

PERFORMING IDENTITY: THEATRE, CINEMA, GENDER, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

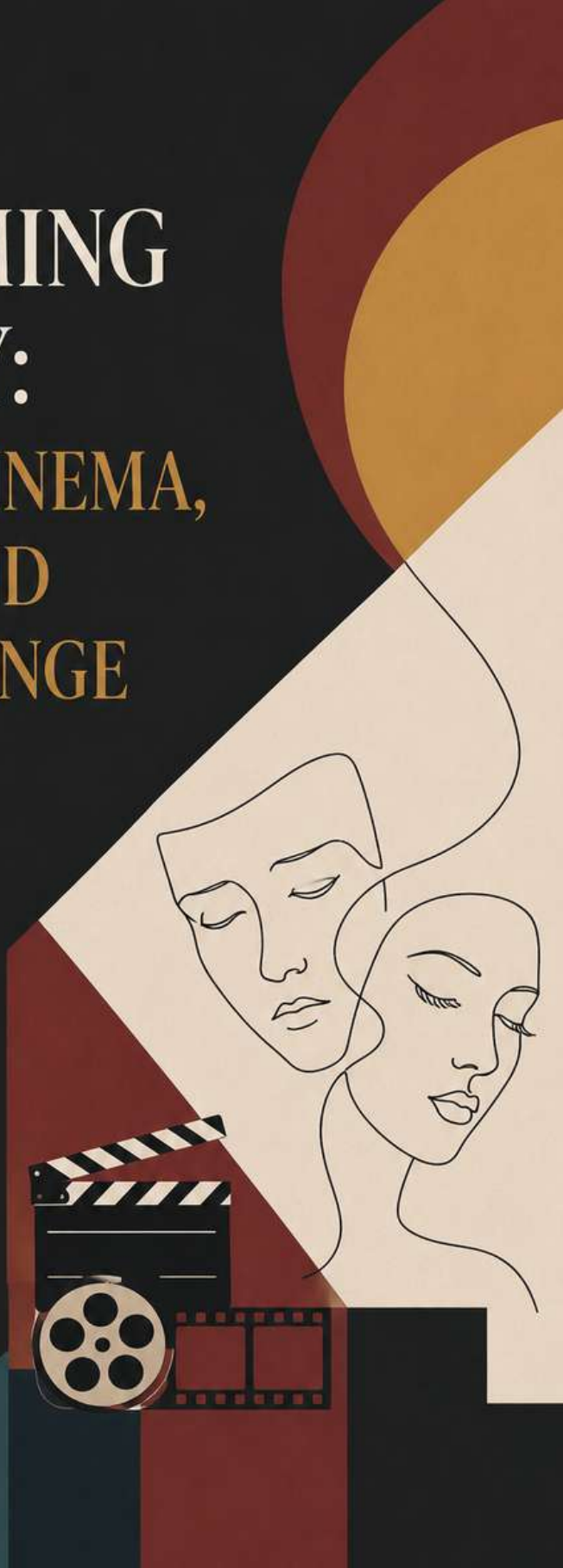
AUTHORS

Dr. Hadwin Charlie Durai S.

Boróka PROHÁSZKA-RÁD

Anannya RAUT

Temilade Afolasade OLATUNJI



**PERFORMING IDENTITY: THEATRE, CINEMA,
GENDER, AND SOCIAL CHANGE- 2026**

ISBN: 978-625-91851-1-8

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21194868

July / 2026

Ankara, Türkiye



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Date: 17.07.2026

Farabi Publishing House

Ankara, Türkiye

www.farabiyayinevi.org

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ISBN: 978-625-91851-1-8

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PREFACE

Theatre and cinema remain important cultural spaces through which societies negotiate identity, power, representation, and social change. Contemporary scholarship in performance and screen studies increasingly examines how artistic forms challenge dominant narratives, make marginalized voices visible, and reflect changing understandings of gender, sexuality, and cultural belonging.

The chapters in this volume explore selected issues in drama, film, and cultural representation. The first chapter analyzes Sam Shepard's *Ages of the Moon* through its subversive techniques and dramatic structure. The second chapter examines Bollywood's evolving engagement with LGBTQ+ acceptance, drawing attention to the role of popular cinema in shaping public attitudes and social visibility. The third chapter investigates gender relations and power in Ahmed Yerima's theatre, highlighting the ways dramatic texts can reveal and question patriarchal structures.

By bringing together perspectives from theatre studies, film studies, gender analysis, and cultural criticism, this volume reflects the interdisciplinary character of contemporary arts and humanities research. The chapters demonstrate how performance and visual media can contribute to critical discussions on identity, representation, and social transformation.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a useful academic resource for researchers, students, artists, and scholars interested in theatre, cinema, cultural studies, gender studies, and literary criticism. We extend our sincere appreciation to all contributing authors for their valuable scholarly efforts.

Editorial Team
July 2026, Türkiye

CHAPTER 1
HOW STILL IS STILLWATER: AN ANALYSIS OF
SAM SHEPARD'S SUBVERSIVE TECHNIQUES

¹Boróka PROHÁSZKA-RÁD

¹Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Department of Humanities,
prohaszkaboroka@uni.sapientia.ro, ORCID ID 0000-0003-1326-1472

INTRODUCTION

Best known for his plays and his acting and script-writing career in Hollywood, Sam Shepard was active also in many other creative fields, including but not limited to music, poetry and fiction. Though he received most awards for his dramatic works (for example, the Guggenheim Fellowship's Drama and Performance Art award in 1968 and in 1971, the Pulitzer Prize for *Buried Child* in 1979, the Drama Desk's Outstanding Play award for *A Lie of the Mind* in 1986, which also won the New York Drama Critics' Circle's Best Play award the same year, the Gold Medal for Drama in 1992, the Gradiva Best Play award for *When the World Was Green* in 1997, several Obies, the Pen American Center's Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater award in 2009, etc.), his fiction also captured the attention of reviewers and literary critics. However, there have been only a limited number of scholarly articles and academic studies that would focus on his short stories, poems and other, non-dramatic works, such as his *Rolling Thunder Logbook*, a kind of poetic journal and travelogue about Bob Dylan's 1975-76 tour where he was invited to participate as a film-script writer, or his last two volumes, *The One Inside* (2017) and *Spy of the First Person* (2017, posthumous), which both transgress the limits and limitations of a specific genre, merging autobiography with elements conventionally linked to the psychological novel, memoir, travel literature and even myth.

The publication of Shepard's 2010 collection *Day Out of Days* led to several reviews, among them Walter Kirn's in the *New York Times*, as well as J. Calemine's 2011 review and St. James' evaluation of the volume. Still, to best of my knowledge, the only study linked to this volume is *Discourse Made of Silence and Indeterminacy in Sam Shepard's One Night in the Long-Ago* that I published in 2025, focusing on the power of "empty spaces" and indeterminacies of the Shepardian text to convey meaning and literally "embody" the trauma it depicts. This 2010 collection is made up of 146 texts that generically range from short stories and poems to monologues and dialogues, to descriptive pieces like the one in focus in the present study, *Stillwater*.

The volume operates with a varied set of titles as well; the majority of them, however, being settlement names across the United States of America, as the reader is invited to travel the country with the narrator(s) – as if in a travelogue – and to discover with/through them both the past and the present of these different locations. At the same time, the concrete geographical places also serve as prompts for contemplations on history, society, identity and the polyphony of voices and discourses that do not merely narrate about these spaces, but also shape and are shaped by them. We “travel” with Shepard’s narrator(s) from Haskell, Arkansas all over the country on multiple highways (also specified in some titles) leading to Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, South Dakota, Montana, to list just a few, to finish off back in Arkansas again, the last but one text of the collection bearing the title Rogers, Arkansas (Highway 62).

Stillwater is the 79th “story” of the collection. Among the 146 texts of the volume those that are entitled by settlement names generically range from one-paragraph to several pages long short stories, poems written in free verse, texts written in the form of dialogues or monologues, as well as descriptions of the given city or small town. These descriptive texts then may give way to digressions into historical or cultural specificities, contemplations on a wide range of topics such as the “disappearance” of the old West, questions of identity construction, family relations and violence, or love. In Stillwater, however, Shepard uses a very different and surprising technique to transform the text into something much more than just the description of a “chill morning” in the small town on the banks of the St. Croix River.

Stillwater is a small town in Minnesota, Washington County, USA, with a population of about twenty thousand people. The settlement’s official website promotes the town as “the birthplace of Minnesota” given that the convention initiating the establishment of the state was held here in 1848. The settlement lies on the west bank of the St. Croix River, a territory once owned and populated by the Ojibwe and Dakota Native American nations. Known for its lumber industry and numerous sawmills already by the middle of the 19th century, the town builds today on its historic heritage to develop tourism.

The city’s website states that the name Stillwater was suggested by John McKusick, lumberman, the first mayor, and then later senator of the Minnesota State Senate.

It was inspired by the calm waters of the St. Croix River used for the transportation of lumber down to the Mississippi. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term “still water” means “a part of a stream where no current is visible.” What also necessarily comes to mind in connection with this phrase is the proverb “Still waters run deep”, used to refer to quiet and reserved people whose calmness and quietness hide profound thoughts and emotions. Its use can already be noticed in Shakespeare’s Henry VI: “Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep; // And in his simple shaw he harbors treason”, a quotation that draws attention to what the proverb also suggests: one should not judge based on appearances, or on what may be seen on the surface, for at closer inspection people or things, in our case, texts may prove to be different than we may think at first sight. In this sense, the title becomes a signal, a warning addressed to the reader to look beyond the obvious, literal meaning of words and of the text as a whole.

The text is made up of merely two paragraphs describing a fall morning with the sound of the Lutheran church tower chimes playing “Onward, Christian soldiers”, a song resounding throughout the “silent” and “peaceful” town, under the “powder blue skies, fluffy clouds, no wind to speak of” (Shepard 2010, p. 185). It also “resounds” within the text as it resurfaces at the end of the text: “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war // with the cross of Jesus going on before” (Shepard 2010, p. 185).

Thus, this Christian hymn frames the text, placing the embedded descriptive sentences about the “spectacular, bright fall day” with “blazing yellow and orange” hardwoods, circling eagles and osprey, and “delicate saleboats and fishing skiffs” as if in “slow motion” (Shepard 2010, p. 185) within a Christian religious context.

There is, however, one sentence at the end of the first paragraph that seems – at first sight – out of place within this bucolic text: “It is also the fifth day in a row that bombs have been falling on distant Kabul and Kandahar” (Shepard 2010, p. 185). One may interpret this as the narrator accidentally recalling a news piece heard somewhere that now jumps back to mind as something unrelated to the now and the here, the phrases “fifth day” and “distant” reinforcing such a reading. It seems rather a counterpoint to the tranquility of the momentary experience.

However, the use of the present perfect continuous and the emphatic “fifth day in a row”, as well as the fact that this sentence is positioned exactly in the center of the text, already caution the reader and demand further analysis.

1. PASTORAL IMAGERY AND THE SUBVERSION OF TRANQUILITY

As mentioned earlier, the bulk of the text fits into the tradition of the pastoral mode of writing. The origins of this mode go back to the Antiquity, to Theocritus and then Virgil, who composed short narratives and poems about the simple, peaceful and “uncorrupted”, close-to-nature, obviously idealized lives of shepherds, farmers, fishermen. By the Middle Ages this pastoral tradition had developed its links to Christianity as well, Christ being seen as the shepherd leading and tending to his flock, people. Pastoral novels, drama and poetry were written throughout the centuries leading up the industrial revolution. This economic and social rearrangement led to a transformation of the pastoral as well, which now displayed a melancholy nostalgia for the idealized past state of rural, “natural” existence and for the tranquility of innocence and ignorance. These works reveal a kind of yearning for lost innocence, and for the lost harmonious coexistence of man and nature, turning into pastoral elegies.

In American literature, the pastoral mode of writing calls to mind primarily the Transcendentalists of the middle of the 19th century, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay *Nature*, or Henry David Thoreau’s oeuvre, most importantly *Walden*. They promoted the fundamentally pantheistic view of the organic unity of God-nature-man and the concept of self-reliance, an American pastoral dream of simple, natural life close to the land. America, thus, appears as a possible new Garden of Eden where people may still achieve a spiritually and morally higher state of existence by their strong links to the land, to rural, small town existence. In Shepard’s works the melancholy longing for such a pastoral lifestyle and return to innocence and authenticity resurfaces over and over.

From Austin's monologue on his alienation from his urban environment in *True West* to Hobart Struther's attempt to return to a more "authentic" existence in *Kicking a Dead Horse*, or Frank and Emma's family farm in *The God of Hell*, etc. Those familiar with Shepard's oeuvre, however, are beware as these desires are systematically subverted in these works. Shepard contests even the possibility of modern pastoral, ironically undermining his characters' self-deluding dreams of a "return" to this imagined Edenic state: marked, for example, of the corpse of the baby unearthed in the garden in *Buried Child*, the brothers' pointless conflict with reference to living authentically in the desert in *True West*, Hobart Struther's dead horse in *Kicking a Dead Horse*, the over-watered plants emanating a mysterious blue light in *The God of Hell*, etc. Through the stories and myths Shepard's characters link to and associate with the natural landscape (most often the desert), in sharp contrast with the way they actually experience or inhabit it—Shepard's characters turn nature into, as Victor Turner suggests, a ritual-liminal space: cut off from familial and social relations, suspended between past and future, that holds both the possibility and the danger of permanently trapping them and of identity turning into something fluid and elusive. The tormented sons in *Buried Child*, Lee and Austin in *True West*, the three Mosses in *The Late Henry Moss*, as well as Hobart Struther in *Kicking a Dead Horse* (to name just a few of the Shepardian male characters who would fit this analysis) bring to the desert—imagined or real—their traumatized thus only illusionary autonomous and stable subjectivities. They hope to find a place of ritual seclusion where they will be spared the pressure of having to validate their lives and their stories about their past. Nature, however, demands a different story; it reveals its dramatic character when instead of constituting a utopian place of endless and limitless drifting and movement, of tranquility and regained innocence, it transforms into the site of final, deadly confrontations between fathers and sons, between brothers, between illusions and reality, as well as between the "romances" about nature and the narrative nature dictates.

In *Stillwater*, the natural landscape and the quiet, peaceful small town with its church tower chimes, whose name itself suggests tranquility, as discussed earlier, seem the perfect setting for a contemporary pastoral.

At closer inspection, however, the reader must notice the markers within the text signaling towards a secondary layer of meaning. The morning is bright, there is no wind, there are blue skies with fluffy clouds, but it is still “chill”. It is also a day that stands out of the ordinary for being “the reason they all suffer the most godawful winters on earth” (Shepard 2010, p. 185). The river, the bay, the eagles and woods are undisturbed by the presence of humans; but this nature does not reproduce the idealized view of Romantics or Transcendentalists. Much rather, in the vein of Crane or Hemingway, Shepard depicts nature as amoral, neutral, and unconcerned with human suffering or brutality and destruction.

A further element calling attention to a possible subversive reading is the melody resounding in the chill morning, that also frames the text. As mentioned earlier, the text opens with a sentence containing the title of the hymn: “The electronic chimes from the brick Lutheran church tower are playing ‘Onward, Christian soldiers’ with crisp mathematical precision in the chill morning air” (Shepard 2010, p. 185). This 19th century hymn builds on military imagery in order to portray the life of believers who are meant to fight the moral battle against evil and sin. It urges unity under the cross of Jesus Christ who appears as commander leading the march of his soldiers in the “war”, the “battle” “against foe”. The lines “Crowns and thrones may perish, // Kingdoms rise and wane; // But the Church of Jesus // Constant will remain” open the text of the hymn towards a historic, even mythic dimension: earthly kingdoms will necessarily parish, but the Christian church will eternally endure. While the text is meant to be understood symbolically, and the military vocabulary allegorically stands for the spiritual struggle against evil, the hymn has still stirred controversy due to its aggressive tone and extended use of military terminology.

In Shepard’s text as well, this violent aspect of the song comes forth already in the very first sentence: it sounds with “crisp mathematical precision” (Shepard 2010, p. 185) calling to mind the rhythm and meticulousness of an army’s march.

What is more, the following two sentences of the text reinforce and amplify this atmosphere of unease and the tension arising from the contrast of bringing together images of a church, warfare, and the tranquility of the bright morning: “The melody line pierces the windows of every house in the neighborhood. No one escapes” (Shepard 2010, p. 185). The phrases “pierces the windows” and “No one escapes” endow the melody with a destructive power that traps everyone. What is more, tension rises to its height at the very end of the text where the sentence “Everything here is quiet and peaceful beyond words:” (Shepard 2010, p. 185) is immediately followed and, at the same time, invalidated by the first two verses of the hymn quoted earlier, calling soldiers to war in the name of Jesus. Thus the hymn encloses the text which – despite all its elements linked to the pastoral tradition and mode of writing – cannot escape this ominous call to battle.

2. WAR, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM, AND POLITICAL CRITIQUE

Within such a textual context then, the earlier quoted sentence on the bombing of Kabul and Kandahar, emphatically positioned in the very center of the text, cannot be interpreted as just a simple digression of the narrator towards some random and fleeting fought or memory of a news piece he might have heard. The cities mentioned – Kabul and Kandahar – suddenly propel us to an entirely different space – the Middle East, geographically and culturally distancing us from the here and now of the text. The “pastoral” space of Stillwater is replaced by the image of a far-away area that seems to have absolutely no connection to it, not only due to the physical distance or the cultural differences, but also due to the contrast that is created by the juxtaposition of the stillness and peace of Stillwater and the bombs that have been falling on Kabul and Kandahar for five days. This contrast may be seen as a means by which Shepard emphasizes even more the tranquility and peace of the described American small town. Still, the reader cannot disregard the link apparent between the bombs mentioned in this sentence and the military terminology used in the hymn referenced at the beginning and end of the text.

Furthermore, considering other works by Shepard – for example, *States of Shock: A Vaudeville Nightmare* which is a play written in 1991, a work “written in response to the first Gulf war” (Gardner 2004), or *The God of Hell*, a 2004 play produced right before the 2004 presidential elections in the USA with the intent to protest with “angry power” and “vivid and harsh” imagery (Hitchcock 2006) against the country’s war on Afghanistan, makes us reinterpret the sentence, which is thus transformed into being not only physically the center of the text, but also the “essence” in the context of which one is forced to reread the entire text.

Kabul and Kandahar are two major cities in Afghanistan. Kabul is the capital of the country, thus the economic, political, and cultural center, while Kandahar is one of the oldest cities, a spiritual and traditional center, but also a major base of the Taliban. It was also these two cities that the USA bombed in the early days of the war in 2001, a war to last for the next twenty years, at the time of the publication of Shepard’s volume having already lasted for ten years. Though the targets were military, as in every war, there were civilian victims and damage to the cities was unavoidable.

Through the inclusion of this one sentence and positioning it in the middle of the text, Shepard opens up the field of interpretation which must act both retrospectively and prospectively. The Christian hymn framing the narrative calling soldiers to war, into battle in the name of Christ does not remain merely a popular religious song. It becomes a premonition, a bad omen of war, destruction and death. It also reads as a Shepardian critique of the government’s decision to start a war, and of war in general, especially on ideological basis. Shepard tends to emphatically “hide in plain sight” within his works his strong anti-war position. His *Operation Sidewinder*, written in the late 1960s, directly critiques the Vietnam war, but for example *Curse of the Starving Class* or his *The Late Henry Moss*, both plays about family violence and dramatizing father-son conflicts, operate with father figures who inflict violence and destruction on their families not being able to come to terms with the trauma of their war experiences, and neither with the destruction they have inflicted on others.

In *Curse of the Starving Class*, for example, Weston, the father declares that he has nitroglycerine in his blood for “I’ve dropped bombs on total strangers” in a monologue depicting his psyche broken by war and the impact of violence and death he has caused.

In our age, when TV and cyber-media have taken over the job of the satirist, and our lives are saturated with the media’s continuous focus on politics, politicians, wars and catastrophes, it has become problematic for authors other than journalists to find effective means to tackle political issues in their respective arts. Shepard, however, finds appropriate tools, techniques and formats to bring political satire and messaging back into literature, be it the genre of drama or fiction, without sounding propagandistic, by transplanting wide-ranging global issues – like the USA’s war in Afghanistan – onto an idealized and myth-imbued environment. For example, in *The God of Hell*, America’s Diary-land, Wisconsin, becomes an anachronistic pastoral landscape which big time politics invades and destroys. Though most reviewers dismissed the play for its obvious political commitment, Shepard called it a comedy. In the naturalistic set of Emma and Frank’s farm he uses vaudeville and dark humor as well as elements reminiscent of Beckettian absurd to showcase the mechanisms, tools and strategies of power (any power system – as since Foucault we know that all power systems tend to move towards totalitarianism for it is the nature of power to infiltrate everyday practices, from public institutions to family, education, or even farms, and that this kind of diffuse, pervasive power may/will result in total control). Shepard also referred to *The God of Hell* as a satire on Republican politics, for one of the central issues evolves around the Iraq War and its effects on American culture and mentality. In his works Shepard mocks and criticizes both the advertisement-driven overt patriotism and paranoia dominating the American mind since the 9/11 attacks, and the unrealistic image of an innocent and uncorrupted rural/natural America. He was always a politically involved artist responding to the country’s involvement in international affairs, and its internal social and economic changes that transformed the “metanarratives”, to use Lyotard’s term, of the American dream, of endless frontiers, and of the unalienable rights of any individual to freedom and happiness, into mere anachronistic illusions.

His works focus on the possibility of identity construction in a society and culture built upon violence and the false ideal of a Manifest Destiny of invasion and subjugation. In *The God of Hell*, the characters Frank and Emma – guilty of ignorance and the illusion of being exempt from participating, or even thinking of and considering large political and economic trends and events, are forced to transit from their isolated, eventless and ignorant rural existence to a subject position imposed upon them by the invading power rooted in a “culture of war”. For, as Katherine Weiss states when discussing Shepard’s three plays, *A Lie of the Mind*, *States of Shock* and *The Late Henry Moss*, for Shepard war plays a crucial role in the making of America. She argues that Shepard’s works embody a discourse which reveals the playwright’s concern regarding an American culture deeply infested with a rage and violence that manifest in all of Shepard’s male characters and that are rooted in a trauma of war that men cannot overcome. Thus these male figures become unable to connect and communicate with their families and communities. This incommunicable trauma and the violence fueled by this frustration destroy the community and the culture in which the consciousness of war goes back as far as the frontier days. Thus, it may be argued that Shepard’s plays and fiction are permeated by subtle references to the horrific consequences of war that form a network of refined but firm anti-war statements.

3. SILENCE, AMBIGUITY, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

He also often operates with hiatus. Oftentimes, through the very brevity and multiple “indeterminacies” and “empty spaces” of his texts, he creates a literary discourse marked by silence and ambiguity. Rather than obscuring or hiding meaning, these textual gaps and indeterminacies contribute extensively and indispensably to the creation of meaning in *Stillwater* as well, demanding the active participation of the reader in this process. The double reference to the Christian hymn in two emphatic places of the text – in the first and the last sentences – signals toward the importance of the intertextual connection.

Still, the text itself does little more in unmasking this link and refuses to explain or comment on it, so it becomes the task of the reader to reveal the role of the hymn and of the quoted two verses in the process of interpretation and in the construction of meaning.

The element that stands out even more as being “surrounded by silence” is the above discussed sentence on the bombing of Kabul and Kandahar. As mentioned earlier, it seems to “appear out of nothing”, merely as a fleeting thought, and in a similar fashion it remains unexplained in the further parts of the text as well. The narrator’s “unwillingness” to comment on it becomes a hiatus within the text that speaks louder than words. The lack of context and contextualization, the seemingly missing links to the rest of the text create an interpretative tension that urges and forces the reader to read “between the lines”. It also saves the text from sounding like propaganda, and allows a wide field for different possible, maybe even contradictory readings.

One also notices the striking absence of an active agent within the sentence. The phrasing “bombs have been falling” (Shepard 2010, p. 185) on the two Afghan cities exempts the narrator from directly accusing or blaming anyone. The obviously catastrophic event is thus linked to no one in particular, and absolutely no hint is made to any cause-and-effect sequences that would have led to the terrific destruction that the given bombs must have been causing. This way, through “silence” and ambiguity, the focus is shifted from the historic and political magnitude, motives or consequences of the event to the very fact that it has been happening, to the shocking fact that it can happen. On the other hand, this “refusal” to comment also highlights nature’s neutrality, and – more importantly – Stillwater’s, and implicitly, people’s ignorance and disinterest when it comes to violent acts and human suffering as long as these things remain “distant” and out of sight.

CONCLUSION

In this context, then, *Stillwater*, becomes a text very different from a pastoral. With a single sentence – lacking any sentimentalism or hyperbolic elements, factual and objective – Shepard subverts readers’ expectations set up already by the title.

Contrary to the idealized and romanticized depiction of nature conventional in pastorals, he portrays nature as neutral and amoral, and his brief narrative becomes a firm stance against war, and a critique of people's ignorance and disregard for suffering. Within the striking "silences" of the text the reader is allowed to find and decode textual clues, decipher the significance of intertextual references, and fill the gaps within the tapestry of this subtly constructed Shepardian text.

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CHAPTER 2

VOICES UNHEARD: BOLLYWOOD AND THE JOURNEY TOWARD LGBTQ+ ACCEPTANCE

¹Dr. Hadwin Charlie Durai S.

²Anannya RAUT

¹Founder, Zion's Voice in the Wilderness Ministries, Chennai, charlidurai@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1061-9774

²Research Scholar, Journalism and Mass Communication, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, anannyaraut@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Topic

LGBTQ+ depicts lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or occasionally questioning), and others. Other sexual orientations, such as pansexual and two-spiritism, are represented by the "+." In recent years, there has been a shift in Indian cinema towards greater representation of the LGBTQ+ community. Bollywood has been leading the way in producing films that tell stories of individuals who do not conform to prevailing social expectations. This article takes a closer look at the growing presence of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films and how these characters are portrayed.

Purpose of the Research Paper

Analyzing the current state of LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood, including the themes and characters in recent films, the ultimate goal of this research paper is to raise awareness of the importance of LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood and to encourage more inclusive and equitable representation in Indian media.

Significance of LGBTQ+ Representation in Bollywood

As one of the largest film industries in the world, Bollywood has the power to influence millions of people and to shape cultural norms and beliefs. This power is responsible for accurately and respectfully representing all communities, including LGBTQ+.

In India, where homosexuality was illegal until 2018, and LGBTQ+ people still faced discrimination and marginalization, the representation of LGBTQ+ people in the media is vital. Bollywood has the potential to challenge harmful stereotypes and prejudices and promote greater understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood can provide visibility and representation to the LGBTQ+ community in India. When LGBTQ+ people see themselves and their experiences reflected in the media, they can profoundly impact their self-esteem, sense of identity, and sense of belonging to society.

In short, LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood is significant because it can shape cultural attitudes, challenge harmful stereotypes, promote understanding and acceptance, and provide visibility and representation for the LGBTQ+ community. By highlighting these voices and experiences, Bollywood has the power to create a more inclusive and equitable society.

Research Questions

- What is the current state of LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood, and how have recent Bollywood films portrayed LGBTQ+ characters and themes?
- What are the challenges and obstacles faced by LGBTQ+ community representation in Bollywood?
- How can the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Bollywood be improved to promote a greater understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in India?

1. BACKGROUND

Overview of Bollywood

Bollywood is an informal term used by the Hindi film industry in Mumbai, India. As one of the largest film industries in the world, Bollywood produces hundreds of films each year and has a vast audience both in India and internationally. As a result, Bollywood can shape public opinion and attitudes, and influence cultural norms and beliefs.

In recent years, Bollywood has begun to address LGBTQ+ themes and characters in some films, but representation remains limited and often stereotypical. Despite India's rich history of LGBTQ+ culture and expression, societal attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community remain negative, with many LGBTQ+ people facing discrimination and marginalization.

History of LGBTQ+ Representation in Bollywood

The representation of LGBTQ+ people in Bollywood has a long and complex history, shaped by cultural, political, and social factors.

While Indian society has a rich history of LGBTQ+ culture and expression, including references to same-sex relationships and gender non-conformity in ancient texts and art, attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community have become increasingly conservative in recent centuries.

In the early years of Bollywood, LGBTQ+ themes and characters were largely absent from Indian films, reflecting broader societal attitudes of shame and stigma toward the LGBTQ+ community. In 2018, the Indian Supreme Court declared that consensual gay sex was no longer a crime in India, a significant step forward for the LGBTQ+ community. Following this landmark decision, Bollywood has seen a more honest representation of the community, with films such as *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (2020) featuring positive LGBTQ+ characters and storylines.

Overview of LGBTQ+ Rights in India

Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was a colonial law enacted in 1862 that criminalized unnatural sexual acts, including homosexuality. The provision stated that anyone engaging in carnal intercourse against the order of nature, including anal sex, oral sex, and mutual masturbation, could be punished with life imprisonment or up to ten years in prison. This law violates human rights, including the right to live with dignity and freedom of expression. The law was applied to punish consensual homosexual acts and even punish heterosexual couples engaging in sodomy.

In *Naz Foundation Govt. V. The NCT Of Delhi* (2009) found that LGBT+ people were a "minuscule minority" and did not need constitutional protection. The court also found that Section 377 of the IPC was constitutional and did not suffer from a vice-of-unconstitutionality. Because LGBT people are a tiny minority, the Supreme Court adamantly neglected the basic fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, and 21, circumventing the Indian Constitution's core. The good news about this decision was that it reignited a fresh wave of campaigning in India, rather than ending the LGBT movement.

Because of their frequent rejection and lack of money, the transgender community frequently turns to beggars or prostitutes, which leaves them more open to prejudice, STDs, and criminal activities, such as human trafficking.

However, according to the Supreme Court's decision in the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India in 2014 gave these transgender individuals new hope and joy because they were acknowledged as the third gender for the first time in history. The Supreme Court further ordered the Indian government to regard those who identify as the "Third Gender" as an economically and socially disadvantaged class regarding reservations. The court also acknowledged that disagreements between a person's gender at birth and their current gender identification were not always pathological.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, is legislation passed by the government of India to protect the rights of transgender persons and to recognize their identities. The Act prohibits discrimination against transgender persons in various areas such as education, employment, and healthcare. It also established the National Council for Transgender Persons to advise the central government on issues related to transgender people. The Act also provides for the right to self-perceived gender identity and empowers transgender persons to obtain a certificate of identity as transgender. The act also includes punishment for offences such as forced or bonded labor; denial of use of public spaces; and physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, or economic abuse of transgender persons. Overall, the Act aims to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of transgender persons and to ensure their inclusion and participation in society.

The Role of Media in Shaping Public Opinion

News outlets, television shows, films, and social media platforms are potent sources of information that can shape people's beliefs and attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community.

The representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Indian media has been limited and stereotypical. This has contributed to the marginalization and stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community in Indian society. However, recent years have seen a change in the representation of the LGBTQ+ community in Indian media, with the release of films such as "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga," "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan," and "Badhai Do."

These films represent LGBTQ+ individuals as complex and human characters rather than caricatures or stereotypes, which has helped to increase the acceptance and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community in India.

Similarly, the media can shape public opinion by addressing LGBTQ rights issues and activism. The press can frame issues in a manner that shapes people's attitudes and beliefs. If the media frames LGBTQ+ rights as a human rights issue, it can help to create a more accepting and inclusive society.

The media play a crucial role in shaping public opinion regarding the LGBTQ+ community in India. By presenting accurate and inclusive representations of LGBTQ+ individuals and framing LGBTQ+ rights issues positively, media can create a more accepting and inclusive society for all individuals.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Claudia Böhme (2015) points out that amidst taboo Tanzanian filmmakers have come out with films such as *Popobawa* and *Shoga* pivoting on homosexuality and despite the controversies regarding morality have opened up debates on the contrasting topic.

Arvind Narrain (2018) mentions that only after the breakage judgement of the Indian Penal Code Section 377 by the Indian court regarding the LGBT community, the court and the public had a wider see of those people on the grounds of rights to equality, dignity and privacy. Yet there is a demand for other constitutional rights from the Supreme Court.

Angelique V. Nixon (2015) analysing the films by black Caribbean filmmakers, examined the difficulties in the representation of male same-sex desire due to larger societal concerns.

Dimitrina Petrova (2013) identifies the criminalisation of same-sex conduct and emphasises the need for decriminalisation. This discrimination could be achieved by the strategy of equality law which ensures equal respect, equal treatment and equal opportunity irrespective of sexual orientation leading to equal rights of homosexuals and LGBT persons.

Rama Srinivasan (2011) addresses various dimensions of Bollywood films on homosexuality and lesbianism in terms of casting and narratives.

The movies and the discussions in the public domain have brought about a certain degree of positive negotiation as the outcome of such controversial topics.

Sumit Saurabh Srivastava (2014) states that the mass media had a significant role in spreading LGBT activism in India. Referring to the gay pride walk across the country by the LGBT community from 2000 quotes that the community is gradually gaining momentum and strength. The author concludes that the LGBT community could enjoy social and legal entities only if the Supreme Court would sentence a favourable verdict.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Exploratory research method using qualitative research methodology

- Content Analysis:

Analyse the collected data to identify common themes, patterns, and trends related to

LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood and its impact on public opinion.

- Focus Group interviews:

Conduct focus group interviews with 120 LGBTQ+ individuals as sample size at

LGBTQ+ community in Raipur.

Data Collection Methods

Content Analysis: Content analysis was conducted on a sample of Bollywood films to analyse their representation of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines. From 1996 to 2023, there was a gradual change in the portrayal of the LGBTQ+ community in Bollywood. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood was largely stereotypical and insensitive. However, in recent years, there has been a shift towards a more nuanced and accepting portrayal of the community.

- Fire: Fire, a 1996 Indian film, is considered a landmark representation of LGBTQ+ communities in India.

The film, directed by Deepa Mehta, focuses on the relationship between two women, Radha and Sita, who are trapped in a loveless arranged marriage and find solace in each other's companies. The film was one of the first in India to depict same-sex relationships openly and was praised for its bold and sensitive portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters. At the time of its release, *Fire* faced significant opposition and controversy from conservative groups, who believed the film was promoting homosexuality and was against Indian culture. Despite this, the film has received critical acclaim and has since been recognized as a trailblazer for LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema. *Fire* has been credited with starting a conversation about homosexuality in India and helping increase the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities. While much work remains to be done regarding full acceptance and equality for LGBTQ+ people in India, *Fire* is remembered as a turning point in the representation of LGBTQ+ communities on Indian screens.

- **Daayra:** Nirmal Pandey and Sonali Kulkarni star in the 1996 Bollywood movie *Daayraa: The Square Circle*, which Amol Palekar directed. Award-winning journalist and author Timeri N. Murari wrote the screenplay. The plot centers on a romantic relationship between a transsexual dancer and a gang-raped woman who starts dressing as a man while exploring subjects like male-female relationships, preconceived ideals of love, and society's views towards them. The movie did not have a theatrical release in India, because of its delicate subjects. Currently, sexual identity, gender fluidity, and the definition of men and women are hot topics. Approaching these issues more than 25 years ago was extremely risky and brave. It feels astonishingly progressive, given the era and culture in which it originated. The movie explores various nuanced ideas about gender firsthand by following a cis woman who must disguise herself as a guy for protection, and a trans woman. Along with expressing her sentiments to the protagonist and viewer, the trans-woman character also discusses her feelings about dressing as a man.
- **My Brother Nikhil:** "My Brother Nikhil" is a 2005 Indian film based on the true story of Nikhil and Dominic, two men who lived and loved in Goa during a time when homosexuality was illegal in India.

Directed by Onir tells the story of, Nikhil is a successful state-level swimmer who is HIV positive. He must accept his diagnosis and the discrimination and stigma that accompany it. The Goa Public Health Act authorized the police to detain him and keep them in isolation at the time because the laws were abominable. Eventually, Nigel and Anamika freed Nikhil and launched People Positive, an AIDS support group. Subsequently, his parents accepted him. In LGBT films, Nikhil's parents treat him like their son when he dies. The film not only depicts the fight against homosexuals, but also tries to burst the myths about HIV.

- Dostana: "Dostana," a 2008 Bollywood film directed by Tarun Mansukhani, was one of the first mainstream Indian films to address LGBTQ+ issues. The film is a romantic comedy that centers around two male friends who pretend to be gays to rent an apartment with a female roommate. While the film was intended to be lighthearted and comedic, its representation of the LGBTQ+ community is not without controversy. The film perpetuated negative stereotypes and promoted the idea that being gay is a choice rather than an inherent aspect of one's identity. However, the film was also a positive step towards greater visibility and representation of the LGBTQ+ people in Indian media. However, laughs often played the film's depiction of homosexuality and failed to consider the complexities of LGBTQ+ experiences and the discrimination of many community members. Overall, while "Dostana" was groundbreaking in its attempt to address LGBTQ+ issues in Indian popular culture, its representation of the LGBTQ+ community was limited by the constraints of its comedic genre and the cultural attitudes of the time. Nevertheless, it remains an essential milestone in the representation of LGBTQ+ people in Indian media and a starting point for further discussions and progress towards a more nuanced and authentic representation of the LGBTQ+ community in India.
- Memories in March: "Memories in March" is a 2011 Indian film exploring a mother's acceptance of his son's homosexuality.

The film is set in the aftermath of the main character, Sanjoy Mukherjee's (played by Debshankar Halder) death and his mother, Arati Mukherjee's (played by Rituparna Sengupta), journey to come to terms with his sexual orientation. The film is widely considered one of the first mainstream Indian films to deal with homosexuality thoughtfully and sensitively. Through Arati's journey of acceptance, the film highlights the importance of love, understanding, and acceptance for the members of the LGBTQ+ community. The movie was slow-paced and lacked a clear narrative direction, making it difficult to connect with the characters and stay engaged in the story. The film lacked a sense of momentum and urgency and failed to build tension or suspense effectively. Another drawback was that the film was heavily handed in its messaging, with some scenes appearing preachy or moralistic. The film overly focused on making a statement about acceptance and understanding, which was detracted from the story's emotional impact. In addition, the film was overly melodramatic, with several scenes appearing excessively sentimental or manipulative. The film failed to strike a balance between emotional intensity and realism, which took away from its overall impact.

- I Am: "I Am" is a 2011 Indian film directed by Onir. The film is an anthology that tells four stories exploring themes of identity, sexuality, love, and acceptance. One of the stories in the film, titled "Omar," deals with the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community before the decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. In this story, Jai (Rahul Bose) is abused by a police officer who discovers him from engaging in sexual acts with another man. The police officer not only extorted money but also engaged in sexual misconduct. Despite the release of the lead character, the police officer experienced no consequences in his actions. However, the lead character is left with lasting psychological trauma from abuse. At last, Jai realises that Omar participated in the scheme to extort money from Jai. The movie is influenced by the articles and research materials available on the Gay Bombay website. This story accurately portrays the discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community, and highlights the need for physical and mental protection.

- **Bombay Talkies:** "Bombay Talkies," a 2013 Indian anthology film, was praised for its positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters and issues. The film, directed by four directors, featured four short films that explored different aspects of Indian society and culture. One of the short films, "Ajeeb Dastaan Hai Yeh," directed by Karan Johar, focuses on the relationship between two men, Varun and Rahul, who are in love but face societal pressures and discrimination. The film's depiction of the relationship between Varun and Rahul is significant in that it portrays a same-sex relationship in a non-stereotypical and sensitive manner, depicting the couple as two people deeply in love and committed to each other. These themes are woven into a broader story of the relationship between Varun and Rahul, giving them a human dimension and making them relevant to a broad audience.
- **Margarita with a Straw:** "Margarita with a Straw" 2014, directed by Shonali Bose, is a coming-of-age film that tells the story of Laila, a young Indian woman with cerebral palsy who leaves India to attend college in New York City. Laila is a creative and ambitious individual who dreams of being a writer and is determined to live life to the fullest extent despite her physical limitations. In New York, Laila meets Khanum, a blind woman who becomes a close friend and a confidant. Through their friendships, Laila discovers her sexual orientation and begins a romantic relationship with Khanum. The film explores Laila's journey as she grapples with her newfound feelings and challenges of being in a same-sex relationship. At the same time, Laila also deals with her family's reactions to her new life in New York and revelations about her sexuality. Her mother, in particular, struggles to accept Laila's relationship with Khanum and must come to terms with her prejudice and bias. Throughout the film, Laila must navigate her personal growth, relationships, and identity while confronting societal prejudices and stigmas regarding disability and homosexuality. This film is a powerful and poignant exploration of love, acceptance, and self-discovery.
- **Kapoor & Sons:** "Kapoor & Sons," a 2016 Indian film, was praised for its positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters and issues.

The film, directed by Shakun Batra, features a subplot involving Rahul Kapoor, a successful author, and his relationship with his partner Celina. The film was significant in portraying same-sex relationships in a non-stereotypical and sensitive manner, depicting the couple as deeply in love and committed to each other. This portrayal departed from the stereotypical and often negative depictions of LGBTQ+ characters that were common in Indian cinema at the time. In addition to depicting same-sex relationships, the film addresses issues such as coming out, discrimination, and acceptance within families. These themes were woven into the broader story of the Kapoor family, giving them a human dimension and making them relevant to a wide audience. Overall, "Kapoor & Sons" was seen as a step forward in the representation of LGBTQ+ communities in Indian cinema and was widely praised for its nuanced and empathetic portrayal of same-sex relationships.

- Aligarh: "Aligarh," a 2016 Indian film directed by Hansal Mehta, is based on the real-life story of Dr Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a professor of Marathi literature at Aligarh Muslim University who was suspended from his job and ostracized from society after being caught in a compromising position with another man. The film provides a nuanced and empathetic portrayal of the experiences of the LGBTQ+ people in India, particularly in terms of the discrimination, stigma, and marginalization they face. The film highlights the importance of acceptance and equality for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The film was widely praised for its sensitive handling of the subject matter and its powerful message of love and acceptance—the performance of actor Manoj Bajpayee, as Dr. Siras was widely acclaimed. Many reviewers praise the depth and nuance of his portrayal of a man struggling to find acceptance and dignity in a society hostile to his sexual orientation.
- Ek ladki ko dekha to aisalaga: "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" (2019) is a Bollywood film praised for its positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters and issues.

The film, directed by Shelly Chopra Dhar, tells the story of a young woman named Sweety, who is in love with another woman, Kuhu, but is struggling to come to her conservative Punjabi family. One of the film's key strengths is its depiction of Sweety's experience as a queer woman in the traditional Indian family. The film sensitively tackles the challenges that many LGBTQ+ people face when coming out, including fear of rejection, societal pressure, and internalized homophobia. Her father initially reacts negatively to the news, but soon realizes that she is the daughter he has loved his entire life. The way he accepts her is the cherry at the top of the movie. In addition, the film also addresses broader issues of acceptance and equality for LGBTQ+ people in India, showcasing the importance of love and family support for those who identify as LGBTQ+.

- Shubhmangal Zyada Savdhan: "Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan" is a 2020 Indian film directed by Hitesh Kewalya. The film is a romantic comedy that follows the story of two gay men, Aman and Kartik, who are in love and want to start a life together, but face resistance from their families and society. However, the film portrayed the families' reactions to the main characters as oversimplified and lacking in nuance, failing to accurately depict the complexities of family dynamics and the challenges LGBTQ+ people face in coming out to their families. The supporting cast, including Neena Gupta, Gajraj Rao, and Manurishi Chaddha, delivered praise-worthy performances with their comedic timing and depth of character adding to the film's overall impact.
- Laxmii "Laxmii" is a Bollywood horror-comedy film released in 2020, starting with Akshay Kumar and Kiara Advani in lead roles. The film tells the story of a man named Asif possessed by the spirit of a transgender woman named Laxmi. Laxmi was wronged in her past life, and she seeks revenge through Asif, who initially resists the possession but eventually comes to understand and empathise with Laxmi's plight. Regardless of its intentions, the movie Laxmii marginalizes an already ostracized trans community. Although it aims to satirize long-held beliefs and biases, the blandness of the plot and subsequent events detract from the intended message.

The film perpetuates old, derogatory stereotypes often associated with transgender women in Bollywood. The premise of the movie is problematic and transphobic, as it reinforces the notion that all transgender women are merely men. Depictions of queer characters, especially trans women and effeminate men, have long been plagued by stereotypes, with filmmakers frequently reducing them to hypersexualized villains, serial killers, or comedic clichés.

- **Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui:** Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui (2021) centres on Manu (Ayushmann Khurana), a big weightlifting athlete and gym trainer who develops feelings for the Zumba teacher at his facility. They resembled a match made in heaven. The character, played by Vaani Kapoor, was born a man, but has always felt more feminine on the inside. She underwent a sex-change procedure and was physically changed into one. The patient's mother and family avoided her. When it is discovered that she is a trans woman, everything changes. He initially maintained denial but subsequently became informed about gender flexibility. He needs much time to realize that love is an internal experience independent of physical characteristics, gender, and social expectations. Once again, this is a compelling statement. We all yearn for inclusion and inclusivity, but this should not come at the expense of self-respect. Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui is a conversation starter about a taboo subject. A woman's experience was handled with enormous maturity, empathy, and restraint, while respectfully depicted on the screen. In terms of what indeed occurs when people experience such biases in the world based on their gender identification, the movie could have done much with the plot at hand.
- **Badhai Do:** In the 2022 Indian Hindi comedy-drama Badhaai Do, a couple in a lavender marriage is portrayed. A gay police officer and lesbian teacher live twice as outcasts in the gay and lesbian communities. The movie sensitively depicts the extreme alienation and isolation that gay people experience, especially when they are left without a channel for open communication with their family and must resolve problems independently.

The movie depicts how the lead character is caught by a man masquerading as a woman through an online dating site, leading to being stalked by the same man. Both lead actors, Bhumi Pednekar and Rajkumar Rao, strive to hide their sexual orientations from their families and society, and try to become someone they are not. Although the story's ending is wishful thinking, the movie clearly shows the difficulties LGBTQ+ individuals and couples face in adopting their children.

Findings From the Content Analysis

Misinformation about misrepresented characters in movies is a huge problem, as these characters are often portrayed stereotypically, with tacky dialogue and over-the-top behavior. Gay men are frequently obsessed with straight men, while transgender people are depicted as running brothels or engaging in illegal activities. Additionally, male actors in mainstream movies often cross-dress inappropriately due to comedic effects. These representations can be harmful, perpetuating the idea that being a gay or transgender is abnormal or deviant.

It is also problematic that characters who are gays are often reduced to their sexuality, with their entire identity defined solely by their sexual orientation. This portrayal is not only inaccurate, but also offensive. This misrepresentation can be found in lowbrow and high-profile movies such as *Kal Ho Na Ho* and *Student of the Year*.

In *Kal Ho Na Ho*, for example, the house help's disgust upon finding two men in a compromising position reinforces the stigma against the LGBTQ+ community. It is particularly disappointing that this comes from a filmmaker belonging to the community. Similarly, in *Student of the Year*, the gay principal's entire existence revolves around his sexuality, with his hitting of the sports teacher being a significant plot point.

Maharani, an evil transgender pimp running a brothel in the movie *Sadak* decades ago, is not the same as Fawad Khan's character in *Kapoor and Sons*, an attractive, likeable, and honest gay man with complexities beyond his sexuality in the 21st century. When members of the LGBTQ+ community are cast in stereotypical and negative roles in movies, they only reinforce existing hatred in the real world.

Despite increasing awareness, Bollywood movies have a long way to go. Therefore, it is crucial to have thoughtfully crafted films with a more mindful approach.

Several films have done an excellent job representing the LGBTQIA+ community and have shed light on their challenges. One example is the movie *Aligarh*, which is based on a true story and is a powerful portrayal of the homophobic structure of Indian society and institutional modalities of sexuality. The film effectively represents what the community goes through and emphasizes the importance of dignity in society. *Margarita with a Straw* is another film that explores intersectionality and portrays a bisexual character, Laila, who struggles with cerebral palsy and societal prejudices. *My Brother Nikhil*, directed by Onir in 2005, depicts the impact of the AIDS pandemic on the gay community during the 90s and the early 2000s. In *Kapoor and Sons*, Fawad Khan's character is at ease with his homosexuality and portrayed as having layers beyond his sexuality, which is a positive representation of the community. These movies are good examples of positive representation essential for promoting the dignity and acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga portrayed a lesbian relationship as the main plot, showcasing the couple's inner struggle, societal pressure, and love in a tender, yet shame-ridden manner. This attempt, though not without flaws (a cisgender heterosexual man's voice throughout), was significant, as it came decades after the movie *Fire*. Another successful commercial film, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, featured a gay couple and addressed the impact of the repeal of section 377. These films are crucial in portraying the LGBTQ+ community in a positive light rather than solely as oppressed and outcast individuals. When such films succeed at the box office, they encourage more filmmakers and actors to strive for better representation and wider audiences. Although *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* was slightly over-the-top, the fact that a teenager could watch and relate to the romantic tune of the movie is a significant step forward.

Observations

Bollywood can influence and shape the opinions of the masses, making it a powerful tool for the LGBTQIA community. It is crucial to break down the stigma surrounding homophobic and transphobic attitudes, which have been passed down from generation to generation. The '+' in LGBTQIA+ reminds us of the vastness and complexity of the community, which still holds many untold stories waiting to be shared. Since there is still much confusion and misunderstanding about gender and sexuality, filmmakers must handle these sensitive subjects carefully, spreading rational information, and portraying the community positively. It may seem overly idealistic, but treating someone's representation with dignity and respect does not require much; it is a bare minimum and an absolute necessity.

In conclusion, the scenario of the LGBTQ+ community in Bollywood has changed dramatically over the past few decades, moving from a limited and stereotypical representation to a more accepting and nuanced portrayal.

Focus Groups: Focus groups was by visiting the local LGBTQ+ shelter "Garima Grih" at Sarona, Raipur, C.G. to gather data from a more extensive sample of participants.

Questionnaire

- What is your Gender Identity?

Table 1. Gender Identity

Transgender	65.5%
Non-binary	34.5%

- What is your sexual orientation?

Table 2. Sexual orientation

Lesbian	10.3%
Gay	20.7%
Transwoman	10.3%
Bisexual	34.5%
Pansexual	24.1%

- Have you ever experienced discrimination or prejudice in your life because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Table 3. Experiences of Discrimination or Prejudice Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Yes	55.2%
No	44.8%

- Have you ever faced harassment or violence because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Table 4. Experiences of Harassment or Violence Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Yes	79.3%
No	20.7%

- Have you ever discussed LGBTQ+ issues with your family members or friends?

Table 5. Discussions of LGBTQ+ Issues with Family Members or Friends

Yes with family	55.2%
No, with neither family	44.8%

- How supportive have your family and friends been of your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Table 6. Perceived Support from Family and Friends for Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Not very supportive	24.1%
Not supportive at all	75.9%

- Do you think Bollywood is responsible for accurately representing the LGBTQ+ community in its films?

Table 7. Perceptions of Bollywood's Responsibility for Accurate LGBTQ+ Representation

Yes, always	Yes, but only if it fits the story	Not sure
41.4%	34.5%	24.1%

- How often do you see an accurate and positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films?

Table 8. Perceived Frequency of Accurate and Positive LGBTQ+ Representation in Bollywood Films

Sometimes	Often	Always
58.6%	10.3%	31.0%

- How important is it to you to see LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films?

Table 9. Perceived Importance of LGBTQ+ Characters in Bollywood Films

Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Extremely important
00.0%	00.0%	10.3%	89.7%

- How important is it to you to see LGBTQ+ storylines in Bollywood movies?

Table 10. Perceived Importance of LGBTQ+ Storylines in Bollywood Films

Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Extremely important
00.0%	00.0%	10.3%	89.7%

- How do you feel about how Bollywood films typically portray LGBTQ+ characters?

Table 11. Perceptions of the Portrayal of LGBTQ+ Characters in Bollywood Films

Negative	Neutral	Positive
24.1%	62.1%	13.8%

- Which of the following terms would you use to describe how Bollywood portrays LGBTQ+ characters?

Table 12. Descriptors of LGBTQ+ Character Portrayals in Bollywood Films

Stereotypical	20.7%
Diverse	3.4%
Repetitive	41.4%
Authentic	34.5%

- Have you ever been positively impacted by the representation of an LGBTQ+ character in a Bollywood film?

Table 13. Positive Impact of LGBTQ+ Character Representation in Bollywood Films

Yes	86.2%
No	13.8%

- Do you think there is a need for more representation of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in Bollywood films?

Table 14. Perceived Need for Greater LGBTQ+ Representation in Bollywood Films

Yes	79.3%
No	20.7%

- What changes would you like to see in how Bollywood represents the LGBTQ+ community?

Table 15. Desired Changes in LGBTQ+ Representation in Bollywood Films

More diverse	More accurate	More positive
20.7%	62.1%	13.8%

Findings from the Focus Group

The data collected through focus group discussions provides valuable insights into the representation of the LGBTQ+ community in Bollywood films and the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The majority of participants identified as transgender (65.5%) or non-binary (35.5%), showcasing the need for more inclusive portrayals of gender identities in Bollywood.

In terms of sexual orientation, respondents identified as lesbian (10.3%), gay (20.7%), bisexual (34.5%), pansexual (24.1%), and asexual (0%), emphasizing the diverse spectrum of sexual orientations that should be better represented on-screen.

A significant proportion of participants (55.2%) reported experiencing discrimination or prejudice due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, highlighting the urgency to address these issues in society and media representation. Interestingly, while the majority felt that positive and accurate representation of LGBTQ+ characters is only sometimes seen in Bollywood films (58.6%), a substantial percentage believed it to be always present (31%). This indicates that there is still room for improvement in portraying LGBTQ+ characters authentically and positively in the Indian film industry.

Participants' feelings about how Bollywood typically portrays LGBTQ+ characters were largely neutral (62.1%), but a significant minority perceived it as negative (24.1%), underscoring the importance of promoting more inclusive and empathetic portrayals. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the respondents (41.4%) felt that Bollywood bears the responsibility of accurately representing the LGBTQ+ community in its films, suggesting a recognition of the industry's potential to influence social attitudes and acceptance.

The study found an overwhelming majority (89.7%) of participants considering LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films as extremely important. This highlights the impact that on-screen representation can have on fostering understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in India. However, participants' discussions revealed a lack of supportiveness from family and friends towards their sexual orientation or gender identity, with 75.9% reporting a lack of support. This underlines the need for media representation to fill the gap and promote acceptance and understanding within families and society.

Encouragingly, a majority of participants (79.3%) expressed that they have discussed LGBTQ+ issues with family members, indicating an increasing openness and willingness to engage in dialogues about these topics. Still, more efforts are required to break stereotypes in Bollywood's portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters, as 44.1% described the representation as repetitive.

The study also revealed that positive representation in Bollywood films had a significant impact on respondents, with 86.2% reporting a positive impact. This emphasizes the power of media to influence public perception and attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community.

Observations

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate the importance of promoting accurate, positive, and diverse representation of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in Bollywood films. The Indian film industry plays a crucial role in shaping societal norms and attitudes, and by reflecting the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, it has the potential to promote greater understanding and acceptance of the community. Addressing the challenges and obstacles to LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood can lead to more inclusive and equitable media, fostering a more accepting and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals in India.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Size: The sample size for this study was 106 respondents, which, although respectable, may not fully represent the entire diversity and complexity of the LGBTQ+ community in India. A larger and more diverse sample could provide more comprehensive insights into the perceptions and experiences of a broader range of individuals.

Sampling Bias: The recruitment of participants for the focus group discussions might have led to sampling bias, as individuals who chose to participate could have particular interests or experiences related to the topic. This could affect the generalizability of the findings to the broader LGBTQ+ population in India.

Self-Report Bias: The study relies on self-report data from focus group participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias or participants providing responses they believe are expected of them. This bias could impact the accuracy and reliability of the data collected.

Contextual Factors: The study does not account for the specific cultural, regional, or socio-economic contexts of the participants.

These factors can significantly influence perceptions and experiences related to LGBTQ+ representation and acceptance, and not considering them might limit the scope of the findings.

Limited Geographical Scope: The focus group discussions were likely conducted in a specific geographical area or urban centre, which may not represent the experiences and opinions of LGBTQ+ individuals across the entire country. Variability in attitudes and acceptance levels may exist across different regions in India.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the perspectives and opinions of a subset of the LGBTQ+ community in India and offers a foundation for future research in this critical area of study.

4. DISCUSSION

Several important insights regarding the representation of the LGBTQ+ community in Bollywood films and the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in India are discussed as follows:

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Diversity: The data shows a diverse range of gender identities and sexual orientations among the participants, including transgender and non-binary individuals, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual individuals. This diversity highlights the need for more inclusive and representative portrayals of gender and sexuality in Bollywood films to reflect the full spectrum of identities within the LGBTQ+ community.

Experiences of Discrimination and Prejudice: The study reveals that over half of the participants have experienced discrimination or prejudice due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This emphasizes the ongoing challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Indian society and the importance of media representation in combating stereotypes and promoting acceptance.

Mixed Views on Bollywood Representation: While some participants felt that accurate and positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films is often seen, others felt that it is only sometimes present. Additionally, a significant number of participants viewed Bollywood's portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters negatively.

These mixed views indicate the need for more nuanced and authentic portrayals in films to resonate positively with the LGBTQ+ audience.

Responsibility of Bollywood: A considerable proportion of participants believed that Bollywood has a responsibility to accurately represent the LGBTQ+ community in its films. This finding suggests that there is an awareness of the potential impact of media representation on societal attitudes and acceptance.

Importance of Representation: The overwhelming majority of participants expressed that LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films is extremely important to them. This demonstrates the significance of positive and inclusive portrayals in fostering understanding, acceptance, and validation for the LGBTQ+ community.

Supportiveness from Family and Friends: The data indicates that a substantial number of participants did not receive supportive responses from their family and friends regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. This underscores the crucial role of media representation in providing role models and promoting acceptance within families and society.

Impact of Positive Representation: The majority of respondents reported being positively impacted by the representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films. This highlights the potential of media to influence perceptions and attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community positively.

Need for More Representation: A significant majority of participants expressed the need for more representation of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in Bollywood films. This finding reinforces the importance of increasing diversity and visibility to foster greater understanding and acceptance.

Overall, the findings suggest that while there have been some positive steps in LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood, there is still significant progress to be made. The study underscores the importance of more authentic, diverse, and empathetic portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters in Indian media to promote social change and create a more inclusive and accepting society.

Implications for the LGBTQ+ Community

Visibility and Validation: The findings highlight the importance of accurate and positive representation of LGBTQ+ characters in Bollywood films. Increased visibility and authentic portrayals can provide validation and a sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, helping them feel seen and recognized in society.

Empowerment and Advocacy: Positive representation in media can empower LGBTQ+ individuals to advocate for their rights and challenge stereotypes and discrimination. Media visibility can serve as a catalyst for advocacy and social change.

Awareness and Understanding: Bollywood films can play a crucial role in educating the wider public about the experiences, challenges, and diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. Accurate and empathetic portrayals can lead to increased awareness and understanding, thereby fostering acceptance and support.

Countering Stigma and Prejudice: Addressing negative stereotypes and promoting authentic portrayals in Bollywood films can contribute to breaking down stigma and prejudice against the LGBTQ+ community. This can have a positive impact on societal attitudes and interactions.

Implications for Bollywood

Social Responsibility: The findings underscore the social responsibility of Bollywood as a powerful influencer of public opinion. The industry has the potential to contribute to societal change by portraying LGBTQ+ characters and themes in a responsible, respectful, and authentic manner.

Market Demand: The data indicates that there is a significant demand for more LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films from the audience, particularly from the LGBTQ+ community itself. Meeting this demand can attract a broader audience and foster a more inclusive and loyal fan base.

Industry Progression: Bollywood has an opportunity to lead in the representation of LGBTQ+ characters and stories, setting an example for other media industries in India. By embracing diversity and inclusivity, Bollywood can contribute to a more progressive and accepting entertainment landscape.

Collaboration and Consultation: The findings suggest that involving LGBTQ+ activists, organizations, and experts in the filmmaking process can lead to more authentic and sensitive portrayals. Engaging in meaningful collaboration can help ensure accurate representation and avoid harmful stereotypes.

Positive Impact on Culture: By actively promoting diverse and empathetic representations, Bollywood can help shape and influence societal attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. This can create a more inclusive and accepting cultural landscape in India.

Talent and Creativity: Embracing LGBTQ+ characters and themes can unlock new creative possibilities and storylines for filmmakers. This can lead to a wider range of compelling narratives that resonate with audiences and contribute to the growth and evolution of Bollywood as an industry.

CONCLUSION

Bollywood films often misrepresent LGBTQ+ characters with stereotypical portrayals, tacky dialogues, and over-the-top behaviors. Gay men are frequently depicted as being obsessed with straight men, while transgender characters are shown running brothels or engaging in illegal activities. These representations perpetuate harmful stereotypes and stigmatize the LGBTQ+ community.

Characters who identify as LGBTQ+ are often reduced to their sexual orientation, with their entire identity defined solely by their sexuality. This portrayal is inaccurate and offensive, limiting the depth and complexity of LGBTQ+ characters in films.

Bollywood films should strive for more thoughtful and mindful portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters. Thoughtfully crafted films can promote dignity and acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community and break down stigmas surrounding homophobic and transphobic attitudes.

The study revealed a diverse range of gender identities and sexual orientations among the participants, highlighting the need for more inclusive representation in Bollywood films.

A significant proportion of participants reported experiencing discrimination or prejudice due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues in society and media representation.

The majority of participants considered LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films as extremely important, indicating the potential impact of media on fostering understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

The study revealed a lack of supportiveness from family and friends toward LGBTQ+ individuals, indicating the need for media representation to promote acceptance and understanding within families and society.

Positive representation in Bollywood films had a significant impact on participants, leading to increased awareness and positive attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for Bollywood to move towards more authentic, positive, and diverse representations of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines. Thoughtful and mindful filmmaking can contribute to promoting understanding, empathy, and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in Indian society. The positive impact of inclusive representation in films can play a crucial role in breaking down stigmas and fostering a more accepting and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals in India.

Future Directions for Research

Based on the findings and implications of the current study, here are some recommendations for future research:

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films over time and assess their impact on public attitudes and acceptance. Long-term research can provide valuable insights into the evolution of LGBTQ+ representation in Indian media.

Intersectional Analysis: Explore the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, caste, religion, and socioeconomic status in Bollywood's portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters. Understanding how multiple identities intersect can lead to more nuanced and inclusive representations.

Audience Perception Studies: Conduct research to gauge the audience's perceptions and reactions to LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films.

Understanding how different segments of the audience respond to such portrayals can help filmmakers make informed decisions.

Comparative Studies: Conduct comparative studies across different film industries in India to assess the state of LGBTQ+ representation and acceptance. Comparing Bollywood with regional film industries can highlight regional differences and common challenges.

Filmmaker Perspectives: Explore the perspectives and challenges faced by Bollywood filmmakers in portraying LGBTQ+ characters. Investigate the factors that influence their decisions and identify opportunities to encourage more inclusive storytelling.

LGBTQ+ Representation in Other Media: Extend research beyond Bollywood films to include other forms of Indian media, such as television shows, web series, and advertisements, to understand the broader media landscape and its impact on LGBTQ+ representation.

Qualitative Research with Non-LGBTQ+ Audiences: Conduct qualitative research with non-LGBTQ+ audiences to understand their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films. This can reveal potential barriers and areas for improvement in fostering empathy and acceptance.

Influence of Censorship: Examine the influence of censorship policies and guidelines on LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films. Investigate how filmmakers navigate these restrictions and suggest policy changes to promote inclusive storytelling.

By pursuing these research recommendations, scholars and stakeholders can contribute to the ongoing efforts to promote more inclusive, diverse, and authentic LGBTQ+ representation in Bollywood films and Indian media as a whole. Such research can foster positive social change and contribute to a more accepting and equitable society.

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CHAPTER 3

GENDER RELATIONS AND POWER IN AHMED YERIMA'S THEATRE

¹Temilade Afolasade OLATUNJI

¹Department of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro. Ogun State, Nigeria,
temilade.olatunji@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0009-0004-2127-0023

INTRODUCTION

Ahmed Yerima is one of the most significant contemporary playwrights in Nigeria to have always focused on the interplay between gender, power, and society expectation in his plays. His plays offer a lot to learn about the way Nigerian society is structuring and bargaining masculine and feminine role especially in marriage, family, politics, and spiritual power. Yerima predicts the social and cultural aspects of human relations, unlike many dramatists who concentrate on political or historical subjects, the author uses gender as a prism which reflects large-scale issues of righteousness, power and societal duty. The chapter analyzes the interaction of gender relations by Yerima in four of his confirmed plays namely, *The Sisters* (2001), *The Wives* (2007), *Yemoja* (2002) and *The Last Game of Kaffir* (2001). The chapter also seeks to show that the dramatization of gender presented by Yerima is reflective and critical. At one level, his plays reflect the Nigerian cultural demands and standards, specifically the ones based on the patriarchal organizations and Yoruba cultures. Men tend to be described as a head of the household, bearers of social order, or even those who get involved in disputes within the community whereas women go through domestic, family and sometimes spiritual realms. At another plane, Yerima questions those norms and points to the instances of resistance, bargaining, and empowerment particularly when female characters are opposing unfair systems or demonstrating moral authority. Through these dynamics, the chapter has placed the theatre of Yerima as one of the arenas where gendered power dynamics are dramatized, disputed, and negotiated and demonstrated the tricky nature of the relationship between individual agency and social demand.

The plays that were chosen to perform this analysis can offer a variety of examples of gender relations. Yerima is introduced in *The Sisters*, where sibling rivalry and female solidarity are offered, the motivation of how women can bargain both social and family pressure and claim agency within narrow spheres is explored. *The Wives* focuses on marriage affairs and sheds light on the conflict between old-fashioned demands of male dominance and feminine maneuvers of bargaining and persuasion.

Yemoja is a character who is based on Yoruba mythology and emphasizes the presence of feminine power in spirituality and the consequences of such a power to the human system of authority, and the Yoruba mythology characterizes the way in which divine femininity challenges and disturbs human gender dominance. Lastly, *Kaffir Last Game* challenges the issues of moral and ethical choices in a gendered society, demonstrating the ways in which male and female protagonists find their way around power, accountability, and social responsibility. Combined, the plays provide the full picture of gendered experiences and power structure in Nigeria today.

The chapter anticipates the literary and theatrical aspects of the Yerima work, discussing the gendered power relations that are expressed through dialogue, characterization, staging and symbolic motifs. Though it does not dwell on abstract theoretical description, it focuses more on textual and performative evidence, or how gender influences not only the way characters interact but how it affects the narrative. Also, the chapter contextualizes the work of Yerima in a wider socio-cultural context, how the theatre mirrors and challenges the societal norms. Using gender as the key prism, the chapter helps to grasp the ethical, social, and cultural interests of human interaction in Nigerian drama. By doing it, this piece of work not only sheds light on the dramaturgy of Yerima but also reminds us of the ongoing applicability of theatre as the tool of examining gendered experiences, distribution of power and social constructs. It contends that with his subtle portrayal of femininity and masculinity, Yerima proposes theatre as a medium upon which the Nigerian audiences can critically address questions of power, right and wrong as well as social change.

1. GENDER OF SOCIO CULTURAL CONTEXT

The interpretation of gender relations in the Ahmed Yerima dramaturgy entails placing his theatre in the socio cultural realities of Nigeria especially on how gender roles are socialized and enacted in Nigeria. Similar to most societies in Africa, Nigeria has been traditionally a patriarchal society with men dominating the family and social structures through formal authority and women through social networks, moral leadership and cultural roles (Eluogu, 2010). The cultural background is apparent in the plays of Yerima.

In *The Sisters* (2001), the main female characters can be seen to be trading family ties, reputation, and social pressures in a system that supports male dominance. Their engagements are representative of both the cultural requirements in terms of female fidelity, compliance, and relationship authority, as well as it brings forward the maneuvers of resourcefulness and ethical bargaining. Gender scholarship of Nigerian drama stresses that women generally have to act indirectly - indirectly through dialogue, positioning within the community, and emotional work - to subvert easy beliefs about passivity in patriarchy (Akinwale, 2013).

The Wives (2007) prefigures the theme of gender through marriage, in a way of negotiating power between husbands and wives. In most Nigerian marriage situations, men have been traditionally linked to the decision making power, the responsibility to provide for the family as well as social representation of the household. Though women are not always included in the official decision-making process, they affect the household outcomes by persuading, morally controlling, and strategically cooperating (Oha, 2015). Yerima poeticizes these processes due to dramatic scenes of the home where wives express their demands, insist on unfair behavior, or manipulate the results with the help of moral arguments.

The fact that the spiritual authority is significant in the culture also adds to the gender dynamics in Yerima. *Yemoja* (2002) focuses on an influential female image that is based on the Yoruba mythology. Yemoja is not merely a maternal and protective spirit, but also a morality judge, who helps the community to make decisions and compromise a conflict. As a narrative that foreshadows a Goddess-like female figure, Yerima upsets traditional gender hierarchies and makes femininity the focal point of the communal justice and religious health. Historians also add that these depictions are in line with the Yoruba cultural practices where women gods have critical roles of morality, fertility and harmony of community (Osundare, 2016). In a way, by so doing Yerima creates a stage where female moral authority becomes dramatized as being equal or even better than male political power.

Kaffir Last Game (2001) provides yet another point of view on the gendered power in that it does not deal with domestic spheres but with the ethical bargaining in social and professional life.

In this case there are male and female characters who relate in such a manner that they reveal the socially dictated norms in regards to honor, courage and social responsibility. Male characters tend to be placed as carriers of collective expectation and are subject to the trial of communal leadership or moral decision making. Women characters are less physically dominant but in most instances, they demonstrate moral clarity and moral reasoning, displaying the ambiguity of gendered moral authority in the public.

In these creations Yerima dramatizes gender not as a fixed set of characteristics but as a set of relations conditioned by cultural, familial and spiritual conventions. His plays depict gendered expectations which are socially constructed and played out, as opposed to biologically set. This way, the theatre of Yerima can be described as a living commentary of how the Nigerian society perceives masculinity, femininity, authority, and moral responsibility.

This situational background is a precursor towards an analysis of masculinity and femininity in subsequent passages. It is through the understanding of the cultural norms that Yerima works with that we can more fully appreciate how his characters are either negotiable or resistant to the established gender roles- provide dramatic spaces where power, equality and social change are negotiated through performance and storytelling.

2. MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION IN THEATRE OF AHMED YERIMA

Masculinity is a performative identity in the plays of Ahmed Yerima which is constructed socially according to the cultural expectations, group obligations and individual values. Patriarchy in the Nigerian society is manifested in that male characters tend to be put in charge, make decisions, and carry the moral code. The dramatization of masculinity by Yerima is however subtle: his male characters are not all submissive heroes but not all oppressive. They instead move along a continuum of actions made by tradition, moral expectation and personal conscience. This part of the paper explores how Yerima invokes masculinity in characterization, dialogue and dramatic situations in consideration of four confirmed plays; *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), *The Wives* (2007) *Yemoja* (2002) and *The Sisters* (2001).

In the film *Kaffir Last Game*, the concept of masculinity is significantly connected with the responsibility of being ethical and the community. The male character is put in ethically problematic scenarios where the maxims of courage, loyalty and social awareness are put to a test. Yerima describes masculinity as the combination of physical ability, decisiveness, and morality that points out that men are supposed to take action not only to their own advantage but also to the advantage of the entire community (Yerima, 2001). The paradox in the play is the conflict of the protagonist who is not able to come to terms with the desires of society and his own desires. By means of dialogue and narrative exposition, Yerima reveals all the psychological pressure related to the male power: men are judged with respect to the collective norms and moral laws, and the violation of these norms leads to the social and personal results. This is based on masculinity being held responsible and accountable, and ethically contingent, not merely performative or hierarchical.

The Wives presents a domestic view of masculinity, with its emphasis laid on the power of husbands as in marital and domestic settings. In this case, the male characters are supposed to offer material support, uphold social order and uphold family honor as a traditional Nigerian male (Yerima, 2007). However, Yerima makes such norms less straightforward, by showing cases where male power is being put to test by the ethical argument and manoeuvring of female characters. To use an example, a wife can challenge or fix the decision made by a husband, which goes to show that masculinity is not something that can be absolute and it is continuously negotiated within the domestic space. The dialogue and dramatic irony of the conversation between Yerima and the men emphasize that the power of the male is based on such issues as wisdom, fairness, and responsiveness, which implies that ideal masculinity must be responsive to both the demands of morality and society.

In *Yemoja*, the issue of masculinity is pursued based on spiritual and moral hierarchy. Male characters deal with the female goddess, whose name is Yemoja whose power exceeds human patriarchal organization. Yerima introduces men who have to strike a balance between respect to divine femininity and their own roles of position of leadership and social responsibility (Yerima, 2002).

The play presents male characters, who, even with the cultural privilege, have to be ethically and spiritually responsible to higher moral standards. This kind of narrative concerns focuses on the idea of masculinity as a situational concept: it must be conscious of social, moral, and spiritual obligations. Yerima plays out these expectations in ritualized dialogue, symbolic action and organized conflicts whereby the legitimacy of the social authority of men is not only warranted by physical and/or political domination but also the ethical behavior and moral courage.

The Sisters offers an analogous discussion of masculinity within the family and community context. The male characters in this play have the duty of ensuring social cohesion and resolution of conflicts, especially when it comes to female characters. Yerima underlines the performative aspect of masculinity, in which men demonstrate the control over the power by acting and talking. Meanwhile, we can see that masculinity is a subject of unremitting examination in the play: it is not only men who judge the conduct of men but also women and the general society. The relationship between the sisters and their male counterparts shows that the masculinity is a negotiated position, which is determined through social observation, moral expectation and the relationship (Yerima, 2001). In the works that Yerima represented, there are a number of recurring characteristics of masculinity:

Moral responsibility: Men are shown as ethical agents, who have to act in the interest of the whole.

Public and private power: Men are those who hold power in family, community and political arenas.

Negotiation and flexibility: Masculinity is conditional and changes in relation to agency of women, moral conflict, and social transformation.

The performance under examination: Men are always assessed, according to the social rules, spiritual demands and relationship dynamics.

The weakness and malleability of masculinity are emphasized in the dramaturgy of Yerima. The dominance of men is depicted as one that is conditional and not impeccable but with a condition of following the ethical code and being subject to social interaction.

This method corresponds with academic evaluation of the Nigerian drama, which states that masculinity in African theatre is commonly created as a moral and social play, defined by both cultural demands and dramatic requirement (Eluogu, 2010; Akinwale, 2013). The analysis of text shows also that Yerima applies dramatic effects to express masculinity. Through dialogue, soliloquy and monologue, the male characters can demonstrate the inner struggle, moral reasoning and social prudence. The struggle and restrictions of male authority are dramatized in conflict resolution and relational negotiation. Such symbolic gestures as bowing to the spiritual power in *Yemoja* or ethical intervention in the *Last Game of Kaffir* show the moral aspect of masculinity, where men are expected to be responsible to the society as well as to some greater entity.

To sum up, the construction of masculinity by Yerima is multifarious, interrelational, and ethical. In his plays, the male characters have to negotiate with the expectation of society, morality, and relationship. Masculinity is not just an exercise of social dominance but an aspect of bravery, uprightness and sensitivity to the societal and spiritual standards. Introducing men as socially and morally responsible, the theatre by Yerima makes audiences think about the ethical consequences of power in a male-dominated world and shows ideal masculinity as both power and responsibility.

3. FEMININITY CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY THEATRE IN AHMED YERIMA

The femininity of Ahmed Yerima plays is represented as the somewhat intricate mix of social anticipation, moral power, and relationship power, which is most frequently practiced in the community, household, and spiritual realms. Female characters are not passive or secondary, on the contrary, Yerima provides them with an agency, moral understanding, and strategic power and emphasizes how women manage the systems of patriarchy to exercise their influence. Yerima continues to discuss femininity as having to deal with the resilience, negotiation, and ethical leadership, as referenced in the plays *The Sisters* (2001), *The Wives* (2007), *Yemoja* (2002), and *Kaffirs Last Game* (2001), thus becoming a major axis towards explaining the power relations in his theatre.

In the play, *The Sisters*, Yerima shows two sisters who might be regarded as the representatives of opposite approaches to female agency. Societal pressure to conform requires the characters to be obedient, loyal to their families and morally upright; however, they bargain with this pressure in a way that proclaims freedom of choice (Yerima, 2001). One sister is persuasive through moral arguments and influence as it does the family choices and the other resists through non-violent means in order to attain the individual and shared objectives. This play reveals that femininity, in the dramaturgy of Yerima, is performative, strategic: women are not only able to influence by authority, but also by being morally acute, crafty in relationships, and sensitive to negotiate societal regulations. According to the scholarly analysis, these representations are indicative of the greater Nigerian realities, where women often find their ways in a patriarchal system on a relational and moral level (Akinwale, 2013).

The Wives also highlights the domestic and marriage aspects of femininity. The woman characters bargain in the male-dominated house structures. Yerima plays scenes where wives take their own position and shape decisions that would include the family, show their moral clarity, intervene in conflict situations to create a balance (Yerima, 2007). These depictions make for the moral and ethical side of femininity, which demonstrates women as a price giver of values to the society and family unity. Notably, Yerima does not portray his female characters as ideal people; they feel frustration, conflict, and constraints of the societal norms. However, even in these limitations, they have agency and show the way femininity can challenge and support male power giving an alternative perspective on the patriarchal systems.

Yemoja gives an impressive representation of female spiritual power, extending femininity outside the domestic and social fields. Yemoja is a sacred Yoruba mythical goddess of morality and ethics, a teacher of human beings, the administer of justice and a conflict resolver (Yerima, 2002). Yerima gives femininity a new status of symbolic, spiritual value through the character Yemoja, proving that feminine power may override human limitations of patriarchy.

According to scholars like Osundare (2016), the use of mythical female characters by Yerima falls under the cultural legacy of the Yoruba whereby female deities are the key elements of communal morality, fertility and social unity. The play can be used to demonstrate that femininity creates a socially constructed position but can also transcend on a higher plane as women create a moral, ethical and spiritual impact.

Kaffir Last Game deals with femininity in the context of the public and social life and it depicts the way in which female characters struggle with ethical dilemmas and power struggles in spaces that are not domestic (Yerima, 2001). The women in the play are moral executives, intervening in conflicts between male, and arbitrating the social conflicts, and they tend to act as the conscience of the society. Yerima introduces these characters as the active contributors towards the determination of the results, making relational knowledge, the strategic communication and the moral judgment as the important qualities of femininity. The play reveals that female power is not necessarily formalized and can work based on ethical, cultural and relational power. In the works of Yerima, one could trace some common elements of femininity:

Ethical and moral authority: Women are placed as the most important in terms of social values and the behavioral guide and conflict mitigators.

Relational influence: Female power is frequently exercised via negotiation, persuasion as well as alliance-building instead of authority.

Resilience and adaptability: Women creatively negotiate social restriction and balance expectations of the society and the agency of the self.

Intercession with cultural and spiritual values: Since the domestic process of negotiation is integrated into the divinity, femininity is imprinted in the more expansive moral and cultural system.

The fact that femininity as represented by Yerima is relational is a deliberate act, where male and female characters shape one another and the result of such interactions on social harmony is brought to the fore. Women are not merely responsive to the male authority; they contend, redirect and shape male actions in a manner that protects or restores moral and social equilibrium.

This strategy highlights the interrelatedness of the gendered roles and presents femininity as a critical component of the ethical working of the society (Oha, 2015).

These femininity constructions are supported by dramatic tools. Yerima employs dialogue, soliloquy and relation conflict to demonstrate strategic and ethical reasoning of women. Ritual direction in *Yemoja* or mediation in *The Sisters* are some examples of symbolic actions that dramatize the moral and cultural authority of women characters. By such means, Yerima builds multiple-dimensional perspective of femininity: it is both relational, moral, strategic, and, at times transcendent.

To sum up, the femininity that Yerima constructs is dynamic and effective, which demonstrates that women in the Nigerian society move in multifaceted structures of social, moral and spiritual demands. In all his plays, female characters are shown to be agentic, strong-willed and morally guiding and empowering, frequently playing the role of mediator, moral compass and a help-holder of the community. Through these attributes, Yerima defies the reductive stereotypes and introduces femininity as the core of social cohesion, moral governance and cultural survival. The relations of male and female agency in his theatre are shedding light on the dynamics of power in relationship, to emphasize the socially constructed, negotiated, and staged gender roles in Nigerian cultural settings.

4. CONFLICT AND POWER RELATIONS IN AHMED YERIMA THEATRE AND THEIR GENDERING

One of the themes addressed in Ahmed Yerima theatre is the bargaining of power between men and women where gender expectations create traffic jams, intervene in choices made, and determine how people socialize. Contrary to the naive ideas of the patriarchal dominance, Yerima represents conflict as a process of relations and as an active process of confrontation and cooperation between the male and female characters. Yerima explains how the gendered power is practiced, challenged, and renegotiated at the domestic, communal, and spiritual levels through the plays, *The Sisters* (2001), *The Wives* (2007), *Yemoja* (2002) and *Kaffir Last Game* (2001).

In *The Sisters*, gendered conflict is predetermined by sibling rivalry and by family relations. The male characters play the role of arbitrating conflicts and ensuring order but their power is constantly challenged by the cleverness, ethical intuition, and aggressiveness of the sisters (Yerima, 2001). It is not the hostility that causes the conflict but rather the difference in perceptions of morality, responsibility, and social norm imposed. Thus, as an example, the sisters question the patriarchal beliefs on the subject of obedience and loyalty, compelling the male characters to align their authority with the rational thinking of the women. Consistent with the scholarly discussion, these portrayals are validated by the fact that gendered power in Nigerian family contexts is interactive, as the power there is not absolute but relational (Akinwale, 2013). The play demonstrates that both male and female roles are not independent: the power does not exist in solitude, it is a reaction to the actions, decisions, and opposition towards other people.

The Wives brings in more on domestic and marital conflict as an area of gender negotiation. Male dominance is officially supported by the husband being able to make decisions concerning the family, but women characters in films tend to take charge either by persuasion, moral justifications or by moral criticism (Yerima, 2007). When these spheres clash, it leads to conflicts: e.g., a decision made in a public or a private life of a husband can be conflicting with the judgment of wife on family welfare. Yerima expresses these tensions, through dialogue, confrontational moments, strategic silence, showing that gendered power is not merely about dominance but in matters of negotiation, accountability and moral responsibility. The female characters in the play use power in a subtle but effective way and demonstrate that femininity has an ability to balance and control masculinity and enforce moral and social stability.

In *Yemoja*, the battles are carried to the spiritual level and men characters have to struggle against the dominance of a female deity. The power of Yemoja is beyond human patriarchy that makes it impossible to make the male characters in the story rethink their beliefs on authority, morality and social responsibility (Yerima, 2002). The struggle is symbolical and real: men have to adjust to the system of morality where female spiritual power is supreme, and it has to be negotiated, respected, and aligned with ethics.

The gendered power dramatized in the play is fluid and illustrates that social, family, and spiritual power intersect to make sense of authority and its application. The role of a mythic female figure incorporates a stress that conflict and reconciliation in gendered power relations is not limited to human interaction, which Yerima incorporates in his drama through the incorporation of cultural and moral demands.

Kaffir Last game introduces the gendered conflict on the ethical, professional, and communal basis. Male and female characters have power play which demonstrates expectations of morality, justice and excellence in the society. The dilemma comes in when the gendered roles cannot deal with the complex ethical issues. Women characters exercise moral clarity and strategic understanding which emphasize the significance of relational intelligence in dispute solving (Yerima, 2001). The combination of masculine decisiveness and feminine judgment stresses that good power is participative and morally enlightened, and not forceful. The play illustrates that gendered conflict is fruitful: it uncovers the ethical dilemma and the authority, and eventually leads to the communal bargaining and the ethical decision-making.

Throughout these plays, one notices a number of trends in the gendered conflict as portrayed by Yerima:

Negotiation as conflict: Negotiations can be dialogic, i.e., based on persuasion, moral reasoning and relational power, as opposed to brute power.

Interdependence of sexes: The characters of both sexes are dependent on each other to ensure social and moral order, the exertion of power is mutually dependent.

Ethics and moral mediation: A conflict gendered is usually about an ethical quandary, and a woman is often a moral judge.

Cultural and spiritual integration: Cultural norms, cultural values and in certain instances; the spiritual authority shape conflicts which contributes to complexity in gendered power processes.

The plays by Yerima reveal that gendered conflict is not so much a competition of dominance. Rather, it is an area where moral judgment, relationship intelligence, and cultural values meet. Male power is softened by female wisdom and women control their power through socially and culturally approved practices.

This performance creates emphasis on the performance and relationship of gendered power, which brings to light the way theatre can help clarify the ways of negotiating social and moral power. These are reinforced with dramatic techniques. Confrontation, dialogue, and symbolic action are some of the techniques that Yerima employs to bring gendered conflict into the stage. The form of his plays makes it possible to have a moment of tension and resolution which helps to expose the restrictions and possibilities of the male and female roles. The manner in which power and conflict are negotiated, at the ethical and relation level, is dramatized in ritualized and symbolic actions, like the moral advice in *Yemoja* or the mediation in *The Sisters*.

Conclusively, Yerima introduces gendered power as a process of negotiation, which is dynamic and cultural. His plays demonstrate that men against women conflict is a vital process in which the maintenance and challenge of moral, social and ethical orders occur. Yerima explores the idea of male and female agency in a very subtle way that gives a view of the fact that power is not a zero-sum game but a cooperative and ethical endeavor as it has been seen in the complexities of Nigerian social existences. Through foregrounding such interactions, the theatre by Yerima provides viewers with an in-depth view of the interdependent, moral, and performative aspects of gendered power and his works are therefore socially thoughtful and culturally educative.

5. THEATRE PERFORMANCE, AND CULTURAL MOTIFS AND SYMBOLISM IN AHMED YERIMA

The movies by Ahmed Yerima make use of symbolism, cultural motifs, and performance tactics as the key tools to understand gender relations and power dynamics. In these methods, Yerima also expresses intricate thoughts regarding masculinity, femininity, moral accountability and social anticipation without the need to use a straightforward exposition. Symbolism and cultural motives are used in *The Sisters* (2001), *The Wives* (2007), *Yemoja* (2002), and in *Kaffir last game* (2001) to emphasize relational power, ethical conflict and social norms, whereas performance aspects of dialogue, staging and ritualized action give life to such themes on stage.

Space is one of the most outstanding symbolic elements in the theatre of Yerima. The domestic spaces like household in *The Wives*, or family home in *The Sisters* are symbolic of arenas of gendered negotiation. The home does not imply just a place where a physical place meets, but it is where the masculine power and feminine agency meet and clash (Yerima, 2007). An example is the drawing room or the marital bedroom, where the dialogue, confrontation and moral negotiation has occurred, drawing the point that gendered power has been exerted in a relational manner in the socially constructed spaces. Likewise, the public or collective spaces such as the case in *Kaffir Last Game* represent social judgment and the moral duties of both males and females characters to reveal the external implications of the personal action in the society (Yerima, 2001).

Ritual and myth are other cultural themes used by Yerima in order to enhance the ethical and gendered meaning. The female deity in *Yemoja* represents the spiritual and moral power and her intervention is ritualized and is usually accompanied by songs, chants and ritual gestures (Yerima, 2002). It is a ritualistic manner of framing that lays stress on the transcendent aspect of female power and locates femininity in both the spiritual and cultural contexts. According to Osundare (2016), the incorporation of mythical female characters by Yerima can be explained by the Yoruba cultural beliefs according to which divine womanhood facilitates moral and social justice, establishing the relationship between symbolic power and moral power.

Another symbolic means is the dialogue and language. The characters of Yerima tend to articulate some ethical, moral and relational questions by the correct use of words, proverbs, and expressions which have some cultural significance. The dialogue between the sisters in *The Sisters* is full of ethical reasoning and implicit confrontations with male dominance and the language is a weapon to claim agency and trade power (Yerima, 2001). Likewise in *The Wives*, loved-making between husbands and wives is carried out in indirect, metaphorical, and culture-specific idioms to express conflict and negotiating value. Language is therefore a tool through which gendered power is practiced and challenged and embodies social conventions as well as enabling characters to have any influence within culturally approved boundaries (Akinwale, 2013).

The symbolic aspects of the drama of Yerima are supported by performance strategies (blocking, gesture, stage action, etc.).

In the case of *Yemoja*, the submissive postures of the male characters to the female god represent submission and moral responsibility, and ritual movements by the female characters represent moral power and spiritual wisdom (Yerima, 2002). Equally, in *The Sisters* subtle gestures in the form of pause, expressions and physical positioning during a conversation are taken to be dictators of power and therefore which character has power, moral high ground, or relational bargaining. It is these elements of performance that are creating the abstract ideas of gender into actions that are visually and emotionally compelling on the stage.

Gender and power can also be represented with the help of symbolic props and cultural artifacts. The items like family heirlooms, ritualistic tools or symbolic clothing are frequently employed to indicate authority, moral accountability, or status in relations. The interaction of the male and female characters in *Kaffir Last Game* includes objectification to denote the communal expectation and moral duty and is also used to affirm relational and performative aspects of gendered power (Yerima, 2001). Equally, in *The Wives*, household objects and furniture are considered projections of the power of the female characters in the family, which enables them to exercise agency and to bargain power indirectly yet successfully. Similarly, the symbolic resolution adopted by Yerima in solving conflicts, in which conflicts are solved either in rituals, dialogue, or moral negotiation, highlights the ethical and relational aspect of gendered power. In the four plays, acts of resolution display both the male and female characters acting in unison in order to bring about moral, social, or spiritual balance. This style depicts the cultural perception of the Yoruba and the Nigerian in general that social harmony is achieved by means of mutual responsibility, negotiation, and moral involvement and not making unilateral claims (Oha, 2015).

In such a way, the use of symbolism, cultural motifs, and performance makes Yerima develop a multidimensional image of gender relationships and power. The playwright enacted the trokadero of the masculine and feminine power, the moral duty, and the relation of power through domestic, communal, and spiritual space, ritualized action, conversation, and culturally resonant props.

These methods enable viewers to participate in difficult social and moral interactions by following the performance of gendered roles, the struggle and reconciliation in Nigerian society. Through symbolism and performance, Yerima can turn abstract ideas about gender and power into physical, stageable and culturally significant experiences and solidify the importance of the relational, ethical, and cultural aspects of his theatre.

CONCLUSION

The theatre of Ahmed Yerima offers a deep and subtle insight into the relationships between gender and power in Nigerian society. In all the plays, *The Sisters* (2001), *The Wives* (2007), *Yemoja* (2002), and *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), Yerima evidences that masculinity, femininity is socially constructed, performative and relational by cultural norms, ethical responsibility, and negotiation of authority. Instead of introducing male and female characters as rigid or stereotypical, Yerima prefigures the ambiguity of the relationship between the expectation of society and agency of an individual, and demonstrates the way in which the roles of gender are constantly acted, resisted, and renegotiated in the play.

Various male characters in the chapter have been revealed to be of an ethically grounded, socially responsible and contingent masculinity, which is in relation to Yerima. In *Kaffir Last Game*, the men bargain over moral responsibility and societal norms and the pressure that comes with the patriarchal powers is brought to the fore (Yerima, 2001). The authority of men is mediated by the morality and relationship power of women in such domestic settings like *The Wives*, making masculinity be a performance and a negotiation issue (Yerima, 2007). Male characters in such spiritual stories as *Yemoja* are faced with sources of power that goes beyond the social structures of human societies reaffirming the notion that ethical and moral accountability is a fundamental aspect of idealized manhood (Yerima, 2002).

Femininity as represented by Yerima is multi-dimensional, resolute and morally strong. Girls also do not have passive characters; they have power in terms of moral direction, bargaining, and interpersonal acumen.

The women in *The Sisters* manage their roles in relation to their family and society in a strategic way and demonstrate independence in the patriarchal system (Yerima, 2001). The wives in *The Wives* interfere in the domestic quarrels and this illustrates how femininity can be used to balance the male authority without affecting social and moral solidarity (Yerima, 2007). The representations of myths in *Yemoja* take female authority to the spiritual world again to demonstrate that women can be the bearers of moral and societal guidance that transcends the human hierarchies (Osundare, 2016).

One of the main things to understand about this analysis is that the gendered power in the theatre of Yerima is always relational. The conflict, negotiation, and ethical deliberation are the key aspects of the interaction between men and women. As demonstrated in the chapter, Yerima sets up gendered tension as not only a conflict of dominance, but as a way of reflecting ethically, morally, and creating social balance. Male and female characters wield power complementarily, according to the social norms of Nigeria in general, power in the country is not unilateral, and is acquired through moral, cultural, and relational practices (Akinwale, 2013; Oha, 2015).

The dynamics are conveyed through the use of symbolism and performance. Domestic space, ritual activity, talk, and cultural themes enable the audience to represent and explain gendered power with regards to ethical and socialities obligations that come with masculinity and femininity. The dramatization of the operation of authority, influence, and moral judgment in culturally informed practices might be, as an example, the ritualized interventions of *Yemoja*, the negotiation between husbands and wives, and the mediation of sisters in disputes within the family (Yerima, 2001; Yerima, 2002; Yerima, 2007). These theatre effects support the general thesis of Yerima: Gender roles are constructed socially, ethically and mediated by culture. Undoubtedly, in his plays Ahmed Yerima offers holistic approach to gender relation and power in which male and female are complementary, moral and socialized. His work questions the reductionist stereotypes of male dominance and female passivity and instead highlights the interdependence between the genders as well as the moral responsibility and the relational bargaining of the power.

The combination of symbolic action, cultural tropes, and moral issues renders the theatre of Yerima a source of entertainment and social commentary, which teaches the audience about the intricacies of the Nigerian gender roles and power structures.

The value of Yerima in Nigerian drama is therefore twofold in the first place: he clarifies the ethical and relational aspects of gendered power and reveals how the social and moral expectations predetermine the behavior; secondly, he proves that theatre is also the place where the negotiating, questioning, and reflection of the societal standards occur. The nature of his plays is to provoke the audiences to think critically about the problems of authority, responsibility and gendered negotiation, which support the ongoing relevance of drama as a social and cultural reflection. Through this, Yerima confirms the need to consider gender in the Nigerian society in terms of performance, morality, relationality and cultural considerations, thus his work is of invaluable value to both scholars, practitioners and even audiences.

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ISBN: 978-625-91851-1-8



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