

THEMES AND STYLE IN AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S STAY WITH ME

BY

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project work entitled, Themes and Style in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* was carried out by **EDOBOR Osamudiamehn Blessing (MISS)** with matriculation number **ART1900438** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin. Benin City.

Professor E.B. Adeleke
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DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to God Almighty, whose guidance has carried me through this significant milestone. To my late grandmother, who was a major inspiration to me. I also dedicate this project to myself and to the society that continues to motivate my efforts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Terry Eagleton argues that literature is not just the causes of social effects, but also the effect of Social Cause”. In other words, there is a mutual relationship between the Society and Literature whereby Literature paints a picture of what is happening in the society.

Ayobami Adebayo’s *Stay with me* is an excellent reflection of the happenings in the society.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this essay is to examine the thematic preoccupations and literary style used in *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo.

1.2 Scope of Study

The scope of this essay will majorly focus on gender inequalities, barrenness, and the literary devices used in *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo.

1.3 Research Methodology

This essay utilizes the qualitative research methodology, with close reference to *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo as the primary source.

According to Paul Leedy and Ormrod Ellis in their book *Practical Research*, “in qualitative research, we indeed dig deep; we collect various forms of data and examine them from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture” (269).

Alongside the primary text, this essay incorporates secondary materials from a variety of sources, including relevant essays, scholarly journals, articles, e-books, online sources, personal notes, and other useful materials.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The theory of double standards posits that individuals utilize different criteria to evaluate abilities based on the social status or gender of their respective groups. Low-status groups, such as women and minority members, often face more stringent judgment than high-status individuals due to their position or gender. This theory, rooted in considerations of justice and morality, lays the groundwork for discussions on fairness; a theme echoed in religious and ethical texts across civilizations. (Foschi 237).

Manifesting across various domains of society, gender double standards expose systemic biases ingrained within societal structures. Women, in particular, face harsh judgment and stigma for engaging in sexual activity, while men engaging in the same behaviour may be praised or admired. Additionally, women encounter scrutiny and criticism for their appearance and clothing choices, facing rigid standards dictating how they should present themselves. In positions of leadership and authority, women often face heightened skepticism and resistance compared to men, facing barriers to advancement in male-dominated fields. Furthermore, women are expected to prioritize caregiving and domestic responsibilities, facing judgment if they deviate from these roles (Hooks 42).

The roots of gender double standards extend deep into history and culture, emanating from traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms. As Virginia Woolf astutely observed, “For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.” Throughout the ages, societies have assigned distinct roles and attributes to men and women, shaping expectations regarding behavior, appearance, and achievement. These entrenched beliefs have perpetuated the notion that men and women should adhere to different standards, resulting in inequalities and injustices based on gender. Scholars of the Enlightenment era, including John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, championed principles of equality and individual rights, while feminist movements in the 19th and 20th centuries challenged gender-based double standards. The late 20th century ushered in postmodern thought, with intellectuals like Michel Foucault exploring power dynamics and societal structures that perpetuate differing standards. In contemporary discussions, the theory of Double Standards has gained prominence, acknowledging that factors such as race and gender shape unique experiences and challenges. (Foschi, 21-42)

Throughout the history of sociological and psychological theory, gender disparities in social dynamics have garnered significant attention. A central inquiry revolves around the extent to which observed social variations between genders, such as in education, occupation, and marriage, are shaped by differential treatment across various social contexts and over the course of one's life. For instance, numerous scholars argue that unequal treatment originates from distinctions in early environments, wherein gender-specific behaviours, attitudes, and expectations towards infants play a role in shaping

future life trajectories. Others observe that historically defined masculine behaviours tend to be enforced or permitted in boys and more feminine behaviours are encouraged in girls. Despite the absence of clear-cut evidence indicating enforced gender-specific behaviour or attitudes, numerous studies demonstrate that mothers and fathers often maintain distinct gender role beliefs or parenting approaches, which may vary in intensity based on the child's gender. Consequently, parents frequently differentiate between their sons and daughters, resulting in unequal treatment (Antill et al, 238). These gender double standards perpetuate inequality and reinforce harmful stereotypes, limiting opportunities for both men and women.

Based on this theory, one can expect that the abilities of women are perceived differently than those of men, and members of disadvantaged minorities are evaluated less likely as clever than members of the majority, even when considering the same level of performance.

The theory of gender double standards reveals the differential treatment and societal expectations imposed on individuals based on their gender, highlighting the disparities in how men and women are evaluated, valued, and held to different moral and behavioural standards.

Addressing gender double standards is essential for advancing gender equality and fostering a just and equitable society where individuals are valued based on their merits, irrespective of gender.

Using this theory, this essay seeks to delve into the historical origins of gender double standards, analyse its manifestations across various aspects of society, and discuss its implications for gender equality and social justice.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

Due to the ideas portrayed in this novel, it has attracted some reviews from certain critics and researchers especially in attempts to evaluate, compliment and explicate both the writer and the novel.

Michiko Kakutani gives a review on how the novel explores the tussle in Nigeria between “tradition and modernity, old definitions of masculinity and femininity, and newer imperatives of self-definition and identity”. Yejide, a modern lady is forced into a battle with traditions and constantly pressured to relinquish her modernity and accept tradition. The childlessness in the marriage of Akin and Yejide places a huge strain on their love life and marriage. Akin strongly professes that he loved Yejide from the beginning of their time together. However, the 4 years of their childless marriage brings problems into their marriage life. The theme of childlessness introduces us to the pressures and problems faced by childless couples in Africa.

Michiko explains that in addition to the strain on their lovely and happy marriage, Akin’s mother particularly faults Yejide for the couple’s childlessness, and emotionally blackmails Yejide into accepting Akin’s second wife.

Akin's mother cruelly says: "Women manufacture children and if you can't you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman." This reveals the traditional illogical perspective where a woman is always at fault whenever a couple is unable to conceive.

Caving into Akin's mother's request and pressure, Yejide is forced to try to save her marriage by getting a child at all costs. She seeks medical help from different doctors and even treks up the "Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles" to visit a healer named Prophet Josiah, who has her dance with a white goat and breastfeed it. Yejide's desperation soon turns to delusion when she begins to believe she's pregnant, despite doctors' insistence that there is no baby. Eventually, after she conceives, she's confronted with the problems of her children having sickle cell disease.

In Diana Evans' review of *Stay with Me*, she considers the traditions and superstitions imposed on pregnant women as archaic and unnecessary. For the case of a childless woman, the case is worse. In the Nigerian society a childless woman is a tragedy, and considered to have probably brought it on herself. In Yejide's marriage, she's faced by the problems of being unable to conceive, and also the problems of being pressured and blamed by her in-laws. They ignore the fact that childlessness affects both Akin and Yejide. Instead, Yejide is constantly faulted. "You have had my son between your legs for two more months and still your stomach is flat," Moomi tells Yejide.

Also, when the new wife is also not yet pregnant. "Close your thighs to him, I beg you ... If you don't, he (Akin) will die childless. I beg you, don't spoil my life. He is my first son,

Yejide.” Yejide is also blamed for Akin’s ‘refusal’ to impregnate Funmi, whereas, Akin is simply impotent.

However, Sumaiyya Naseem finds the major themes in the novel to include “polygamy, infertility and the value of children or rather what a child represents.” At the beginning of the Akin’s relationship with Yejide, the couple were filled with love. However, the love fails to be enough in stopping Akin from marrying Funmi (a second wife). Unfortunately, Funmi fails to ‘give Akin a child’ before her demise. “As a result of their childlessness, Yejide and Akin’s marriage is considered a failure by the society.

In this novel, we see just how harrowing Yejide’s struggle is and it points to the fact that when it comes to childlessness the social burden of failure falls on the woman disproportionately. This is, regardless of the fact, that 50% of the time it’s male infertility that leads to the inability to conceive”. Naseem however posits the question of “What is the value of a woman without a child? Why is a woman’s value placed on her ability to have children? and is a woman nothing if she’s not a mother?”

Sarah Jessica Parker on the other hand stands that *Stay with Me* is a wise and deeply humane debut novel that unpeels the layers of politics in a marriage from the inside. Ayobami Adebayo tells the story of Akin, Yejide, and their families – a powerfully affecting tale of love, loyalty, and betrayal – with both savagery and heart”. It focuses on how Africans perceive marriage and how certain persons can influence a couple’s relationship. Either negatively or positively.

Zoë Apostolides also appraises the concept of couples being under intense pressure by family members to give birth. Moomi had told Yejide that “Women manufacture children and if you can’t you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman.” In Apostolides’ review with Financial Times, she says: “This tale of a Nigerian couple under familial pressure to conceive is a subtle and unsentimental triumph . . . A tale of real complexity and humanity, part psychological observation and social study.” Coupled with Nigerian writers, African writers are branded with peculiar writing styles which enthrall many people to make their stories peculiar.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Ayobami Adebayo in *Stay with Me* employs narrative structure, diction, and character development to reveal the themes of gender imbalance and the stigma of barrenness.

CHAPTER TWO

THEMES IN AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME*

Introduction

In the African society, women are often stigmatized and treated differently from men. This stigma revolves round childbirth and even in other life scenarios.

This chapter focus on two concepts; The themes of Gender Imbalance and The Stigma of Barrenness.

The Theme of Gender Imbalance

Gender imbalance simply refers to an unequal distribution or representation of genders within a given population or context. It is a term used in situations where one gender is significantly underrepresented or overrepresented in comparison to the other gender. This can occur in various aspects of society, including demographics, employment, education, politics, and marriage. Gender imbalance can have significant social, economic, and cultural implications on every aspect of one's life.

Streamlining it to the female gender, gender imbalance, particularly when related to women, often refers to situations where women are underrepresented or disadvantaged compared to men in various spheres of life. This can include areas such as political leadership, corporate leadership, access to education, employment opportunities, wages, and even basic rights and freedoms.

Additionally, gender imbalance can manifest in cultural & religious norms and expectations that limit women's choices. It therefore perpetuates inequalities over time. In Nigeria, gender imbalance is a significant issue that affects various aspects of society. Despite education, civilization and progress in recent years, women still face significant challenges in terms of representation, access to education, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes.

In politics, for example, women are often underrepresented in both elected and appointed positions at the local, state, and national levels. This lack of representation limits the diversity of perspectives in governance and can hinder the development of policies that address the needs of all citizens, regardless of gender. In Nigerian politics, as of 2022, women held only about 6.4% of the seats in the National Assembly, reflecting a broader trend of underrepresentation in both national and state-level politics.

In terms of education and exposure, there is a societal bias that assumes men are inherently smarter and more knowledgeable than women. This bias is exemplified in the encounter between Yejide and the mechanic, where the mechanic automatically assumes Yejide won't understand car issues and prefers to discuss them with "oga."

A gender stereotype is also perpetuated when Iya Bolu's expresses her desire for her daughter to become a medical doctor, highlighting the deep-seated gender biases that persist in our society.

Iya Bolu came to stand beside me, arms akimbo. ‘Ehen, so if Bolu is beautiful, she cannot read? She cannot go to the university?’ Aunty Sadia smiled into the mirror. ‘Just wait until her breasts are sweet oranges and all the men that see her start standing stiff like soldiers. Small time, pregnancy will come. Then you will understand what I’m saying.’ ‘Not my daughter. God forbid.’ Iya Bolu leaned closer to Aunty Sadia and raised her voice. ‘My own daughter will go to school’ (154).

Gender imbalance also manifests in marriage and domestic life. In a marital home, there exists a perceived disparity between the roles of husband and wife. The man is typically considered the father, protector, and the head of the household, while the woman assumes the responsibility of caring for the children and managing the home. These gender roles are instilled from childhood, as they are culturally ingrained to find fulfilment and accept the duty of reproduction and household chores. Although in Yejide’s case, the house which she lived in with her husband was not fully paid by Akin (Yejide pays half every month).

‘Is it not because of you that he has found a flat for Funmi to stay in when he has a big duplex right here?’ Iya Martha looked around the sitting room, spreading her palms to point out the big duplex in case I had missed her reference to the house for which I paid half of the rent every month (17).

Nevertheless, one of the significant aspects in which this imbalance comes to play is during the African traditional marriage ceremony. The ceremony symbolizes the bride's transition from her father's family to her husband's family. Additionally, it is customary for a woman to adopt her husband's last name, relinquishing her father's name upon marriage. In *Stay with me*, Baba Lola said, "*our wife, people say that when a man has a possession and it becomes two, he does not become angry, right?*" (13) to pacify Yejide and remind her that Akin, her husband, is the prize.

Conversely, a male child retains his father's surname after marriage, highlighting the prevailing emphasis on the importance of male offspring over female. Traditional gender roles often assign women primary responsibility for household chores, caregiving, and child-rearing, while men are expected to be the breadwinners.

In traditional African society, a woman's role as a child-bearer bestows upon her social status, respect, and value (Imbiza 13). The presence of children in a household is considered a source of happiness and is viewed as a form of 'intergenerational social security.' Upon Yejide becoming 'pregnant', she gladly receives her husband's second wife (Funmi) and deliberately ridicules Funmi by telling her that she (Yejide) just started antenatal. "*She whirled around and stared at me. I saw in her eyes the realization that I was now a threat to her instead of the other way round. She gripped her forehead. Unable to fake joy, she walked away*" (63).

The natural circumstance wherein a woman conceives and carries the baby for nine months before giving birth often leads to the perception that fertility is primarily the woman's responsibility, thus exonerating the man. During Yejide's meeting with her in-laws, Baba Lola 'commends' Yejide by saying; "*I want to appreciate your efforts to make sure that our son leaves a child behind when he dies*" (15). The reality however is that, without a reproductive intercourse between a man and a woman, a child cannot be born. A man's spermatozoa and a female egg is what forms a zygote, then a foetus and eventually a child. However, the African society understands this biological fact, but still chooses to hold a woman responsible for both parties' failure

Additionally, inheritance laws and customs in Nigeria frequently favour male heirs over female heirs, depriving women of their rightful share of family assets and perpetuating economic disparities between genders. The reason for this is believing the female heirs when married will no longer be part of the family, but of their husbands' families. In some cultures, a widow is 'inherited' by her late husband's brother in order to 'keep her in the family'.

In the long run, addressing these entrenched forms of gender imbalance requires comprehensive strategies, including legal reforms to protect women's rights, education and awareness campaigns to challenge harmful norms, economic empowerment initiatives, and community-based interventions aimed at fostering gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours. Only through concerted efforts can Nigeria move towards

greater gender equality within the home and in marriages, ensuring the fulfilment of women's rights and opportunities for all

Stigma of Barrenness

Barrenness, as a concept pertains to land or soil that lacks the necessary conditions for plants to grow successfully. In the context of human beings, it is used to describe an infertile woman who is unable to conceive and bear children.

Marriage serves various purposes, such as companionship, the fulfilment of dreams, and procreation, among others. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the primary emphasis for marriage is centred around childbirth. Having children outside of wedlock is considered irresponsible and socially frowned upon in the African society, thus couples are expected to birth children as soon as they get married.

‘Why won’t you allow my son to have a child?’ She slapped the tray of groundnuts on the floor and stood up.

‘I don’t manufacture children. God does.’

‘Have you ever seen God in a labour room giving birth to a child? Tell me, Yejide, have you ever seen God in the labour ward? Women manufacture children and if you can’t you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman’ (48).

The stigma surrounding barrenness, particularly directed towards women, is a deeply ingrained societal issue that transcends cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries. Across many cultures, there persists a pervasive belief that a woman's value is intrinsically linked to her ability to conceive and bear children. Consequently, women who find themselves unable to meet this expectation often encounter social ostracization, discrimination, and stigma. This stigma can manifest in various forms, such as social isolation, blame, and shame. Women grappling with barrenness may experience exclusion from family gatherings, community events, and religious ceremonies, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression. Moreover, they may face internalized guilt and a sense of failure, compounded by societal pressures and expectations. Barrenness can strain marital relationships, especially in societies where marriage is primarily viewed as a means of procreation. Couples may feel pressured by family members and societal norms, resulting in tension, resentment, and potential marital discord. Furthermore, women may encounter a lack of understanding and support from healthcare providers, religious leaders, and even friends and family members, exacerbating their feelings of isolation and despair.

Addressing the stigma of barrenness necessitates a comprehensive approach involving education, advocacy, and support services. Efforts to challenge harmful beliefs and

attitudes about infertility, promote empathy and understanding, and provide access to reproductive healthcare and fertility treatments are crucial steps toward reducing the stigma surrounding barrenness and fostering support for individuals and couples navigating the challenges of infertility.

Barren couples face substantial societal pressure and stigma, particularly in societies like Africa, which place significant importance on having children. Since women are perceived as responsible for giving birth, society often attributes barrenness to curses, bewitchment, past abortions, or questionable lifestyles. Consequently, infertility becomes a more burdensome and distressing experience for women. Unfortunately, regardless of their other contributions to society, women may be deemed worthless until they become mothers, leading to shame and stigmatization until they conceive. To cope with this challenging situation, barren women are compelled to subject themselves to both physical and spiritual examinations in search of a solution to their fertility issues. They are expected to consult pastors, spiritualists, and diviners in an effort to find remedies for their inability to bear children.

The constant pressure on barren women to seek solutions wherever and whenever possible serves as a validation mechanism for society's expectations and beliefs. This relentless pursuit of help is seen as an acknowledgment of their worth in the eyes of others. Yejide made an attempt to conceive a child on the "Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles," where she was asked to perform peculiar rituals such as dancing, cuddling a

goat as if it were a baby, and even breastfeeding it. Despite her efforts, she eventually became 'pregnant', but unfortunately, it was diagnosed as 'pseudocyesis' (247).

During the initial stages of Yejide's struggle with infertility, her mother-in-law, Moomi, suggested a prayer and fasting session. However, Yejide was unable to maintain the regimen, which inadvertently gave the impression that she was not taking the matter seriously.

Moomi told me that before asking God to give me a child, I must ask for the grace to be able to suffer for that child. She said I wasn't ready to be a mother yet if I was fainting after three days of fasting (14).

Furthermore, certain cultures and traditions within African society view a barren wife as an incomplete woman, reinforcing this perspective through the use of demeaning and insulting proverbs. These proverbs not only undermine the emotions of these women but also highlight the insensitivity and humiliation they face due to their childlessness. For instance, in Kenya, a saying goes, "The woman whose sons have died is richer than the barren woman," while in Burkina Faso, there is a proverb that states, "A barren woman should not scold a bad child." Similarly, a Swahili proverb asserts, "A barren wife never gives thanks," implying that she has no cause or joy to express gratitude, and a Gikuyu proverb echoes this sentiment, stating, "The woman who has children does not desert her home." These proverbs perpetuate the social pressure on childless women and contribute to the marginalization and belittlement they experience in African society.

In some customs, whenever a barren woman dies after her husband, she is not laid to rest in her husband's land. It is believed that she is a stranger in such land with no possession. Her corpse is then sent back to her father's house where she will be buried.

Yejide, perceived as a barren woman, endured pressure and stigmatization from her husband's family members. Despite consistently showing respect towards her in-laws, they never visited her to check on her well-being. Instead, their interactions with her were solely centred around discussing her struggles with conceiving, mainly with Akin, her husband. Each time Yejide meets with Moomi, she is reminded of how patient Moomi has been about Yejide's conception challenges. To resolve Yejide's problem, Akin is urged to marry Funmilayo as his second wife, and Yejide is compelled to embrace and accept Funmilayo. Unfortunately, Funmilayo perpetuates the gossips and stigma associated with Yejide during her visit to Yejide's salon.

She went on her knees again. 'I know people say you are barren, but there is nothing God cannot do. I know that once I conceive, your own womb too will be opened. If you say I should not come here, I will not come, but I want you to know that this bitterness can be one of the things causing the barrenness-o. Goodbye, Ma.' (39)

Barren women can experience a sense of stigma influenced by the behaviour of other women around them. The mockery and ridicule barren women receive also involves the gossips, petty fights, confrontations and stigma from rivals, family members and the

society. Reports indicate that witnessing mothers flaunting their children can leave childless women feeling sorrowful and stigmatized. The reaction and behaviours of some husbands further adds to the stigma that their wives face. These husbands also have the mentality of women being the sole provider of children, thus they tend to maltreat their wives and/or engage in polygamy.

Mbiti points out that in African societies, divorce was sometimes considered a solution when a marriage failed to produce children (133). He further states that the concept of marriage and childbearing is deeply ingrained in many African cultures as a divine command or teaching from God (104). With no medical or concrete proof, the fact that the husband divorces his wife or takes a second wife already points to the woman as the root cause of the childlessness. The unfortunate consequence is that instead of childbearing being a source of joy for the family, it becomes a burden that can contribute to domestic violence.

Alternatively, according to Kimathi, the frustration arising from a childless marriage leads the husband and wife to consider bringing another woman or girl into the family to bear children (83). In some cases, if an agreement cannot be reached, the husband's family may introduce a new wife for their son, forcing polygamy upon the barren woman. This practice further marginalizes and victimizes childless wives within their own families.

Funmilayo's introduction into the love life of Yejide and Akin was aimed at Akin getting a son as soon as possible, with little regard about how Yejide will feel about the new wife.

'Our wife, our people say that when a man has a possession and it becomes two, he does not become angry, right?' Baba Lola said.

I nodded and smiled.

'Well, our wife, this is your new wife. It is one child that calls another one into this world. Who knows, the king in heaven may answer your prayers because of this wife. Once she gets pregnant and has a child, we are sure you will have one too,' Baba Lola said (13).

Conclusion

The societal pressure and discriminatory attitudes towards women contribute to feelings of shame, worthlessness, and isolation. With the stigma attached to barrenness, traditional beliefs and cultural norms also fuel these harmful stereotypes, leaving women vulnerable to mistreatment and strained relationships within their families and communities.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the imbalance between the treatment of the male and female gender, and also the pervasive stigma of barrenness in Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

STYLE IN AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S *STAY WITH ME*

Ayobami Adebayo in *Stay with Me* masterfully weaves a captivating narrative to immerse readers in the complex fabric of Nigerian culture

This essay discusses the ways Adebayo's deliberate language choices and characters enrich the novel's themes and subject matter.

Point of View

The book starts with a chapter set in 2008, then goes back to events in 1985, 1987, and 1992 respectively. Each part begins in Ilesha in 2008, then shifts to earlier times. The story spans 25 years and is mostly told from Yejide's perspective, with occasional insights from Akin.

The novel employs a first-person narrative, alternating between the perspectives of two main characters, Yejide and Akin. The 42 chapters are divided unevenly, with Yejide's voice dominating 28 chapters and Akin's voice featured in 14. The narrative switches between the two characters unpredictably, without a discernible pattern.

In some chapters, the narrator's identity is ambiguous until several paragraphs in. While the story largely unfolds chronologically, the first chapter of each part deviates from this structure. Additionally, this narrative technique employed by Adebayo allows the characters to frequently reminisce about past events and memories through flashbacks,

thus, adding depth to the narrative. By alternating between Yejide and Akin's first-person perspectives, Adebayo skilfully creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy, drawing the reader into the innermost thoughts and feelings of each character.

This dual narrative approach also enables the reader to experience the story from multiple angles, heightening the sense of tension and suspense as the characters' secrets and lies are gradually revealed.

Diction and Language

Diction as a literary device refers to an author's choice of words in order to convey his/her messages clearly to the reader. It involves both vocabulary choices and sentence constructions.

Ayobami Adebayo's novel *Stay with Me* stands as proof to the richness of Nigerian culture and the power of storytelling. Through her masterful use of language, Adebayo skilfully crafts a narrative that resonates with readers on different levels.

At its core, *Stay with Me* is a profound Nigerian story, steeped in the traditions, customs, and social dynamics of its setting. Adebayo navigates themes of infertility, societal expectations, and familial duty against the backdrop of Nigeria's social-political landscape.

One of the standout features of Adebayo's writing is her use of her similes, which infuse the narrative with a sense of immediacy and depth. From likening a character's

complexion to the inside of an unripe mango to describing a foul odour as reminiscent of stale urine.

“If one moved close enough, that mouth oozed an unbearable stench, like stale urine” (17).

Adebayo’s descriptive prowess extends beyond similes to encompass richly drawn scenes that linger in the reader’s mind long after the book is closed. Thus, her imageries are vivid and rich.

Alongside the names of the characters, the ‘Yoruba English’ employed in the conversations of some of the characters and in the telling of proverbs, folklores and songs is also a thing of beauty, particularly for those who understand the language. We see phrases like

“Eeran leaves” (36)

“Egbere” / Bush baby (39)

“Iya ni wura, Iya ni wura iyebiye ti a ko le f’owo ra” / Mother is a gold that cannot be bought (46)

L’ojo ikunle a gbohun Iya a gbohun omo / when the mother gives birth, both she and her child will be alive (69)

Se ko si / Hope there is nothing (148)

Saanu mi, malo, omo mi joo nitori olorun. Saanu mi. Duro timi / Pity me, don't go, my child, please in the name of God. Have mercy on me. Stay with me (181)

Additionally, food also plays a significant role. It is used as a potent symbol of hospitality, power, and manipulation within the story, reflecting the intricate social dynamics at play. Yejide's decision to serve bean pottage to her visitors not only highlights her defiance of societal norms but also underscores the ways in which food can be used to assert control and express emotions.

'I will prepare the food,' I said, refusing to ask them again what they wanted to eat. Now that they have introduced Funmi, it was acceptable for Baba Lola and Iya Martha to have a meal. I was not ready to cook a separate meal for each person, so I served them what I wanted. I gave them bean pottage. I mixed the three-day-old beans I had been planning to throw in the bin with the freshly cooked pottage. Even though I was sure they will notice the mixture tasted a little bad, I counted on the guilt Baba Lola was masking with outrage at my behaviour and the glee Iya Martha was hiding beneath her displays of dismay to keep them eating (17-18).

Through her meticulous selection of words and phrases, Adebayo not only show the lively culture of Nigeria but also reveal her characters' deep feelings. She uses similes and powerful descriptions to make the story richer, pulling readers into an experience that feels both personal and relatable. *Stay with Me* shows how language can link us to a

location, its people, and their tales. Adebayo mixes local language, traditional stories, and symbols found in food and daily life to create a story that is deep in culture and really interesting.

Characterization

Characterization is the process by which an author creates and develops a character in a story, play, or novel. It is the way an author reveals a character's personality, traits, motivations, and emotions to the reader or audience.

Most importantly, Ayobami's characters are the frame which are used to drive home the messages intended.

Akin

As good a person as he seemed, Akin let his pride, stupidity and his idea of masculinity pretty much destroy his family. Ayobami Adebayo uses Akin in a culture where perceptions of masculinity and femininity are so rigid, to depict the flaw in the logic of childbirth being the duty of a woman.

He is portrayed as a complex and flawed character who struggles with societal expectations and his own sense of masculinity. He is under pressure from his family to have children, and this leads him to make decisions that ultimately harm his marriage and relationships. In his marriage with Yejide, he agrees with her about polygamy being a no

for them and tries to be very supportive. He however agrees to marry a second wife (Funmi) when he is pressured by his family members to produce an heir.

Being a man and a first-born son in a Nigerian-Yoruba society, he understands that it would be completely emasculating and disgraceful for people to know that he is unable to use what Iya Bolu and Yejide's customer, Aunty Sadia, called his "hard thing." Akin's foolishness is compounded by his decision to keep his infertility a secret from his wife and mother, leading to a set of tragic events. He convinces his brother to seduce his wife and have sex with her so she can conceive, and when Funmi discovers the truth, he inadvertently causes her death.

Also, he passively watches as Yejide endures the heartbreak of losing two children, all while knowing he is the root cause of their suffering. This devastating chain of events illustrates the destructive consequences of rigid and toxic masculinity.

Throughout the novel, Akin's character undergoes significant development as he grapples with the consequences of his actions and confronts the societal norms that have shaped his behaviour.

Yejide

Yejide is one of the two main voices in the novel and the novel begins and ends with a chapter from her perspective. Yejide is the protagonist in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me*. She is a complex and round character whom Adebayo uses to drive home the novel's

subject matter. The name Iyejide (often shortened to Yejide) is traditionally given to her because she was born under tragic circumstances. The name is used for female children whose mother dies during or shortly after childbirth. This fact however made her grow up as a lonely and sad child.

“I had no father, no mother, and no sibling. Akin was the only person in the world who would really notice if I went missing” (79).

Yejide and Akin met in the university, where they shared a passion for social justice and activism. Yejide made it clear that she wanted to wait until they were married to consummate their relationship, a commitment that Akin readily agreed to.

After several years of her marriage to Akin, Yejide is unfairly labelled as barren by his family, who then exert immense pressure on her to produce a child at any cost. This societal pressure takes a devastating toll on her mental and emotional well-being, leading to unbearable stress and eventually, a state of delusion and pseudocyesis.

“... I began seeing a psychiatrist on Wednesdays. I’d never heard of pseudocyesis until then and though it sounded to me like a made-up word, I went for my appointment every week and my body began to revert gradually to its normal size” (95)

Yejide’s quest for a child transforms from a desire to an active pursuit and, eventually, a fervent obsession. She undergoes hospital tests and scours for the names of

renowned doctors, pastors, prophets, and herbalists. Ultimately, her relentless search leads her to the "Mountain of Jaw-Dropping Miracles," where she seeks the guidance of Prophet Josiah, a self-proclaimed healer and child giver.

Under the guidance of Prophet Josiah, she performs a trance-like dance, clinging to the white goat she had brought to the mountain, as she is surrounded by a group of followers who chant and swarm around her. After this experience, a transformed Yejide descends the mountain, now convinced that she is with child.

Yejide is an unfortunate victim of circumstance, unfairly blamed for her husband's infertility. She is coerced into accepting Funmi as a second wife and later falls prey to Akin's deceit, unwittingly sleeping with his brother, Dotun.

It's fitting that the theme of death shadows Yejide throughout the novel, as she experiences the heartbreak of losing her own mother early in life, and children later in the novel. Children born out of her extramarital affair with her husband's brother Dotun.

Although she is described as elegant, self-sufficient, and hardworking, she falls victim to the whims of the society and is left with no choice than to conform. Adebayo uses Yejide's naivety about sexual reproduction to show how manipulative her 'understanding' could be, and also the cruelty of the society on childless women.

Moomi

Moomi is the mother of Akin and the mother-in-law of Yejide. She is actively involved in Akin's life as she pushes him to make certain decisions. Although she has 2 children (Akin and Dotun). She is more engrossed in Akin's life due to him being the first born and being the childless one amongst her children.

Moomi however symbolises the society. As much as Akin's pressures came from his family members, Moomi could be termed as the leader who will leave no stone unturned until her son gets his own child. Besides pressuring Akin, she also gives advice, tips and instructions on what Yejide needs to do so as to have a child. Moomi, Yejide's once compassionate mother-in-law tells Yejide that:

‘Have you ever seen God in a labour room giving birth to a child? Tell me, Yejide, have you ever seen God in the labour ward? Women manufacture children and if you can't you are just a man. Nobody should call you a woman.’ She gripped my wrists and lowered her voice to a whisper. ‘This life is not difficult, Yejide. If you cannot have children, allow my son to have some with Funmi. See, we are not asking you to stand up from your place in his life, we are just saying you should shift so that someone else can sit down.’

In her relentless pursuit of grandchildren, Moomi embodies the societal pressures faced by women to fulfil traditional roles, especially in the context of marriage and

motherhood. Her harsh words to Yejide highlight the intensity of her expectations and the deep-rooted cultural beliefs she represents. Despite her seeming harshness, Moomi's actions are driven by her own experiences and the societal values she upholds, painting a complex picture of a woman caught between love for her family and adherence to cultural norms. Ultimately, Moomi's character challenges the reader to reflect on the broader societal pressures that shape individual lives and relationships, making her a pivotal figure in the unfolding drama of family, tradition, and personal identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Adebayo Ayobami's *Stay with Me* is a masterful exploration of the complexities of human relationships, culture, and identity. Through her skilful manipulation of perspective, diction, and cultural heritage, Ayobami weaves a narrative that is both deeply personal and universally relatable.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The novel, *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo, in context of Africa and more specifically Nigeria, gives us a deep look into how society shape the roles of men and women. The novel especially shows how much more pressure women face compared to men. In the story's traditional world, men are valued as the ones who will carry on the family name, while women are just seen as tools for this purpose, expected to marry and move away. This unfair treatment of women is a big problem that affects everything from government policies to daily family life.

The political structure in Nigeria is demonstrably favouring to men, creating systemic barriers to women's participation and representation. This imbalance extends into the household, where cultural norms and expectations place a higher value on male children, viewing them as the continuers of the family legacy, while female children are often regarded as temporary members who will eventually leave through marriage.

Also, the societal pressures faced by women are vividly illustrated in Ayobami Adebayo's novel *Stay with Me*, where the protagonist Yejide bears the brunt of blame and pressure for being unable to conceive, specifically a son, which is seen as her duty to her husband. This expectation to seek both religious and medical solutions to her supposed infertility is a burden not equally shared by her husband, Akin, despite the fact that he is

the one with fertility issues. This narrative underscores the double standards and the silent struggles that women endure due to gender biases.

Furthermore, this work exposes the stigma attached to barrenness, and the various forms of which it is been perpetuated, particularly within the African context. The traditional roles within the African household, where the father is the protector and provider and the mother is the nurturer and caretaker, further fuels the stigma attached to barrenness, invariably placing the blame on the woman. The narrative of Yejide in Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay with Me* serves as a stark representation of the pressures and extreme measures women are subjected to in the face of infertility.

The expectation for women to seek help from any possible avenue, even when it involves unconventional and demeaning practices like 'breastfeeding a goat at the Mountain of Jaw Dropping Miracles', highlights the desperation and lengths to which they are pushed.

Notably, this research has shed light on the cultural and proverbial language that perpetuates the stigmatization of barren women, such as the denial of burial rights within the husband's family home, further alienating them even in death. The behavior of husbands, as exemplified by Akin's decision to take a second wife, Funmi, not only stigmatizes but also marginalizes their first wives, intensifying the sense of failure and isolation.

Adebayo also employs a non-linear narrative and continuously alternates perspectives to explore the complexities of marriage, societal expectations, and personal identity. Through the eyes of Yejide and Akin, the reader experiences the nature of love, complications and the weight of cultural pressures.

The novel's language is also accessible yet rich with emotion, weaving Yoruba phrases and cultural references into a tapestry that celebrates the depth and beauty of Nigerian life. The use of food as a metaphorical weapon by Yejide against her in-laws encapsulates the silent battles fought within domestic spaces.

The characters of Akin, Yejide, and Moomi are deftly crafted to represent broader societal issues. Akin's struggle with impotence and societal pressure to produce a male heir reflects the patriarchal demands placed on African men. Yejide's character challenges the narrative that blames women for infertility, while Moomi represents the relentless societal expectations.

Ultimately, *Stay with Me* stands as a profound reflection on the essence of our existence, challenging the predefined roles we adopt and the decisions we make within their confines. The narrative strikes a chord with anyone who has ever struggled with the complex interplay of self-authenticity and societal expectations.

This work calls for a transformative shift in societal mindsets and policies that sustain gender inequalities. It advocates for a holistic approach that acknowledges the inherent value and capabilities of every person, irrespective of gender.

Also, this work urges a thorough reassessment of these deep-seated cultural standards and champions a movement towards progress. It highlights the importance of education and open conversation in dispelling the myths associated with infertility and fostering a more empathetic and informed perspective.

In conclusion, *Stay with Me* serves as a powerful critique of the gender biases found in the Nigerian society. It compels readers to question and confront the unfair burdens placed on women. Adebayo's main characters—Yejide, Akin, and Moomi—embody the complex interplay between personal desires and societal expectations, highlighting the need for societal transformation. The novel advocates for a re-evaluation of cultural norms and calls for an inclusive approach that values and empowers all individuals, regardless of gender.

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