allowance women have got, the African family must be preserved from the current torrent of westernisation sweeping through it today. This concern, as captured in this study, forms the thematic thrust of his plays. This places Yerima as an ambassador of African culture who is concerned with family life, because the African family is the nucleus of African communal life. This is because Yerima is one of the very few African playwrights who devote their art to call for a change in mutual relationship especially between husband and wife.

Through the works of Yerima this study debunks the feminists claim (s) that women are poorly portrayed and negatively presented in the texts authored by African male writers, because the field of feminism discourse has gone beyond the idea of identifying writer by gender. There are many male writers that show great concern on the course of female and do justice to their presentation of female characters in their works. Writers such as: Femi Osofisan, Ulu Oba Femi, Ahmed Yerima and a host of others. All the aforementioned writers have ensured a near balanced representation of both male and female genders. This debunks the feminist claim within African literary tradition and shows that there are writers in Nigeria who empathize with the plight of women in a patriarchal society such as Nigeria. Yerima`s portrayal of his female characters in positive light in *The Wives*, *The Sisters*, *Mirror Cracks*, *The Portrait*, *Tuti* and *Owivi* respectively, justifies this claim.

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