



RETHINKING GENDER, PATRIARCHY AND FEMALE 'THINGIFICATION' IN AHMED YERIMA'S *JAKADIYA*

By

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Abstract

Gender discourse has received significant attention from scholars and critics over the years. Justifiably, gender is the basis for most social relations in most societies. Most extant studies on Yerima's *Jakadiya* hold that patriarchy or men constitute oppressive force which subjugates and abuses females. It is against this backdrop that this study reimagines gender, patriarchy, and female 'thingification' in Yerima's *Jakadiya* to uncover the contradictions and instability in the binary oppositions therein. The paper adopts Jacques Derrida's deconstruction as its theoretical framework, and relies on interpretive research design for its analysis. Textual analysis reveals that women have the power and agency to decide how cultural practices are carried out, without interference or influence of men. The work equally divulges that the rights, identity, and dignity of females like Atine and Bilkisu are abused and jeopardised by the privileged women (matriarchs) who occupy exalted positions in traditional societies. Additionally, the paper discovers that every form of abuse or dehumanisation of females in the text is orchestrated by women in positions of power. Consequently, the research concludes that women are a great force in the discrimination, humiliation, and oppression of fellow females. Against the position of previous scholarship on the text, this paper submits that women in traditional African societies discriminate, 'thingify', and regard fellow females as things without dignity, self-worth, feelings, and ambition. Also, the work holds that men are portrayed as caring and sensitive people who encourage female liberty, progress, aspiration, and safety. Accordingly, the oppressive force against females in traditional Nigerian societies is women rather than men or patriarchy.

Keywords: Gender, Patriarchy, Matriarchy, Deconstruction, Ahmed Yerima, *Jakadiya*

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Introduction

In modern society, gender is a critical concept which has received significant attention from scholars of various orientations and disciplines, especially those from the feminist school of thought or persuasion. It becomes this central to everyday human relations because cultural, socio-political, and economic structures of societies are constructed based on the gender ideologies held in such societies (Jackson Etuk and Isonguyo Akpan, 2023; Jackson Etuk and Naomi Okon, 2024). Consequently, the social engineering of the younger generation, social values, and modes of production and distribution of goods and services (the economic system of a society) are a product of gender philosophy promoted and upheld by a society. Thus, gender constitutes an important factor in the civilisation of the modern world and social interaction, both in the macro and micro domains.

The conceptualisation of gender is multifaceted. By this, it is meant that gender has manifold meanings; therefore, it is beyond the binary conception of maleness and femaleness or the biological sexes. Gender is often regarded as a social construct (Oluwaseun Olanrewaju & Omolara Awogbayila, 2021). This stems from the premise that it is a creation of society, and a product of choices made by individuals. Hence, in the contemporary worldview, a biological male could assume the female gender identity and vice versa. It becomes crystal clear that both normative and non-normative gender orientations are within the purview of gender discourse. The normative gender denotes the binary male and female orientation, while the non-normative gender constitutes all other forms of sexual identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). What constitute normative and non-normative are subjective and ideologically inspired. That is why both the traditional and emerging sexualities are idiosyncratic and ideological.

Furthermore, Judith Lorber (2018) considers gender a social principle which stipulates the code of conduct for both males and females, and not necessarily sex. Thus, gender and sex are two distant poles which operate within a culture. Lober's (2018) perception of gender is vividly expressed, thus:

Gender is an organizing principle of social order that divides people into two major categories: “men” and “women.” They are expected to be different and are treated differently and often unequally, with men usually more privileged. The social construction perspective explains the historical and cross-cultural variability of gender differences by social processes (Lober, 2018, p.2).

This perception of gender facilitates the understanding of the critical role of gender in the social behaviour and relevance of members of society. It is equally important to add that the classification of persons based on social roles or behaviour has been the foundation of the dominance and oppression of one group by another. Inevitably, this results in social and inter-gender conflict, just as the Marxists envisage a class combat between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats in a capitalist economy. In a simpler term, gender is a linguistic signifier for the systematic cultural delineation of social roles to men and women, taking advantage of the existing cultural and social ideology in society. Gender, therefore, transcends the binary of the sexes and mere distribution of labour, but focuses on the cultural and social values of a people. Its intrinsic factors are the socio-cultural and religious ideologies which shape the consciousness of a people.

Gender in this paper alludes to the biological male and female, and the social construction of their roles and behaviours, especially vis-à-vis human relations in all spheres of life. It alludes to the social discrimination of males and females based on the kind of ideology sanctioned by a society's culture, norms, and values. This conception of gender has been the subject of discourse for decades, most especially as it forms the genesis of discrimination of persons based on their biological sexes. For instance, females are usually regarded as weak, inferior, secondary, and subservient within the patriarchal culture. Discussing gender dynamics and female activism, Isonguyo Akpan (2023) comments, thus:

...gender as a social construct has been the guise under which the female gender in the patriarchal African society is subjected to some forms of abuse of rights; denial of certain economic and political rights and privileges on the basis of their biological sexes. (p.83).

The concern here is that abuse or denial of rights and privileges of females is orchestrated by the patriarchal gender construct which prioritises males alone. Idowu Adeniyi (2023) holds that the organisation of society in a patriarchal order makes males more eminent than females. According to Abigail Eruaga (2018), "Patriarchy as an ideology privileges a male-centred society and encourages male control" (p.212). This definition points to the apparent fact that in patriarchal African societies, males dominate the cultural, socio-political, economic, and even religious affairs, while females are perpetually kept at the periphery or the lower rung of the social ladder. It is within this paradigm that females are said to be 'thingified': that is, regarded as ordinary things or objects. Hence, 'thingification' of females

denotes abuse of women in such a way that they are used as one would ordinary things or objects bought or received as gifts. It is the robbing of females of their dignity and humanity in most patriarchal societies.

'Thingification' is conceptualised in this paper as the systemic reduction of persons, especially females, to ordinary objects or things. It encompasses all forms of abuses which significantly affect or demean the dignity and personality of females. Hence, socio-cultural practices which subject females to derogatory observances are conceived as means of thingification of females. Also, anti-female traditional practices like widowhood practices are forms of 'thingification' of women. Similarly, patriarchal conception of womanhood based on childbearing reduces females to ordinary childbearing machines. Through this, the dignity of women as humans is denied, thereby reducing them to ordinary objects. Ultimately, all forms of economic, socio-political exploitation and sexploitation of females are regarded as forms of 'thingification' of females. Consequently, female 'thingification' has sparked debate on patriarchal ideology over time, and feminist critical engagement of patriarchy in gender discourses.

According to Sylvia Walby (1990), patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p.20). These social structures serve as the agency for the continuous oppression of females through cultural practices and religion. It is within the purview of practices in cultures and religions that victimisation, *othering*, and thingification of women are entrenched in other aspects of life like politics and governance, business and economy, education, medicine and other lucrative professions. This is buttressed by Kehinde Oyetimi (2022) who posits that “For a long while, gender relations were repeatedly captured through the prisms of religion, culture, collective perception and the social environment” (p.2). Ekwutosi Offiong et al (2021) assert that patriarchy as an ideology promotes inequality between men and women within the same society or organisation. According to them, “In such societies, women are systematically disadvantaged and oppressed. The males hold power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of the property” (Offiong et al, 2021, p.80). This kind of discrimination is what Faith Agbogidi (2020) describes as gender inequality: “a condition in which men and women in a society do not have the same rights or social status” (p.23). Hence, it makes sense to state that rather than sex, gender informs the pattern of social relations at all levels of social engagement in a

society.

Gender discourse on patriarchal culture, masculinity and female subjugation has been critical to feminists right from the earliest theorists like Virginia Woolf whose work entitled, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) gave the foundation for the interrogation of male supremacy and female inferiority. Also, Simone De Beauvoir's criticism of patriarchy is encapsulated in her seminal work entitled, *The Second Sex* (1953). The latter interrogates the patriarchal appropriation of the second-class tag to females in some societies. Eruaga (2018) posits that “patriarchy relegates the female sex to the position of insignificance and inconsequentiality...” (p.212). Therefore, the female gender is treated with disdain by males. This quickly found its way into African prose fiction written by men. Most female characters in novels like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, among others, were presented within the purview of their traditional roles as wives and mothers (Gloria Chukukere, 1995). Chukukere (1995) has accused the earliest African male writers of gender stereotypical roles given to females in their works, noting that it was because of the paucity of female writers then.

Consequently, African female writers have risen to the task of rewriting the narrative by using their craft(wo)manship to explore the condition of females in a male-dominated society. This change in narrative is reflected in the works of earliest African female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emetcheta, Mariama Bâ, Akachi Ezeigbo, Efua Sutherland and Grace Ogot, among others. Feminist liberation is the leitmotif in the works of most of these writers. Adeniyi (2023) avers that “Most of the literary texts emanating from Africa have been accused of being gender biased. The authors of these texts often weave visions of gender inequality and superiority oftentimes to the advantage of the male sex” (p.60). Their writings form a corpus of gender discrimination and how females navigate their way through African patriarchal societies.

Therefore, the conception of patriarchy as asphyxiating to contemporary African females has received a quantum of intellectual engagements and research. For instance, Agbogidi (2020) examines gender inequality and oppression in Akachi Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols*. Engaging the text through the lens of African feminism, the author interrogates the trajectory of females in their quest to be relevant in a patriarchal society. According to Agbogidi (2020), females have been subjected to different forms of oppression and

discrimination at different levels of patriarchal society. However, they navigate their way out of the age-long prejudice against women to attain self-awareness. Agbogidi's (2020) study completely blames males for the unpleasant experiences of females in the patriarchal Igbo society. Although it is an undeniable fact that the privileged position of males in such societies gives them dominance over females, a critical examination of cultures which subjugate women would reveal not only the gullibility of females but their practical roles as an agency in the propagation of patriarchal ideologies. The structuralist school of literary criticism holds that every text has a binary opposition. Therefore, an interrogation of the other side of gender discourse becomes important as research therein seeks to advance discourse on possible and emerging realities.

Furthermore, Develda Seanego et al (2022) carry out a comparative study of Chimamanda Adichie's novels to investigate the portrayal of women in African patriarchal societies. Examining *Americanah* (2013), *Half of a Yellow Sun*, (2006), and *Purple Hibiscus* (2004) through the feminist theoretical paradigm, the authors observe that female characters in the texts are objects of oppression by patriarchy. However, their study focuses on sex and racial relations. They hold that rather than the traditional sexual role of women in procreation and motherhood, Adichie's novels portray female sexual engagement in contemporary Africa as a choice of pleasure and display of female power. Their work is basically a reconstruction of the hitherto representation of females in African prose fiction, and does not explore the shift in gender discourse as it concerns female victimisation and the role of females in either liberating themselves or constituting the agency for the exploitation and abuse of females, especially in Yerima's plays. This shift in gender discourse in the drama genre is central to the current study.

Ahmed Yerima is a contemporary playwright and academic. Yerima is one of the playwrights who explores gender and sexuality in his plays. In *Jakadiya*, the “jakadiya” tradition is an obnoxious cultural practice in Northern Nigeria. It reduces females to sex objects for some men, and encourages sexual exploitation of females. This undignifies and demean the value of females. The tradition gives a bird-eye view to the cultural, social, religious, and political subjugation, oppression, and exploitation of females in the predominant Muslim societies in the north of Nigeria. Therefore, “jakadiya” is a metaphor for exploitation and dehumanisation of females in patriarchal Muslim societies in Nigeria.

Ahmed's works dramatise gender inequality and other forms of gender manifestations in the patriarchal Nigerian society, and have received significant critical attention in literary scholarship. Scholars have engaged his plays from different feminist persuasions. Eruaga (2018) examines the illusion of female empowerment in Yerima's *Jakadiya*. She critiques the play from the patriarchal theory point of view. Her work holds that patriarchy is responsible for female pains and misery. For instance, the “Jakadiya” tradition is considered by the critic as oppressive because it allows the Emirs to use women at their disposal as they wish. This is captured in “the cliff of excitement” (p.211).

However, her work does not consider other salient aspects of the play, especially the role of the female characters in enforcing or executing traditional and cultural practices. Her theory of inquiry is equally a bit far from contemporary theorisations in gender and the feminist movement in Africa, thereby distorting the possibility of advancing gender discourse in the context of the play. Therefore, Eruaga's (2018) study serves as a springboard for the current study which seeks to deconstruct the notion of male domination, abuse, and victimisation of females through structures like cultural practices and traditional values. This becomes necessary because trends in literary works by contemporary female and male writers reveal a society where complementarity is gradually paving the way for matriliney. This is the backdrop for rethinking gender paradigms and female roles in the abuse of other females in society, hence, the need for this study.

Ruth Epochi-Olise (2022) interrogates the subjugation of the minority group in patriarchal Nigerian society. By minority group, the author refers to girls and women. According to her, this set of people is the most oppressed and victimised in society. She holds that girls and women have been used as sexual objects meant to satisfy the sexual urges of men in patriarchal societies. Epochi-Olise's (2022) study concludes that Yerima's *Jakadiya* portrays the ill effect of forced migration, and the dehumanisation, oppression, and sexual abuse of females by patriarchy because they (females) are the only group in most societies suffering from intersectionality. This work is not different from Eruaga's (2018) study except that they use different theories to examine the abuse of females in the text.

However, Epochi-Olise's (2022) study has equally not given much attention to the complicity of matriarchy in the successful objectification and abuse of females in the play.

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore and critically deconstruct the role of females in the subservient status of females in patriarchal societies, especially that created by Yerima in his play. This is to shift gender discourse away from the one-sided patriarchal prejudices to include other structures like matriarchy, as well as deconstructing the image of men in Yerima's *Jakadiya*.

The study adopts interpretive research design. The primary source of data is Yerima's play, *Jakadiya*, purposively selected based on its relevant thematic preoccupation. Relevant library materials, journal articles, and internet materials comprise the secondary source of data for the work. Moreover, the text is subjected to a critical literary analysis, using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory as the framework.

Theoretical Framework

Deconstruction literary theory is the critical approach deployed to guide the analysis of data for this work. This theory developed from some principles of poststructuralism as the works of the earliest poststructuralists are some forms of deconstruction (David Carter, 2006). According to Mawazo Sikirivwa (2020), the theory was developed in the late 1960s by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. The term “deconstruction” originated from the “French verb “deconstuire”, which in English connotes “to undo the improvement of or the development of, to take to pieces.” (p.44). The author notes that deconstruction has since then become an important term in literary study, philosophy and politics. Although it was not initially a theory or method of criticism but a reaction against the structuralist philosophy, deconstruction later became a theory and method of literary criticism with immense influence on arts, criticism, psychoanalysis and political theories, among others in the 1980s (Sikirivwa, 2020). Therefore, deconstruction is a twentieth-century literary theory which seeks to uncover the hidden inconsistent meaning or binary oppositions in a text.

The most important figures in the deconstructionist approach to literary criticism are Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) (Hans Bertens, 2007), and Paul de Man (1919-1983). Paul de Man is regarded as a major deconstructionist critic after Derrida. According to Carter (2006), Derrida's contribution to the development of this critical approach to literary analysis cannot be taken for granted because he was the “. . . man who called into question the basic metaphysical assumptions of all western philosophy since Plato” (109). In 1966,

Derrida presented a paper entitled *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences* at John Hopkins University, America. This marked the revolution in the interpretation of texts, with the argument that written texts could be subjected to different interpretations, with different meanings derived. Thus, the centring of meaning or the unilateral assumption of “...being, self, essence, God, etc” is called into question by Derrida (Carter, 2006, p.110).

Bertens (2007) considers deconstruction as Derrida's poststructuralism since it was the first form of poststructuralism to emerge in the US. The approach later influenced American and English literary studies in the late 1970s. Ghulam Butt et al (2022) regard it as the most powerful and influential postmodernist theory. They hold that if there is a centre of meaning in texts to stop the potential meanings from being derived, that means there are marginal meanings: those not within the theorised centre. Thus, Derrida's approach to literary analysis focuses on highlighting the friction between the central and marginal meanings (Bertens, 2007), to bring to bear the possibility of multiple meanings within a text. Therefore, the primary objective or tenet of deconstruction in literary analysis is to reinterpret a text, and divulge the contradictions in it to bring out a counter meaning or deconstruct the popular interpretation of the same text. Carter (2006) buttresses this assertion, thus:

In Derrida's approach to literary analysis there is the assumption that all texts, whether literary or not, can be deconstructed. This involves, in effect, dismantling texts, or part of them, to reveal inner inconsistencies: where a text might appear to imply one thing, it can, in fact, be shown to imply its opposite (p.111).

Texts are said to create only what appears to be the meaning as could be apparent to every reader at a cursory level of engagement. An American critic, Barbara Johnson (1980) holds that “The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text” (p.5). This view is supported by Etuk (2021, p.67). Conscious and close interrogation of texts open the possible binary oppositions inherent in them in form of good and evil, truth and falsehood, conscious and unconscious (Carter, 2006).

Sikirivwa (2020) states that deconstruction seeks to re-situate or redirect the interpretation of a text. Derrida notes that a text does not have a no single meaning; therefore, a deconstructionist analysis of a text pays attention to the inherent contradictions in the text, especially in the use of language by the author. Language presents the possibility of multiple interpretations and diverse meanings (Etuk and Urujzian, 2018; Urujzian and Etuk, 2023; Etuk and Urujzian, 2024). Additionally, Butt et al (2022) aver that in the deconstruction approach to literary criticism, language is regarded as unstable and transient. Consequently, there is no permanent signification and meaning. The text remains the source of generating an infinite range of meanings.

The suitability of this theory for the current study is obvious. Yerima's *Jakadiya* has often been read from the viewpoint of the immediate patriarchal gender narrative, focusing mostly on the abuse and objectification of females by the patriarchal social order. However, conflicting intricacies of intragender oppression among members of the abused group in the text offer a binary conception of gender discourse therein. As Derrida's approach to the analysis of literary works states, Yerima's play cannot be interpreted from a single perspective, most especially because of its self-indicting semantic oppositions. Consequently, the deconstructionist theory is deployed to facilitate the rereading and reinterpretation of the selected text “in order to reveal ... inconsistencies and inner contradictions” (Bertens, 2007, p.102); that is, to debunk earlier claims made about gender relations in it.

Rethinking Gender and Female Thingification in Yerima's *Jakadiya*

Yerima's *Jakadiya* offers insights into the abuse of females in traditional African societies. Set in the colonial Hausa/Fulani traditional society in Northern Nigeria, the play reflects the complexity of female objectification through certain cultural practices. Of specific reference to the text is the coronation of new Emirs, an act which foregrounds the *Jakadiya* tradition. Scholars like Eruagua (2018) and Epochi-Olise (2022) portray patriarchy and men in the text as oppressive and abusive. However, a critical examination of the operation of cultural and traditional practices in the text offers the lens through which the play is reinterpreted; therefore, gender roles in the thingification of females are reexamined in this study.

There is no cultural practice which concerns women or females that is not directly carried out by females. In Yerima's *Jakadiya*, the “*jakadiya*” tradition is championed by females.

The “jakadiya” itself is a medium for thingification of females by women in the play. Most importantly, women are the custodians of the tradition. At the beginning of the play, it is obvious that Bilkisu and Hajiya Hauwa (Uwar Soro) have the agency to determine how the “jakadiya” tradition should be operated. They are those who make decisions concerning the position of the “jakadiya” (Emir's consort) in the palace. In fact, it is Bilkisu who goes in search of Atine to be prepared for abuse. Consequently, Yerima makes it clear that the use of females as ordinary things is facilitated by women. For instance, in the play, Bilkisu reports her achievement in the role of subjugation and enslavement of females, thus: “Uwar Soro, let me present the new Emir's **pleasure sport**. We have taught and coached her on how to perform the great feast of taking the Emir to the cliff of excitement” [emphasis is mine] (p.9). From this excerpt, women in positions of authority objectify females first before any other set of persons. The description of Atine as a “pleasure sport” robs the teen girl of her humanity and dignity as a person.

Moreover, Atine is presented as an ordinary thing, a sport for the pleasure of the Emir. The description “pleasure sport” objectifies Atine. She is not better than or valued above a thing like a pleasure boat. Naturally, the Emir has been influenced to treat her as such, nothing less. It is only natural that humans receive things the way such things are introduced or presented, either with or without dignity. The kind of description and portrayal of a thing determines if it is worth treating with care or not. Therefore, having presented Atine to the Emir as an object for deriving pleasure, just like one would go on a ride on a pleasure boat, Bilkisu successfully 'thingifies' her. Atine is only perceived as a thing whose value is not beyond the pleasure it can give the Emir. Also, the Emir is entitled to do to her as he pleases. Thus, Atine is an archetype of the oppressed females by fellow women in society.

Patriarchy only provides structures to maintain social order, though it may keep some males in privileged positions, but in modern society, women enjoy social relevance and swapping of gender roles. Yerima seeks to enlighten readers that females who have enjoyed power because of their privileged positions in traditional African societies are responsible for the continuous subjugation of women in society. Women like Bilkisu and Uwar Soro enjoy social relevance given their roles in the “jakadiya” tradition. However, they use their exalted positions to inflict pain on the less privileged females. Bilkisu and Uwar Soro are the women who form matriarchy. They take important decisions, like the Uwar Soro who must pray for the Emir before his coronation. Supposing that she refuses to pray, that means there would be no Emir. Apparently, Yerima shows the sacred and

significant positions held by women in society, meaning that they are in control of most of the rites and traditional practices which undermine the dignity and humanity of females like Atine. This is against the hitherto subservient roles some scholars like Epochi-Olise (2022) suggested.

Matriarchy, the rule, or leadership by women (matriarchs) is responsible for the discrimination, torture, abuse and 'thingification' of females in Yerima's play. According to Shannon (1997), "We live in a matriarchal society. Most of our citizens are females" (n.p). Matriarchy plays on the emotions of men, and uses the existing social order to perpetuate evil against females. It suffices to state that most of what is regarded as patriarchal oppression of females are the consequences of manipulations of men by women in the text. For instance, Bilkisu explains, "**We have taught and coached her on how to perform** the great feast of taking the Emir to the cliff of excitement" [emphasis is mine] (p.9). The use of the plural first-person pronoun 'we' reflects the collective effort of the women in power. The word 'we' is an anaphor for Bilkisu, Uwar Soro (Hajiya Hauwa) and other women in the emirate. In addition, the tense employed in the foregrounded data above indicates completion and execution of the steps for subjugation. According to Udoka, Umoh and Etuk (2020:58), "Tense is a category that locates the action of a verb on a timeline in relation to the time of speech relating to the action in question". Also, their "teaching and coaching" of an innocent teenager, Atine, to take the new Emir to the cliff of excitement is the manipulation of man. They train the innocent girl how to seduce the Emir in a way that he would not resist becoming a victim of their emotional manipulation.

Sikirivwa (2020) notes that ". . . deconstruction accounts for how a text's explicit formulations undermine its implicit or non-explicit aspects. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. It highlights what remains indecidable [sic] and what operates as an indecidable [sic] in the text itself" (p.47). There is no doubt that previous research on the text, especially Eruaga (2018) and Epochi-Olise (2022), obviously got overwhelmed by men's roles in the reification of "jakdiya" in the play, but paid little or no attention to the underlying meaning and interplay of power between matriarchy and patriarchy. A deconstructionist reading of the text reveals the conflicting layers of meaning existing within the same text. For instance, evidence from the text shows that the women have been so tactical in observing the "jakadiya" tradition that men like the Emir become vulnerable over the years, under the pretext of traditional practice before the coronation. Uwar Soro and Bilkisu take advantage of the Emir's emotions and his erotic

predisposition. Hence, they successfully lure him into sleeping with minors whom they have taught seductive skills to apply to the manipulated man.

Furthermore, a deconstructionist approach to studying the play offers insights into other interpretations which set previous studies of the text at a binary opposition. Bertens (2007) asserts that in deconstruction, “The independent 'play' of language that no one can stop is the origin of a surplus meaning that plays havoc with whatever meaning we intended” (99). A close reading of the text reveals the ideological restriction and social confinement placed on females, not by patriarchy but by matriarchy, suggesting that matriarchy does not encourage women to rise to such dignified positions as Uwar Soro of the emirate. As a metaphor for exalted positions in a society, the Uwar Soro title is so valued by Hajiya Hauwa. This could be seen in how Uwar Soro addresses Atine who is forcefully plugged off her ancestral land. Atine is consistently addressed as a “girl” (p. 10) by both Bilkisu and Uwar Soro (Hajiya Hauwa). Uwar Soro's use of “girl” and other pronouns such as “she”, and “you” in the subject position to refer to Atine is very significant because such usage robs Atine of her dignity and identity as a human. By denying Atine of identity, through the use of pronouns and common nouns, she is equally denied of her existence as a woman. She is a nameless entity who is only used but not seen or heard. When she is finally given a name over time, Atine is given a slave name (Atine) against her original identity, Ometere.

The implication is that identity, dignity, humanity, and the existence of females have been robbed by matriarchs like Uwar Soro. Therefore, like Atine, most females are continually subjected to ridicule and 'thingification' by some powerful women, as Yerima portrays. The chances of all females evolving into independent, rational, and dignified members of a society have been jeopardised by women like Uwar Soro, an archetype of matriarchs in traditional African societies, especially in Nigeria. For example, when Atine is brought for examination, Uwar Soro makes her clearly understand that she (Atine) is just a thing which must be used by the new Emir. Therefore, Atine should forget about any kind of thought, emotion or whatever that would make her feel human. Uwar Usoro's words are not ordinary words but authoritative warnings. She warns Atine succinctly, thus:

There must be no attempt to rise beyond your place.
You are nothing but *kwakwara* ... a common consort,
and you shall remain one until you die. No dreams ...
no aspirations The Emir has wives to touch his
heart. No bastard child is allowed in the palace. The
consequence is fatal.... The palace uses you, you do
not dare to use the palace.... (p. 10-11).

The excerpt above reflects the matriarchal subjugation of females in society. Uwar Soro is a matriarchal figure who does not want females to progress in any way except in their roles as slaves. For instance, Uwar Soro specifically tells Atine, “There must be no attempt to rise beyond **your place**” [emphasis is mine] (p.10). This means that matriarchy or women in traditional African societies place limitations on the aspirations, goals, and the extent to which females in society can attain.

The matriarchs dictate the progress, place, and limitation of females in traditional African societies as seen in Yerima's play. The subservient roles given to females in such societies are assigned to them by the matriarchs, not the patriarchs as evident in the text. The emboldened text in the afore-cited text justifies this. The phrase “your place” denotes an already assigned or designated status meant for ordinary females like Atine. The phrase foregrounds the role of women (matriarchs) in the discrimination and allocation of gender roles to females based on their sex. Thus, it suffices to add that the derogatory duties assigned to females and their place on the lower rung of the social ladder as in Yerima's play, are orchestrated by the matriarchs, and forced into traditional practice for popularity.

Uwar Soro uses her position in the emirate to threaten Atine and to cause her unforgettable pains which leave a lasting impression on her memory. As a teenager at fifteen, she is already told not to aspire to become anything other than a slave in the palace. She is equally warned by Uwar Soro not to develop any feelings or emotion. Apparently, the privileged women are too lazy to perform their functions as wives. It is most likely that that is why they introduce the “*jakadiya*” tradition to cast their burden on innocent girls whom they (the matriarchs) have cursed to doom. It is not surprising that Uwar Soro warns Atine not to ever think of having a child for the Emir in the process of being used as a consort to the Emir. It is disheartening that even though African societies appreciate and celebrate motherhood, Uwar Soro does not want Atine to have a child, thereby negating African values and heritage. Obviously, Uwar Soro does not only do this from a privileged social status but because of jealousy that Atine may soon become independent, disentangle herself from matriarchal oppression, and attain self-realisation.

Furthermore, against the criticism that men in traditional African societies are oppressive and abusive, Yerima portrays men as caring, sympathetic, and understanding. For Yerima, men in traditional African societies are sensitive people who save females from destruction instituted by matriarchy. Yerima presents Ahmed Datijo as a very important character in the play who serves as a protective shield to the traumatised Bilkisu. He exposes the evil done

to Bilkisu by Uwar Soro and seeks to protect her from danger as the dead Emir instructed. He exposes the secret which keeps Bilkisu in perpetual sadness and trauma. During her time as the “jakadiya”, Bilkisu is pregnant for the Emir. However, the palace midwife, Gogo Halima, exchanges her (Bilkisu's) healthy baby boy with Hajiya Hauwa's dead baby as both are delivered of babies almost at the same time. The pains of childbirth make Bilkisu cry, but she is traumatised by the fact that her baby is dead, not knowing that her joy has been stolen by her fellow woman. Ahmed Datijo reveals this secret to Bilkisu, thus:

If my recollection is right, I think I saw Gogo
Halima run with a covered mute bundle first from
the right wing, and then emerged with a howling
baby from the left which took to the right wing.
That must have been when she did it (p.42-43).

Gogo Halima connives with Uwar Soro to rob Bilkisu of her right to motherhood and ascension to the revered position of Uwar Soro (Emir's mother) in future. Although the Emir knows about this ploy to stop Bilkisu from attaining that enviable height in the emirate, he is not part of those who sabotage Bilkisu's progress. In fact, the Emir is caring enough to understand the implication of announcing that it is the son of the slave that is heir to the throne. Thus, he keeps mute to prevent the matriarchs (his wives) from killing Bilkisu. Ahmed Datijo explains the Emir's concern, thus:

If your baby had been pronounced as the heir, and
the Queen's child announced dead, you would
have had to die too. **They** would have killed you.
The other Queens, who all had daughters. Even
the Queen whose son died [emphasis is mine]
(p.43-44).

The emboldened word “they” is a cataphor for the Emir's wives, the matriarchs. It excludes the male speaker (Ahmed Datijo). The excerpt reveals the inherent bad intention in the privileged women (matriarchs) in traditional African societies, and how men function and strive to protect females from other females.

It is only natural that Bilkisu feels betrayed, discriminated, and subjugated by fellow women. This is why she feels very angry and traumatised to the extent that she starts talking to herself, thus:

This hot lava of bile which flows in me burns up
my very entrails until my once blind eyes are now
reddened. I feel my bones shiver. This truth is
heavy. What a sad life this has turned out to be.
Used and spurned until I feel tousled ... sadness

creeps in ... for I am disheveled. My own prized
seed stolen and I am left to graze in a dry barren
farm to gaze at nothing but emptiness (p.47).

Bilkisu does not only express the loss she has suffered because of the oppression of women like Uwar Soro and Gogo Halima but also her traumatic state of being. Against the common assertion that males are the cause of female victimisation and abuse, Yerima clearly portrays that men or patriarchy is not responsible for the dehumanisation of females in traditional African societies. Both the late Emir and Datijo are presented as men who encourage equity, justice and the well-being of both men and women. This clarifies the misconception of men as oppressors. Datijo's exposure of the age-long secret kept by Uwar Soro and Gogo Halima reveals his quest for equity and justice for women. Equally, the late Emir's refusal to announce Bilkisu's baby as heir to the throne averts her destruction, thereby projecting him as a source of protection to the despised and downtrodden women in society.

Conclusion

This study attempts to deconstruct gender and female reification against the backdrop that previous studies have blamed men and patriarchy for the misfortunes, discrimination, abuse, and subjugation of females in traditional African societies. Earlier studies on Yerima's *Jakadiya* submit that the abuse of females in African societies, especially in Nigeria, is occasioned by patriarchy and its consequential putting of men above women. This work reexamined the text to bring to the fore the contradictory meanings and binary oppositions in the text. Through the lens of deconstruction literary theory, the study has revealed several contradictory meanings in the text.

The playwright portrays women as strong and independent members of society. The position of Uwar Soro and Bilkisu foregrounds females' exalted place in the scheme of things in traditional African societies, especially in Nigeria. Very significant among the different roles of females are the "jakadiya" tradition and Uwar Soro's function in the coronation of a new Emir. These make women very powerful personalities in the decision-making process of their society. For instance, the process of selecting and training the Emir's consort, like Atine, is primarily carried out by the matriarchs without any form of interference from men, even the soon-to-be-coronated Emir. Thus, every tragedy occasioned by that practice is orchestrated by females against their fellow females. The Emir's role in such a practice, as could be seen, is already predetermined by the women who

are the custodians of the culture and traditions of the land. It suffices to state that Yerima holds that men like the Emir have been manipulated to do whatever they do according to the dictate of the tradition upheld and sanctioned by women.

Therefore, the study concludes that women have become a great force in the discrimination, humiliation, and oppression of fellow females. Therefore, while patriarchy may encourage male domination, any form of oppression of women cannot be achieved except with collaboration and active enforcement by other women. The study holds that matriarchy or the privileged women in traditional African societies discriminate, 'thingify', and render fellow females as ordinary things without dignity, self-worth, feelings, and ambition as seen in Uwar Soro's social relations with Atine. The continuous use of a common noun like "girl" and pronouns like "she" and "you" by Uwar Soro to refer to Atine grounds the matriarchal stripping of identity from females.

Moreover, the work submits that women in positions of authority in the play are responsible for the 'thingification' and abuse of females and womanhood. This stems from Bilkisu's description of Atine as a "pleasure sport". Such a description dehumanises females and womanhood in African traditional societies, especially in Nigeria. Again, the study notes that Uwar Soro's warning of Atine against aspiring to be great and independent and the servitude status she wants Atine to maintain emphasise women and matriarchal suppression of females in traditional societies in Nigeria. Finally, the study concludes that contrary to the position of previous studies about men and patriarchy in Yerima's *Jakadiya*, men are portrayed as caring, sensitive, and loving people who encourage freedom, progress, equity, and justice for females. Hence, the greatest problem of females in traditional African societies, especially Nigeria, is women rather than men and patriarchy.

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