EMPOWERED WOMEN IN SELECTED PLAYS OF AHMED YERIMA

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this thesis Empowered Women in Selected Plays of Ahmed Yerima was done by **Eunice Imo KALU,** in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City.

PROF. E.O. OKWECHIME	**Date**
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Head of Department	

DEDICATION

I am in no little way grateful to Almighty God for the completion of this work. He was and still is my stay-power. He has all the glory, indeed.

My gratitude goes to all my lecturers in the department for their tireless effort to the refining of this work. Special thanks to my supervisor, Professor E. O. Okwechime, for his relentless effort in the realisation of this work.

Many thanks to my parents, Mr and Mrs Kalu Imo, for their undying love for education and helping me start the first steps towards my live for education. A big thank you to all my siblings, especially to my big sister, Mrs Ugonma Kalu-Bazuaye, who comes through always for me.

My love and appreciation to my husband, Farouk Momodu: your support is next to none. Thank you for taking care of our girls, Rachel and Michelle, who bring joy to us always.

This work is also dedicated to all women who leave people better than they met them.

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ABSTRACT

Women have in diverse ways contributed to the development and growth of society. Their contribution leave every community where they are belong better than it was.

This study, which is anchored on women's empowerment theories, covers three plays of Ahmed Yerima: "The Wooden Pot", "The Sick People" and "Erelu-Kuti". The study examines the economic, political and cultural roles of women in these plays.

Each play analyses the relevance of empowered women in society in the aspect of politics, economics and culture. These women have in no small way given to society what their male counterparts have. Their contributions are as relevant and elevating as that of men who have made their habitat and those around them better.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Purpose of Study

This study attempts examination of the economic, political and cultural roles of women in selected plays of Ahmed Yerima. The study further projects how the contributions of these empowered women to their families and societies place them in respectable positions. By so doing, the study highlights how women compete favourably with their male counterparts.

1.2 Scope of Study

The study covers three selected plays of Ahmed Yerima. To this end, the study is restricted to the following plays of his: "The Wooden Pot," "The Sick People," and "Erelu Kuti." However, Yerima has written several plays that transcend these three. The decision to go with these three out of other plays of his is found in the fact .that the concern of the present study is well replicated in them

1.3 Methodology

This study adopts content analysis method. Content analysis is the study of information which is recorded in texts, media or physical items. It differs from other kinds of qualitative method in the sense that it does not require data gathering from people. It is purely text-based. The primary data is made up of three selected plays. The manifestations of the economic, political and cultural roles of women are examined. The primary texts are complemented with relevant secondary materials and critical opinions to validate its findings. Additionaly, the interpretation of textual data is guided by theoretical assumptions drawn from women empowerment.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The study is anchored on women's empowerment theories. In this connection, the background to theorisation of women empowerment is provided. Empowerment as a broad concept is discussed here with respect to women. Its meaning, dimensions and theorisation are explored below to offer a basis for theoretical aspects of the concept.

The major problem of a woman is found in the very unhealthy condition of not being considered as a complete human being. Various aspects of her being and existence are seen differently and are emphasised as independent of each other. This aspect of consideration of a woman not only denies her of her total identity but explains her vulnerability to different aspects of exploitation. Deeply rooted societal beliefs, social customs, bias towards women, and different aspects of popular culture like cinema, TV and popular literature to entrench these stereotypical constructions of women such gender identities construction and production is traceable to entrenched societal listing and structure. A woman is portrayed as a symbol of societal dignity and an embodiment of cultural values. She is considered as a signifier of her family honor, community and even society. She is also an object of male dominance and it is against this background that the concept of empowerment is discussed.

Empowerment has been defined by various authors. Empowerment, according to Sen and Grown, is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control, and to transformative action (4) . To Bhatt, empowerment is " the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power" (48) . The goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and

institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor women to gain access to, and control over both material and informational resources "(5)

1.4.1 Scopes of Empowerment

Personal: This relates to development of a sense of self confidence and individual capacity and getting rid of the impacts of internalised oppression.

Relational: It is the development of the ability to engage and impact the manner of a relationship and decision made within it.

Collective: This deals with the aspect of individuals working together to actualise a wider effect than an individual could have done when acting alone. It entails participation in political structures, but could include collective action touching on cooperation instead of competition (7).

Socio-economic: Gender relations are decided majorly by interaction of aspects in which structure of societies, specific history, cultural practices and, economic conditions and political ideologies are pervasive in a given society play a significant role (8)

1.4.2 Theorisation of Women Empowerment

The concept of women empowerment could be said to have gained heightened attention in the latter half of twentieth century when it was increasingly discussed and advanced by third world feminists and women's organisations (15). Sen and Grown, while analysing three decades of development policies targeted at women, note that the idea was initially developed when scores of feminist intellectuals and activists that included those engaged

in Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN), projected engagement of constructing a coherent framework through which "development, social and economic crises, the subordination of women and feminism" could be grasped (16). Therefore, the initial move for women's empowerment is traceable to a theoretical framework that was predicated on the subordination of women, as well as the roles of colonialism and policy development in framing the position of developing countries and women in the global world order. Additionally, there was a recognition of the importance of women's agency and self transformation (19). Antrobus posits that empowerment involves a process that makes a powerless woman to gain autonomy, self- control and confidence and with a group of women and men, a level of group power over repressive social conditions. She hinges her argument on the fact that when women start to comprehend gender oppression and mobilise themselves to change the ways in which various institutions approve of and influence their treatment as second class citizens, the collective empowerment of women will take place. Also, Antrobus is of the opinion that empowerment could take place at a personal level. By causing the enthronement of an egalitarian and just society, the process of women's empowerment gives rise to a "redistribution of power within, as well as between societies" and groups. This is achieved partly through actions "ranging from acts of individual resistance to mass political mobilisations that challenge basic power relations"(18).

Antrobus appropriates Moser's concepts of practical and strategic gender needs and interest to expatiate her notion of women empowerment. For Moser, practical gender interests are offshoots of practical gender needs, which are those that arise from women's daily realities and are typically a reaction to perceived pressing needs like food or health

care (22). They do not "challenge prevailing forms of subordination even though they arise directly out of them". As a result, approaches to development that only see to solving practical gender needs and interest will not ordinarily produce women empowerment. On the contrary, it is pertinent to observe that by mobilising for immediate (or practical) realities and negotiating the challenges that arise, women most times, develop a deeper knowledge of the need for more drastic revisions of power structures and in their engagements with men. Strategic gender interests are derived from an interpretation of women subjugation by men and are directly connected with men empowerment. Concern about strategic gender interests is crucial due to the fact that " practical gains are easily reserved if strategic gender interests have not been addressed "(23).

Given the above, the initial theoretical framework through which the original framing of women empowerment was conveyed recognised inequalities between men and women, subordination of women in the family, the community, the market, and the state, and stressed that women perceive oppression in various degrees in relation to their race, class, colonial background, and their country's place in the global economic order. Added to this, it insisted that women should confront oppressive systems and processes at the same time, and at diverse levels. This would create the space for empowerment to blossom at the personal and group levels(24).

The third world feminists also recognised the relevance of women's increased power that is indirect within the notion of women empowerment, but they made attempts to recognise power, not in relation to domination over other (with its unstated assumption that a victory for women) (suggest a loss for men), and more with regard to ability of

women to improve their self-reliance and internal strength. This is recognised as the right to make choices in life and to impact the dimension of change, via the capacity to acquire control over critical material and non material resources (25). Put in another way,they acknowledged that men and institutions always have “power over” women, but maintained that women do not want to acquire power over men. Rather, these intellectuals tailored their analyses towards focusing on the advancement of the view that women tend towards increasing their capabilities and abilities so as to have “power to” make life choices and be self-reliant (26).

Critical analyses of the approaches advanced during the United Nations Decade of the Advancement of Women also influenced the initial notion of women empowerment (27). The major parts of the Decade's programmes and projects originally enhanced women’s accelerated access to productive resources and their active involvement in processes of development. As Sen and Grown note, the driving insinuation of the period's programmes was that the major challenge of Third World Women was their inadequate involvement in an otherwise generous system of growth and development (28). Thus, improving women’s involvement and increasing their shares in resources, employment and income as it affects men were considered not only necessary but sufficient to affect sudden improvements in their conditions of living.

Sen and Grown maintained that particular economic processes and development strategies, both those calculated towards satisfying the requirements of and receptive to the inflows of private foreign capital and the broadening of the foreign trade sector, the prescriptions that free capital and free trade capital inflows result in the further discrimination against Third World countries and poor women and men, and the

subordination of women. Put in another way, they insisted that earlier approaches to development that revolved around improving women's productive capacities within the context of the market system, most times resulted in further maltreatment and subordination of women and girls(31).

Additionally, the limited success of this approach designated the "equity" approach by Moser was partly "due in part to the difficulties of overcoming traditional cultural attitudes and prejudices regarding women's participation in economic and social life" (33). The latter as an essential aspect of women empowerment holds that women's subordination is deeply rooted in the inner recesses of both men and women and reinforced through religious beliefs, cultural practices and educational systems " that associate women with leases status and power(34). The realisation of women empowerment is also dependent on the degree to which the humanity of women and girls is accepted, both their right to self-determination and autonomy, and the level to which adjustments in structures of patriarchy are promoted. It is arguable that the strategies of development appropriated during the decade for women did not consider this as an important responsibility, but assured that it would happen, to some extent by increasing women's participation in the market economy(35).

This approach to women empowerment was conceived and used in a decade in which the world recorded poverty increase, inspite of global efforts to check poverty levels and facilitate growth and development in Third World countries. Scores of African and Asian countries witnessed environmental and political crisis that posed a threat to their food security, while Latin America and the Caribbean had to endure financial and monetary crises that made their living conditions worse.

As a result, women empowerment was seen to be realisable through diverse departure points, political mobilisation, consciousness raising, and education (38). Additionally, changes in laws, civil codes, system of property right, control over our bodies, and the social and legal institutions, where necessary, that support male control and privileges, were considered to be necessary for the attainment of equality of women. Consequently, these thinkers emphasise the enabling circumstances for women empowerment to include participatory democracy, serious self-examination and group action. As an objective, it equally needs long term systematic strategies designed to challenge existing structures as well as the construction of accountable state.

Considering this, Sen et al advance the argument that women's organisations hold the greatest promise to promote women empowerment (39). These organisations are tailored towards designing new structures and culture that project women's needs, interests, and preferences of behavior. The self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union which has mobilised not less than 40, 000 indigent women workers in the state of Gujarat, India, is a reflection of an organisation that is trying to empower women (40). Ela Bhatt observes that an organization like SEWA represents a new phenomenon in the history of organisations. Unlike the localised one- issue movements, they tackle the multitudes of problems surrounding the working and living conditions of self-employed women working in many different trades and occupations " (42). For instance, SEWA engages in struggles for the rights of women to work to be paid wages that are fair, better working conditions and to be entitled to legal protection and social security. Bhatt explains organising as a way "to bring people together to think through their common problems, to agree on their common issues, to think through their

common action, and to forge common Ideologies“ (43). In a manner reflective of Sen et al, she opines that in “order to be effective the struggle has to be waged at various levels” -- the local, national, and international (44).

We have gone to this extent to explore the meaning, dimensions and theorisation of women empowerment, the concern of this study, to establish its suitability for the examination of the concern of this study. The foregoing analysis shows that it fits what we set out to achieve in this study.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship

In order to situate the present study and identify the research gap it seeks to fill, some critical, especially gender-related works on Ahmed Yerima's plays are reviewed. The issue of girl child marriage in Yerima's *Aetu* is the thrust of a study carried out by Taye Awoyemi.

In examining the subject matter of the research, his findings reveal that girl-child marriage has implications for the victim. Among these implications is lack of economic viability of the girl-child victim whose economic potential is circumscribed by the bleak reality she has been sentenced to. As a result, she is a “zero- contributor to National development” in view of the fact that she is not “self-reliant” (10). Another implication is its psychological impact on the victim. Citing the example of Aetu, the eponymous character of the play, she “is left numb with pain, anger, bitterness, and confusion as a result of the injustice meted out to her” (10). This psychological angle exposes its victim to life-long bitterness as the oppressors of the prey are considered as enemies by the person and lives to resent and revulse them. Awoyemi further points out that girl-child

marriage predisposes its victim to early death as “these babies with babies die at pretty young ages”(10). As a fall out of this implication, children given birth to by such a person die early because they do not receive adequate maternal care. Even when they survive, they are deprived of balanced parenting because their mother is not well equipped to handle such responsibility.

Osita C. Ezenwanebe sets out to investigate the educational empowerment of female characters in the plays of Yerima and the methods employed by the playwright in portraying them with the intention of determining the implication of the style of the playwright on the theme of the play and response of his audience. This is to enable her ascertain the implication of the theme and technique on human and national development. Used for the study are Yerima's *The Wives*, *The Sisters*, *The* P*ortraits* and *The Mirror Cracks.* To achieve the stated objective, the professional female characters in the selected plays are critically analysed to reveal the delicate interplay between subject matter, character and style in arriving at the import of the message of the plays and how they are received by the audience. The result shows that “it is the style of the playwright that conditions audience response whether approvingly or otherwise” (200). His narrative method influences how the audience perceives the plays in terms of negative and positive evaluations.

The duo of Taiwo A. Stanley Osanyemi and B. A. Adedeji explore dejavu as a dramatic technique in examing the psychic context for unfolding historical context so as to explain the construction of feminine heroism in *Aetu*. To explore the concern of the study , the researchers make resort to David Loliff's psychoanalytic framework as a theoretical model. The findings reveal that the instrumentality of dejavu is employed by

the playwright as instruments of foreshadowing and flashback in order to signal physical and psychological wars in the play (115). By implication, it is employed to depict the heroine's traumas and disclosures about her family and community's history. Given this fact, the technique is deployed by Yerima as a strategy to reconstruct history. A demonstration of this is when Aetu, the eponymous character, commits suicide in order to be reunited with Ateba, her lover, so as to be free from the thousand heartaches that this world represents.

Discussing the manifestation of unconscious in patterns of dream as a technique to examine feminism and origin of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region so as to highlight the connection between the crises of the female characters, their challenge and the environmental consequences. Taiwo A. Stanley Osanyemi focuses his investigative lens on Yerima's "Little Drops." The study, which adopts psychoanalysis and ecocriticism as theoretical tools, establishes that its adoption of psychoanalysis is to enable interrogation of unconscious motives and traumas of characters, while ecoriticism is used to investigate the interplay between characters and nature and aesthetic challenges occasioned by the crisis of environment (499). The results of the findings indicate that the unconscious type that offers the psychic environment for the text is dream. To this end, dream is utilised as a technique of flash back and a basis for the physical, psychological and environmental crises in the text (487). The study concludes by asserting that feminism and the unconscious are necessary ingredients in the playwright's history and environmental representation.

The oil crisis in Ahmed Yerima's "Little Drops" as it affects the issue of violence and its implications for the common man in the region is the subject of investigation

carried out by Lawal Nurudeen Adeshina. In addition, the study looks at the performance elements employed in portraying this motif. The study demonstrates that against the often peddled impression that the struggle in the region is for the interest of the common people, the playwright reveals that the circle of violence in the region is motivated by selfish considerations among the powers that be in the area. It highlights the debilitating effects of the frequent resort to violence during the crisis on the people and the areas that make up the region. It further points out that the crisis, instead of alleviating the pains of the ordinary people who are in the majority, visits on them physical and psychological suffering with its associated avoidable loss of lives (13). The study surmises that Yerima's "Little Drops" is a key dramatic reconstruction of the crisis of oil in the Niger Delta region. In view of this ,instead of violence, the play suggests interaction, responsible representation, good governance among other suggestions as necessary preconditions for thorough and fitting closure to the crisis in the area.

B. A. Adedeji and A. A. Oladipupo look at the way Yerima handles history in order to produce satirical drama through the instrumentality of dream "to showcase his imaginative idiosyncrasy "in *Aetu* (121). To explore the concern of the study, resort is made to Karl Jung's version of dream theory of psychologysis. This allows for the interrogation of characters' unconscious drives and group archetypes. It is found that the dream patterns represent techniques of and flashback to the conflicts of physical and psychological dimensions in the text (33). More specifically, the dream patterns serve as pointers to the central character's traumas, which are induced by her naivity. Additionally, the psychic and sarcastic revelation of the bigotry, crudity and exploitation that characterise Nigeria's socio-political environment are depicted using dream patterns.

The historical import of Yerima's *Attahiru* is the thrust of a study undertaken by Isyaku Hassan et al. In this direction,the study seeks to illuminate Yerima's deployment of dramaturgy and theatricals in *Attahiru* to question and reject the distorted account of the Sokoto Caliphate's history by colonial history in an affective and effective manner. To attain the aim of the study, the researchers make use of textual analysis by fusing author based model with context based model. The result reveals that ordinary people of the pre-colonial Northern Nigeria as conveyed by the characters defended the cause and resisted colonialism (174). Consequently, the play demonstrates how literature serves as instrument of rebuffing Western favoured account of the event and contributes to the existing literature on northern Nigeria. Thus, Yerima corrects the impression, especially erroneous teachings in schools for several years in southern Nigeria, in respect of the relationship between the government of colonial rule and the North.

Toeing a similar historical path, Rasheedah Liman attempts a repudiation of extant historical accounts of the encounter between Emir Attahiru in Yerima's *Attahiru* and the colonial government. The study notes that Yerima's account produces a new approach that demands the presentation of the history version that differs from the position in circulation on the colonial encounter in the North. The colonial version shows Sultan Attahiru, the Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate in the late 19th century, as an agent of destabilisation and a threat to the colonial government, specifically in the northern protectorate. This notion is what Yerima challenges using a narrative technique depicting "political resistance and the discourse of tradition and modernity, conflicts of religion and culture and the question of identity and power" (158). The study concludes by asserting

that Yerima "…is able to combine facts with fiction to educate and entertain his audiences "(169).

The issue of the changing nature of identity politics in the drama of Ahmed Yerima is investigated by Harry Olufunwa. The study advances the claim that the playwright attributes the vital ingredients in relationships that exist among and within characters and social groups portrayed in his plays as an aspect of his whole focus on the society's nature. Citing some of his plays as a demonstration of this claim, the study argues that merely taking a look at the particular manners groups and individuals engage in relationships, the explanation of politics of identity in drama assists in achieving deeper understanding of the various ways society as a whole is organised in real life(24). As a result, the portrayal of deceased kings in *Oba Ovonoramwen*, *Ame Obi*, and *Attahiru* is an indirect explication of the way present day political leaders should know more about their contracted relationships. Thus, the attitudes as exhibited in the plays contrast sharply with the obvious lack of dignity, or even shame ,that characterises the Nigerian polity today.

Analysing the effects of time and historical change on Nigerian feminist literature by looking at Yerima's *Aetu*, Albert Olatunde Oloruntoba presents an interpretation of the manner the play engages the issue of cultural subordination of women in Yoruba tradition. Against this backdrop, the study establishes that *Aetu* provides a clear and uncontradictory denunciation of the various types of culturally subjugating practices it addresses (108). Thus, the play serves as a clarion call to Nigerian men to end the reprehensible practice of wife inheritance. Additionally, the play's use of a multiple

"temporal structure (using circularity and analepsis)" reveals the inextricable link between women's time and experience (108).

As the above reviews have shown, scholary criticism on Yerima's plays pursue gender and historical paths. Noticeable from the reviews also is the fact that the texts of attention in this study have not received much scholarly attention. Again, gender – related studies in Yerima's plays have focused mainly on projection of culture-induced women subordination. Yerima's projection of women's empowerment has received scant attention. This gap in research is what the present study seeks to fill.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Ahmed Yerima's "The Wooden Pot," "The Sick People," and "Erelu-Kuti" project economic, political, and cultural roles of women.

CHAPTER TWO

ECONOMIC ROLES OF EMPOWERED WOMEN IN SELECTED PLAYS OF AHMED YERIMA

The fortune of any nation or society depends on its economy and the economy depends on good players, that is, merchants of business men and women. In the study of selected Yerima's plays, it is discovered that some women projected are economically inclined and relevant in the society.

Erelu is a successful business woman and when it comes to trans-border or international business she is a force to reckon with. This claim is expressed by King Akinsemoyin:

AKINSEMOYIN: Please be seated, gentlemen.

I have invited you here today to meet those who own Lagos. In due course, you shall meet them better. The lady amongst us is my sister, Erelu, herself a successful trader in Lagos. I believe that it is good for you to meet both the great men and women of Lagos. I know who you are but I will like you to introduce yourselves to them.

JOAO: (Rises) I thank your Royal Highness, I am Joao de Oliveira. I am from Brazil, and I trade mainly in human cargo. Thank you. (sit)

DOMINGO: (Rises) I am Damingo Martinez, I am from Portugal, and I am a general trader of cotton and silk. But I also deal in slave trade. Thank you, Your Excellency. (Bows and Sits) (18-19)

Lagos under the reign of Oba Akinsemoyin reached a higher level of commercial development. International traders arrive the city to discuss business. Despite being in a patriarchal society, Erelu is considered a commercial giant that cannot be ignored. Her place in the business circle of Lagos is similar to that of Iyaloja described by Okolocha. According to Okolocha, "the market continues to be the seat of the economy in contemporary time but the difference is that modern concepts of trade are well beyond foodstuff and household items sold within the restricted confines of the market place. What is immediately apparent in Death is that the market place is a woman's domain in traditional society" (108). A visit to most markets will reveal the place of women in the economic space of any country. More than men are the numbers of women who engage in business activities. Production of goods and services is not complete until finished goods get to the final consumers. Women are always at the end of most production stages because they reach final consumers through their business activities. The most successful and influential becomes "Iyaloja," that is, the mother or head of a market. Erelu's influence portrays her as one.

Considering her economic influence, Yerima depicts Erelu as a financial or business arbiter, that is, an individual with an authority to decide what will happen in a situation. Foreign business men who have challenges in running their business smoothly consult her to bail them out. This is recounted thus:

ERELU: You mean you have not been able to see Oba Kekere all this while?

JOAO: No, Your Highness

DOMINGO: The major problem we have is that someone has convinced him that we were bad people to do business with. They have brought in

other slaves dealers. And infact we hear some of the chiefs have convinced the Oba to introduce Palm oil merchants to rival our slave market.

JOAO: This has made things very difficult for us. I am almost moving my post totally to Port Novo.

ERELU: Ha….. it is not that bad.

JOAO: It is bad. This is why we have come, Your Highness, to seek your help in putting in a word for us with the king.

DOMINGO: And if you did this successfully, then we will cut you in for a percentage in our new deals at the wharf. (53-54)

At the height of their economic woes and barrier, Joao and Domingo approach Erelu to get her support and intervention. As an empowered woman or business tycoon, she wades into the crisis surrounding the business of Joao and Domingo. The concept of female empowerment holds that women who strive to be financially independent and economically intelligent always find it easier to compete favourably with men. Erelu's position as a successful trader qualifies her to discuss an important business matter with top business men. Being empowered distinguishes her from petty traders whose economic exposure is too shallow to command trans border business deals.

Yerima's "The Wooden Pot" is replete with single mothers who fight all odds to get their family members out of difficult and tight situations. These women are different from well known traditional African women who live with their husbands as couples.

Anthonia M. Essien and Agapetus A. Bassey assert that, "the traditional concept of family of husband, wife and child or children is facing challenges. In recent times,

there is a proliferation of “alternative family” forms such as one-parent families” (240). These single mothers go through many challenges that almost choke them out of existence. In “The Wooden Pot,” Sedu tells the story of a woman who transforms from a wretched abandoned wife to a celebrity. According to her, at first:

> SEDU: Her stench was so strong, you could touch it. She oozed, and as she passed, the people’s hearts were swelled to tears. Her voice cracking in between, was tearful as she told her side of the story. How your brother Sabo left her with an unfinished house and three children to take care of. How she had to do menial jobs to feed them and herself. How she finished building the house through the help of her family. At this point, half of the women cried. By the time she narrated how her husband philandered with women in the city, how he forgot her and the children for the new one’s in the city, all the women including two of the elders were in tears. (69)

The woman described above demonstrates the active spirit of a commercially oriented individual. She labours hard to be rich.

Having solved all the challenges before her, her husband surfaces to claim his house and children. She drags her husband before council of elders and she is exonerated.

> SEDU: That was not all. After she won, she told the whole gathering that she had a token for them.
>
> IKADI: Token of what?
>
> SEDU: Local gin and pipes for the elders.
>
> IKADI: Heo! Our money! My brother’s hard earned money!

SEDU: A packet of cigarette for each man, and a long black car pulled up, and she sat at the back, as they drove off with her. Her stench replaced by the smoke of the car. (70)

The experience and turn around of this woman show that no condition is permanent provided an effort is made. As an economically empowered woman, she becomes generous.

She plays the role of a philanthropist who helps the needy to meet their pressing needs.

Mama, the mother of Ikadi in "The Wooden Pot" recalls how Dede, her husband abandons her to cater for their children. Yerima uses flashback to bring back the hands of time.

According to Mama:

MAMA: After your brother built me the house in the city, your father could not swallow it. His envy grew. I had sold bean cakes to send your brother to school. Your father did not pay a kobo of the fees. He spent all his money on his woman and drinks. I paid all. When Sabo gave me the papers of the house in my name, your father swore to kill and bury me in it. All the gods I went to who ate my chicken and sacrifices could not tame him. I was going to die if I did not find a more powerful god. I was most afraid for my children's lives too. That was when I ran to the church. (77)

Mama's husband abandons his role as a father, a supposed provider for his family. She does not yield to the economic pressure that almost crushes her family. In the

absence of a dutiful husband, Mama does the needful by providing her family's needs. L.A. Keswet and A.E. Dapas note that:

> Many single parents and their children keep their jobs and also engage in extra-activities like farming, poultry production, animal production and rearing, and the production of local snacks and drinks (e.g. allele, kosai, dakuwa, zobo, kunu), just to mention but a few. Those who have grown-up children also involve them in the family business for extra income. (55)

Keswet and Dapas capture the economic efforts Mama makes to emancipate her family from the jaws of poverty. Yerima uses Mama's character to demonstrate the need to work hard in the face of poverty.

She is crafted with inner strength that motivates her to forge ahead and this pays off as she meets up with her duties. As an independent or self-reliant single mother, Mama is able to keep her family members together. Besides, she is financially capable to pay for sacrifices she needs to wade evil people.

Iviki in "The Sick People" comes from a poor family but she struggles very hard to remove her household members from the ditch of poverty.

The quest for economic turn around motivates her to travel abroad in order to seek a greener pasture.

Her return from abroad with luxurious gifts for her family members brings untold happiness. This is dramatized thus:

> IVIKI: Good. Now I brought everyone something from England. Aghata, first, I have good news for you, you shall soon become an Aunty.

MAMA ICODI: (jumps up for joy) Oni… did you hear that. My sister is heavy with child. Oghene no gie.

ONIRHODE: Oroke, we won, now the night owl must fly. (…Iviki opens the box and gives each person a gift.)

IVIKI: This one is for you. (To ICODI, who jumps for joy) this one is for you, Jumble, this one is for my loving sister. I also have your watch. These two shirts are for you. Daddy, and Oni… this shawl is for you. I did not get the colour you wanted, so I bought you a black one. (59)

Iviki is empowered with enough finance to wipe away the tears of her family members. This is unlike her mother, who finds it difficult to raise her as a single mother. Nidhi Kotwal and Bharti Prabhakar discover in a study that, "financial crises was a standing situation with most of the single mother families. The situation was that of economic helplessness. With the limited resources it was difficult for single mothers to meet the basic needs of children such as food, clothing and school fees, maintaining the previous standard of living and meet personal expenses" (200).

Iviki gets a first-hand experience of poverty and the need to change her family's fortunes drives her out of the shores of Africa. She travels to Europe where she finds a greener pasture.

Yerima's plays studies reveal that economically empowered women take charge of responsibilities that define men as patriarchs. They sponsor children's education, pay rents and cater for personal needs.

Moreover, there is no political and cultural empowerment without economic empowerment. This is demonstrated with the life of Erelu. As an empowered woman, she is nominated to carry out business dealings with Joao and Domingo, two international slave traders. She has an understanding of foreign trade and relation therefore she plays the role of an ambassador. The position of this research is that economic empowerment is central to women's emancipation. Without finance, it will be difficult for women to attain high political and cultural heights in society.

CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL ROLES OF WOMEN IN SELECTED AHMED YERIMA'S PLAYS

Women especially influential ones play key roles in every political process and that is why every political party has a woman leader. This has been so for long. M.E.M. Kolawole notes that "there is a catalogue of African women rulers and leaders who have charted their people's history in a remarkable way while the marks left by collective group action remain indelible"(43). Such women described above are given communal tasks. Erelu is one of such politically empowered women. This conversation throws light on her personality:

OLUWA: Kabiyesi, we thank Chief Aromire for the insult so far meted to us chiefs. I wish to make it categorically clear that if another incident occurs where my agents are made to wait I shall boycott the market for an alternative one.

ERELU: ASA had no more discussion on this matter. We are not at the wharf with the Chief Aromire, so we are finding it difficult to appreciate the problems he is going through. This is my decision that Chief Oluwa works with Chief Aromire as an observer for three days, and report back to us if he still feels the same anger he feels presently. He is also to advise the court on what we need to do to help ease the situation at the Wharf. Until then all further discussions on black market or alternative market is (sic) hereby forbidden. (35 - 36)

The authority with which Erelu discharges her duty as a king (regent) shows that some women have what it takes to govern society of any size. She is politically empowered to deal with issues that can pull down a society. She wields a political power that makes men listen to her counsel. Such feminine empowerment is real because it is sometimes hard to come across a powerful female character performing the great roles of Kings.

Men have sometimes fought/worked against women who aspire to gain political power. They fear that women will revolutionize the world and patriarchy will be a thing of the past. Micere Githae Mugo paints a picture that illustrates this:

According to Mugo:

> Between 1979 and 1982 I experimented with a small voluntary literacy campaign project, involving women from Kibera, one of Nairobi's huge slums. One day my best student, a beautiful mother of six, turned up at my house (where I held the class) with a swollen face and badly damaged nose. Her husband had come home and had been infuriated to find her reading a book. describing the activity as a reflection of idleness and a sign of unwomanly conduct. The angry man warned his wife that she was never to be caught at any time of day or night reading a book (51).

This is a clear case of patriarchal subjugation. The portrayal of Erelu as an unmarried King is highly fortified against patriarchal domination. Erelu enjoys unlimited freedom. Apart from being an administrative head, which is an executive arm of government, Erelu also functions as a chief judge. This makes her the head of the

executive and judiciary arm of government. She overseas chieftaincy title disputes even among clans outside her immediate domain. This is expressed in this discourse:

ELETU: (Rises) Kabiyesi, distinguished member of the court I wish to present before the court, the case of claim of chieftaincy title by some houses in Iseri and Awori.

ERELU: We know these houses but tell us why they were not made chiefs before now. Also tell this court what significant things they have done to the development of Lagos to warrant their new claims. (36)

It is not an easy task to preside over court proceedings let alone knotty issues like that of chieftaincy tussle or denial. The clear voice and uncommon wisdom that Erelu deployed in handling the aggressive complaints shows that she is worthy of the political office she occupies portrays her as an empowered woman who rules over great men and women and demonstrates a sound knowledge of history:

ERELU: Is that all? (Looks round, no one talks). We thank all present. Interestingly, the kings concerned here are well known to us. One is my grandfather, the other, my father. These men, no matter their faults, were able to do simple things like reward those who fought with them. From both expeditions came the titles of Eletu -Odido, Eletu-Wase, Olorogun and the Asogbon. There are many more we cannot mention here but if they were not given caps, such families should wait for future Obas to consider them fit. I find it irritating when slaves begin to demand for royalty. I also want to plead with

chiefs not to sell their birthright by promising titles to people they cannot defend at the palace. This is my decision on the matter.

ALL: Kabiyesi, (36-37)

The qualities that Erelu displays such as being firm and knowledgeable draw a comparison between her and Queen Amina of Zazzu who rules over the great Northern Kingdom. According to Okey Okwechime, "as a youth Amina attached herself to a grandfather and by identifying herself with the court began to acquire different skills normally unexpected of girls. Her interest in war was beyond imagination. In courage and bravery she excelled. She rejected marriage so that she can rule the people, men and women" (53). The distinguished Erelu shares most of the rare qualities Queen Amina possesses. Their place in history revealed that women have always played kingship roles in powerful kingdoms across the world.

Yerima's Erelu Kuti shows that women play an active role in nation-building and promotion of good governance. Erelu is portrayed as a force to be reckoned with and it shows how powerful and influential she is in the play. Men consult her before important discussions are held. This is expressed in this conversation:

ONISIWO: Kabiyesi, on behalf of the other chiefs, for we have met on the matter, we would like to know when Oba Akinsemoyin will return to the palace. It is already three moons and although we appreciate the work of our regent, we feel that the OBA should return and release you from the burden of governance.

ERELU: This is sweet music to our ears. But I hope the regent is not falling below expectations of the distinguished chiefs?

ALL: (They all rise and pay homage) No, Kabiyesi.

ERELU: We thank you all, Chief Olumegbon.

OLUMEGBON: Kabiyesi

ERELU: You shall live for Apa with Bajulu and Sasore, and bring back the king. (As she calls them they step forward). (37)

Erelu is evaluated by mean men who are hard to please. This proud or egoistic men agree that Erelu has ruled them well. In a claim, Jane Tompkins says that "what enrages me is the way women are used as an extension of men mirrors of men devices for showing men off, devices for helping men get what they want. They are never there in their own right or rarely. The world of the West contains no woman. Sometimes, I think the world contains no women" (gut in Bressler, 142). Tompkins paints a picture of a world that is devoid of women. Or comment or observation makes it clear that women have no place in the world other than the one men give them. The portrayal of Erelu negates Tompkins position that Erelu rules over great men and women. She does not serve as an extension of any man nor a device for showing men off. Yerima's portrayal of Erelu therefore shows that some empowered women have distinguished roles in their societies.

Men in Africa have the notion that politics and political space are their domain. To this end, they almost bar women from entering politics. Yerima crafts Erelu Kuti to inform the male folks that women also excel politically. Yerima re-lives the memory of

Erelu Kuti who reigned in colonial Nigeria. This is done against the backdrop of women who clamor for political recognition. Women's cry for justice in the political space is captured in the demand of Captain sharp in Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested.*

According to Captain Sharp, the feminist voice of the women:

> Now the synopsis of the women's demand is this. We want equal opportunity with men, this means, for example, that society should remove the prejudices which prevent women from getting into the highest positions like heads of state, governor, vice Chancellor and a lot of other top ranking positions including a spiritual office like that of the Pope or the Sheik. (73-74)

The position itemized by Captain Sharp are often protected by men against the wishes of women. It is however noted that Yerima presents some female characters who occupy such positions. For example, Erelu rules as a king when a brother is on self-exile. She administered justice and exercises authority over high chiefs. sea business and active political role that affirms the saying that what a man can do a woman can do better.

CHAPTER FOUR

CULTURAL ROLES OF WOMEN IN SELECTED AHMED YERIMA'S PLAYS

Traditions and cultural beliefs had at one point limited women's freedom. Yetunde Olukemi, Akorede writes that "socially too, the woman was placed at a disadvantaged position. She was inferior to man". (12) Culturally, women do not have the same right with men but Yerima's plays identify some women who command respect even in a male-dominated setting.

In “The Wooden Pot,” Mama, the wife of Dede, leaves him to cater for her children. She does this by going into petty trade. This is revealed in her conversation with Ikadi, her son:

> **MAMA**: After your brother Sabo built me the house in the city your father could not swallow it, his envy grew. I had sold bean cakes to send your brother to school. Your father did not pay a kobo of the fees. He spent all his money on his woman and drinks. I paid all. When Sabo gave me the papers of that house in my name your father wanted to kill and bury me in it. All the gods I went to who ate my chicken and sacrifices could not tame him. I was going to die if I did not find a more powerful god. I was most afraid for my children’s lives too. That was when I ran to the church. (77)

Mama becomes an object of envy for men whom her husband represents. And her life is put on the line because she has a house of her own. Both young and old men

respect Mama. Ikadi does not want to be like his father. Therefore, he begs his successful model to tell him more about his father. Ikadi asks:

IKADI: Mama, tell us more about Dede

MAMA: Hm, one day, he just parked his load, resigned from work and returned to the village and asked me to follow him as his wife. I refused. We had nothing in place when every month started jabbering about how I had decided to dump my husband because he no longer had anything I followed through this hell. It was here that the other battle really began (78).

Ikadi's father is not determined. Economically, he disempowers himself by resigning from his job. This put Mama at a disadvantaged position because she has to depend on a lazy husband for whatever she needs.

A woman who does not have anything she does to earn some money will be culturally reduced. First, she will find it very difficult to relate with other women around her. Besides, she will never be given any social recognition in society. Above all, our children and household members will become a butt of joke. Mama Ikadi’s mother resorts to selling bean cakes. "I had sold beans cake to send your brother to school" (77). She does this to reposition her family fallen state. The concept of empowerment shows that empowered women evaluate their situation and think of a turnaround that can change them. Empowerment of women begins from the mental attitude towards life. It is on this ground that J. Rappaport et al argued that empowerment is an internalized attitude on an observable behaviour" (3). This propels a person towards changes. Mama has come to the

realisation that her husband will get less money to cater for her and her children so she seeks material empowerment that is geared towards self-reliance.

Culturally, Mama becomes a social mobilizer for her children. She fills the gap that her husband created as a result of his mean attitude towards life. Mama has four sides about the social power of education. Therefore, she invests so much in it as her struggles pay off because a house built for her. A "house" here symbolises a social status symbols that defines a person's place in the society.

In many typical African societies, men are the leading voices and forces when it comes to offering sacrifices to the gods. They take charge of different rights involving their entire community. It is however noted that Yerima presents some culturally empowered women who have deep knowledge about sacred social religious rites. One of such women is Erelu Kuti. She leads prayers for the safe return of the king, her elder brother:

ERELU: Mothers, I bring before you the life of my brother, Oba Akinsemoyin, save him at Apa.

WOMEN: Ase!

ERELU: Bring him safely back to us

WOMEN: Ase!

ERELU: The cow we have killed for you, the woman today, accept it, let the barren have children

WOMEN: Ase!

ERELU: Let the young girls marry and have numerous children. (33)

Erelu as a cultural understanding of tradition hence she consults a medium or sorcerer on behalf of her brother who is on self-exile. She demonstrates a conscious knowledge of life through her action. Considering her social background as a princess from a royal home, she must have been taught that there is a need to strike a balance between man and forces in unseen realms.

Having been empowered by exposure to many kings, chiefs and priests, she implements divine instructions given about the safe return of her brother from exile.

According to H. Oby Okolocha, "as happened in most cultures of Nigeria a woman usually from 70 and above who is perceived to have unusual prowess or uncommon wisdom is initiated into the secret ritual cult of the community" (101). Okolocha's assertion captures Erelu's ppersonality. As a fearless woman with mature knowledge of life, her quest to protect her brother and his place as a king as an empowered woman makes her to enlist the help of other women. The high powerful priestesses acknowledges her as a voice and force to reckon with. At a critical moment of need, Erelu proves useful to her king. As a woman with some knowledge of culture, she offers to be the wife of an Ifa priest who saves her brother's life:

AKINSEMOYIN: I do not need this ridicule now. Since I returned from Apa, I have had the chiefs under my grip. I need Alagba in Lagos. Spiritually, he is good for me. If I were a woman, I will marry him myself to save the face of the King but now

the whole of Lagos will mock me. How can I rule a country when I cannot control two girls... My own daughters....

ERELU: We can never allow that to happen, Kabiyesi

AKINSEMOYIN: But it has. A man gives me my life and I cannot grant him a simple favour. Oh! the people of Lagos will mock me if the news gets out And I promised him.

ERELU: Is it a good man?

AKINSEMOYIN: A great man. Though old, he has a peaceful and gentle nature. How do I get him a good wife, Sister? I did not want to force a woman on him. She must want him from her heart. The woman must be gentle and kind. She must be like... you. A good woman.

ERELU: Ha, then Kabiyesi, for your sake and the good and success of your rain I shall have him for a husband.

AKINSEMOYIN: Ha... Erelu! (43-44)

The daughters of the King declines to marry Alagba, an elderly priest who saved their father from forces beyond him. The king promised to get him a good wife but it appears that none of the women under his control wants Alagba. Erelu, however, agrees to marry him and this action saves the King from being put to shame. Again, Erelu becomes a cultural facilitator. She finds the King (an ordinary man) with his friend (a

powerful sorcerer). This role she plays distinguishes her from other women who do not know the place of spirituality in the successful reign of their King.

Again, in “The Wooden Pot” Mama feels the need to be strong. Therefore, she seeks spiritual power that can put her husband under her control. She recounts thus:

> **MAMA**: Baking the spiritual and it's got more serious effort stronger more powerful effects. In believe the only Bible became my weapon and instead my pre wearing this white garment I feel pure and strong. When I am weak I 3 and 45 myself more and I feel stronger again. And beside Yesu is cheaper to follow, son. no sacrifices of goat and chicken. All you need is believe full stop our Good Shepherd says Faith. (77)

According to Carl G. Jung, "it takes a lot of courage to take the unconscious seriously and to tackle the problem it raises" (176). The unconscious partly relates to spiritual matter of life and only those who have power do spiritual assignment.

As an empowered woman, Mama has mastered the forces that give and take life or control human affairs. In admiration of his mother Sedu, she states:

> **SEDU**: That Yesu must have given you more than some powers. As you sprinkled the water on Ifati, we could see the child move for the first time, I really believe that Ifati is pregnant. Imaga may be wrong for the first time too. Say it was all an overgrown tissue in your stomach. I swear we all saw the baby stretch hand head leg and all (chuckle). This is all getting very interesting (80)

Imaga, a spiritualist is invited to attend to Ikadi's father's ill health. Mama is there. Mama is like a medium. A medium has power to connect with forces in higher realms. Jung finds that most mediums are women, "the majority of modern mediums are probably women, the belief is still under spread that women are more receptive than men to irrational" (177). Mama is one of such empowered women who possess great powers. Imaga declares Ikadi's father dead but Mama is able to raise him back to life.

MAMA: (Mama goes on her knees and begins another song, the other joins)... In the name of Yesu, Dede, I break whatever covenant you have with death. I command you to leave your body in the name of Yesu Kristi. I say go! Go, spirit of death. You shall not die! Live, Dede! Get up and live!

IKADI: He moved. I swear I saw him move (All watch as Dede sneezes. In a frenzy, the women continue to sing as SOKAN runs in...) (91)

To Imaga, the chief priest, Mama is able to raise her dead husband from the dead. This is a rare supernatural power wielded by a mortal human being. Yerima presents a woman who possesses power that distinguishes her in society. To quote Okolocha again, such a woman is an "alliance between the gods and man in the society" (114). She lives a sacrificial life which trains and employs its power to do and undo.

Mama adds value to people's lives and existence and where necessary, she raises the dead to life.

Culturally, she serves as an intermediary between the gods and man. She connects the ordinary with the spiritual.

Nene in “The Sick People” is culturally empowered so that she can clean outcasts. For instance, she restores Mama Icodi who pollutes herself with adultery. This is captured in the discourse:

NENE: Where is the cockerel? (ONORIODE without saying a word goes into a room and comes out with a cock. Nene collects it from her. Mama Icodi is still kneeling as Nene moves the cock around her head and body). With the blood of this cockerel, I wash away your sin. The family forgives you. May the weakness and the mockery of the people not be yours again. Rise and go and bring the clothes you used to commit your crime... With your hands, you refute your ways. Now you discard this clothes of shame. And the womenfolk accepts you back with your pledge that never again shall we walk in the shadow of shame and pity. Never will you bring shame to us again. Do I speak well?

MAMA ICODI: You speak well, Mama

NENE: Then, rise, my daughter. Welcome back to our fold. (She embraced her. The other woman in turn embraces her). (20)

Cleansing of sinners demands someone that is 45 and empowered to do so otherwise disaster will follow. Just like Mama in Yerima's “The Wooden Pot,” Nene in “The Sick People” has the sacred rights and power to lift curses and restriction on people. The intercourse that Solomon had with Mama Icodi pollutes her marriage and this makes her unworthy to her husband and the female folk.

Yetunde Olukemi Akorede writes that:

> In all ages, women devalued personality and orchestrated downward moral behavior can be traced to men's encouragement and constant patronage. Thus, men have been significant in the making or unmaking of woman's image. In the light of this, feminists argue that sex-based oppression promotes unhealthy female consciousness among women. (25)

Somehow, one can conclude that Solomon lures Mama Icodi into the evil called adultery. Though he dies after the act, Mama Icodi also becomes an outcast but thanks to Nene who redeems her.

Culturally, Nene functions as a redeemer. With her ability to lift curses and restore an outcast to normal human fold, Nene is significant in her society. Nene can be likened to Jesus who saves the human race from damnation.

Nene saves Mama Icodi from damnation that could have killed her husband and children so she is culturally relevant.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study which covers the following plays: “The Wooden Pot,” “The Sick People,” and “Erelu Kuti.” reveals that Yerima portrays women as members of society who can contribute meaningfully when given the chance. The women presented in the plays studied demonstrate that some women have what it takes to act in the capacity that men act and are proclaimed as higher social members of society.

In “Erelu Kuti” and “The Sick People,” Yerima presents women who know that the moving force that shapes society lies in its economic system. These women see economic power as the strength of patriarchy, therefore, they learn the forces of production. For example, Erelu is a slave trader and she uses her trading skills to acquire economic power. As an empowered woman, she becomes a rallying point for foreign traders who know what it means to be economically relevant. Iviki, too, travels abroad to acquire wealth. She struggles very hard to join the bourgeoisie who control economic power in society. The same goes for Mama in “The Wooden Pot.” She goes into petty trade which gives her economic edge over her husband. These women are used by the playwright to inform his audience that economically empowered women play active roles in family and society at large.

The plays studied also reveal that feminist quest cannot be realized easily unless women seek political power to defend whatever freedom they want to gain from patriarchy. This is mostly dramatized with the character of Erelu. She wields political power as a regent and the high chiefs under her authority confirm that she is capable to

govern her people. Her reign shows that women, too, have what it requires in governing a society. Contrary to patriarchal thinking that women are not endowed with the right political fibre, they need to rule over men, Yerima uses the character of Erelu to counter this egoistic view. Erelu's reign as a regent shows that women will do well in politics if empowered.

Culturally, Yerima also presents some women who know the way traditions work. They carry out rites which show that women can also direct human affairs and conducts. For example, Nene in "The Sick People" possesses the cultural power to restore an outcast. Mama in "The Wooden Pot" has spiritual powers which she uses to control lives. She uses her mystical skill to untie a pregnant woman from a medical condition that almost results in stillbirth. She uses her mystical power to return her near dead husband's life. These culturally empowered women do wonders in society. They maintain the norms that give life in traditions. They cleanse those who are condemned for wrong doings and offer sacrifices for those in danger. It is safe to conclude that culturally empowered women serve as mediators, redeemers and saviours in society. On the whole, Yerima's plays studied showcase empowered women who can compete side by side with their male counterparts. These feminist characters triumph over patriarchal restrictions

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