

## Buying Our Lives with a Riddle:<sup>1</sup> Adaptation as the “Female-Other” Perspective<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract.** The existence of a strong relationship between gender and class as well as other patterns of social inequality in African societies has been a major cause of conflict arising from human relationships. Myth and history have also been identified as some of the ways through which this social imbalance is promoted. Overtime various methods have been adopted in combating the malaise; one of such is literature. Such sensibility has equally found expression in adaptation and/or appropriation. This paper focuses on Ahmed Yerima’s *Otaelo*, adapted from Shakespeare’s original text *Othello*, deployed as a site of engagement to confront the condition of the Other, through recourse to feminist theory. The paper also finds in Euripides’s *Medea* a material and prototype dramaturgy for basis of argument, which underlines patriarchy as a significant male-centred practice that militates against women’s right and freedom.

**Keywords:** adaptation; appropriation; culture; otherness; patriarchy

### Introduction

“Othering”, as Onbelet (2004) asserts, “has been associated predominantly with marginalized people who, by virtue of their difference from the dominant group, have been disempowered, robbed of a voice in the social, religious and political world.” Otherness takes many forms and may not necessarily be determined by numerical figure as we had in the native Indians, who outnumbered the British during colonial rule but were still considered the “Other.” Essentially, our concern here is otherness determined by sexual orientation. The feminist scholar, Simone de Beauvoir concerns herself with all aspects of marginalization, especially of women. She raises fundamental questions on the subject. She observes that the pattern of social structure on which society is built makes it imperative for women to struggle, under the whims and caprices of men, because “they live dispersed among males, attached to certain men (fathers or husbands) more firmly than they are to other

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<sup>2</sup> “We buy our life with a riddle, and then afterwards [...] we have to live it [...] and a bigger riddle begins,” See; Osofisan, Femi (1977). *The Chattering and the Song*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

women." She argues that the social construction of woman as the "Other" is responsible for the cause of her oppression.

### **Gender and Otherness: two sides of the same coin**

Feminist theorists have espoused the connection between Otherness and Class in terms of the relationship which bothers on gender inequality in which the dominant group (male) imposes the value of its own particular identity, while at the same time devaluing the identity of the "Other" (female) through the imposition of corresponding discriminatory measures. From the perspective of gender ranking, Lorber argues that "when genders are ranked, the devalued genders have less power, prestige and economic rewards than the valued gender"(Lorber 2001:125). According to Collins, this degrading situation is brought by the fact that "each of us lives within a system that vests us with varying levels of power and privilege [which] are structured along the lines of race, class, gender as well as sexual orientation that frame our relationships" (Collins1990: 76). Trinh Minh ha equally adds that within this kind of relationship, the postcolonial women's position is hard to define because:

Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both, not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate 'other' or 'same' who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming 'I am like you' while persisting in her difference and that of reminding 'I am different', while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at (Trinh 1997, 418).

To say that most scholars, who have written about feminism and female marginalization share similar concern as do Trinh is to state the obvious. For instance, in a related instance, Freedman offers an opinion that is rather more compelling. She states that:

A girl is 'merely a weed', in a Zulu saying. According to the Old Testament, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Set the value of a male between ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels [...] and if it is a female, set the value at thirty shekels.'" A Dutch proverb declares that a "house full of daughters is like a cellar full of sour beer," while Koreans learn that a "girl lets you down twice, once at birth and the second time when she marries." Even contemporary parents usually prefer male children; a 1983 survey of forty countries found only two with daughter preference for boys to girls. Where strong sons' preferences persist, parents may selectively abort female fetuses and neglect girls, leading to higher mortality rates for female infants in parts of the world, such as India and China (Friedman 2002, 19).

The system of gender marginalization in most societies feeds on culture and the prevalent practice of patriarchy, by which the female species is continually

oppressed under the authority of the male. Societies have continued to battle the patriarchal monster, whose origin lies very deep in perceptions that place men above women, especially those sanctioned by religion, cultural beliefs and practices. Most traditional cultures of the world revel in the practice, which presupposes that the problems they have are deep-rooted in female anomaly. And, in order to extirpate the “disorder”, the female species must constantly be locked under the guidance and watchful eyes of the male who is ordained to clean up her mess. Johnson argues that “no matter what other men do to a man or how deeply they control his life, he can always feel culturally superior to women and take out his anger and frustration on them” (Johnson 1997, 37); much as they (men) are prone to using women to cover their sexual inadequacy or abnormality in some cases. This is because “no woman is immune to the cultural devaluing of women’s bodies as sexual objects to be exploited in public and private lives” (19).

Aside these points, Friedman offers an argument that supports the intention of this paper. She says: “heterosexual men are encouraged to use women as badges of success to protect and enhance their standing in the eyes of men” (34), which essentially forms part of some seriously abnormal cases of female oppression. For instance, female domination and oppression take the form of gender inequality, which supports the strength and practice of misogyny prevalent in Western culture. Johnson also explains that “not to be overlooked is the routine of insulting males with names that link them to females—sissys (sister), girl, pussy, son of a bitch, mama’s boy”. She also adds that, “the worst way to insult a woman isn’t to call her a man or a ‘daddy’s girl’; it’s to call her a woman by another name by highlighting or maligning femaleness itself—bitch, whore, cunt” (38-9). Added to these points is the fact that contact with other cultures, with similar psychological perception results in heightened system and structure that often combine to stifle female initiative, except in the aspect of sexual gratification.

### **Deconstructing Otherness: Adaptation/Appropriation and “Playful” Thought**

In tackling the menace of Otherness, adaptation and/or appropriation comes as a tool of re-invention, as an “act of imaginative rediscovery”, and the text as “an act of imaginary reunification” (Hall 1994, 224), in the struggle for the dismantling of every form of oppressive practice, legislation and perception. It is in this light that Yerima has engaged the subject of female domination through his appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Yerima’s humanism, though locally derived, is expressed in some of his other literary works which address the condition of the oppressed “Female-Other”. An itinerant childhood<sup>3</sup>, and position as a cultural officer of high ranking have both combined to afford Yerima the rare opportunity to come in contact with several Nigerian cultures and practices<sup>4</sup>; and this unique experience has positively influenced the blossoming of his career devoted to engaging the same

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<sup>3</sup>Yerima’s childhood was characterized by moving around with his father, a Police Officer, on national duties across the country. See; Adeoti, Gbemisola (2010). *Muse and Mimesis: Cultural Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima’s Drama*: Ibadan, Spectrum Books Ltd; Adeoti, Gbemisola (2010). *Voices Offstage: Nigerian Dramatists on Drama and Politics*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, Ltd.

<sup>4</sup>Yerima was one-time Artistic Director, National Troupe of Nigeria; later Director-General, National Theatre/National Troupe of Nigeria and Director, Abuja Carnival, Nigeria.

cultural practices in ways that have provided informed glimpses into the people's conduct.<sup>5</sup>

By engaging the gender politics that characterizes Igbo culture, specifically the Osu caste system issue, Yerima also alludes to other societies, where patriarchy and female marginalization have remained a significant way of life. For example, in another play entitled *Aetu* set in Yoruba land, he also engages the female issue. In that play, the audience is introduced to a central character, who "violently" challenges the destruction of her being through subjection to the dictates of culture and religious tradition that promote the practice of leviration. It is a custom that allows a woman, whose husband is deceased, to be "owned" by any other male family member (usually the son or brother of the deceased) and/or from the extended family in a heightened patriarchal society. He argues that significant problems related to women's role and position in most societies where they are marginalized often stem from patriarchy and can be cited as the central principle that nurtures the Osu caste system he engages in this particular appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*. According to him, no other cultural practice is as inhuman as the Osu caste system practiced in some parts of Igbo land the way it is focused in this retelling of the Shakespeare canonical text.

Historically, Igbo traditional belief system proved to be very effective in ensuring order in the communities before colonialism, but from the same system arose what Igwebuikwe describes as the "dehumanizing Osu caste system, which has divided and alienated the Igbos", because by all standards, the Osu caste system is "a societal institution borne out of a primitive traditional belief system coloured by superstition and propagated by ignorance" (Igwebuikwe 1986, 4). It can be argued that an average Igbo individual believes in the rationality and complementarity of both the male and female members of the society as basis for a peaceful and progressive co-existence judging from Onwubuariri's opinion drawn from local proverbs and oral narratives of the people, such as "Agbakota Aka nyuommamiriOgboufufu" which means "if all efforts are brought together, the desired goal will be achieved". Also, the Igbo believed in the view of "Ibuanyidanda" which simply means "if everybody will bring their efforts together, there will be no load that is too heavy for them to carry". Moreover, they also believe in the mutual unity among all parts that forms the absolute or the whole. Thus the dictum "EgbebereUgobere"; and "Ka soma dina", which simply shows their belief in the conglomeration and the mutual unification of every human being and their efforts (Onwubuariri 7).

However, the social condition of women of Umuagu community as the "Other" in Yerima's *Otaelo*, in the male-dominated Umuagu culture, given impetus by social and ritual practice which disempowers and robs them of a voice in the social, religious and political world, nullifies the above assertions. It not only casts serious doubt on them, but also puts to test Nwachukwu's description of the Osu as "a sacred and holy being that deserved to live a secluded life, a monk in order to salvage and save the people under him as a king and saviour" (Nwachukwu 1985,5). It also portrays that society, and wherever such is practiced, as glorifying in the celebration of the "inherited sin," by which punishment for the "iniquity" of the parents are visited on

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<sup>5</sup>Yerima is the only Nigerian playwright, who has written plays set in several Nigerian ethnic/cultural backgrounds ranging from Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw/Niger-Delta, Tiv, Igala, Itsekiri/Urhobo, Benin etc

their children and/or the unborn as shown by Yerima in *Otaelo*, the central character of the adaptation. Otherness is portrayed by Yerima in *Otaelo* by his highlighting the gender victimization and domestic violence against women. It is also shown in the way the people ostracized Otaelo, who is considered and treated as an Osu, the “Other” in the society. It is the same society, which turns a blind eye to a man (his father), who batters his wife (his mother); the woman.

The extent of the dehumanization of the female species can also be seen in Otaelo’s mother’s “no identity” position in the text. She is not seen, but heard. The playwright appears to highlight this point by not even having her physically in the story or the community, except to be made constant reference to through her son, a male, who inherits from her, his own inconsequential position in the society. But, technically, not been physically present in the play does not diminish her importance to the plot. In fact it is her decisive action against oppression that sets the tone for the entire dramatic experience. Heavily pregnant, she bore the pains of torture and maltreatment from her husband (men), like every other female members of the society, who have been cowed into silence and submission. But, as one can infer from her action to change the situation, she drew attention to a significant aspect of her character that becomes manifested through her equally condemned and ostracized son. She thus comes across to us, in the words of William, as “the philosophical soul of the community, one given to much reflection about the state of things and the actual condition on which human nature is judged and human acts defined” (William 1997, 292). The same society punishes her with death, for reacting in self-defense to the violence suffered in the hands of her husband.

Cultural practice is used as a social stigma to suppress her and destroy her child through condemnation at birth. After her being sentenced to death by Ala, the god of protection, she runs to for refuge, and executed accordingly as soon as she has given birth, her child is also made to bear the brunt of society’s denigration and condemnation<sup>6</sup>. Ironically too, the Igwe (monarch) of the land, who attempts a redeeming act by wanting the Osu to live a normal life of struggle, hope and aspiration like every other freeborn in the society, also gets destroyed in the throes of a system that perpetuates male aggressiveness and domination. Though he (the Igwe) perfectly understands the cultural stipulation against flirting with the Osu, yet he gives him the chance to prove his worth by allowing Otaelo join the community’s soldiers to do battle in the name of the land. His action is considered a taboo (a forbidden act according to the land’s customs). Also, in order to express appreciation for Otaelo at the battlefield (he actually saves the Igwe’s life twice by fencing off arrows with his chest), he decides to honour him with one of the most prestigious titles in the land, as well as giving his consent to Otaelo’s request to marry his daughter whom he has been dating secretly.

For such “redeeming acts,” that is, mixing Osu and freeborn freely, the Igwe crosses the line between reason and irrationality. Igwe’s “unusual” frame of mind, in a society taken over by irrationality sanctioned by a practice that is not only barbaric

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<sup>6</sup>*Ala* in Igbo culture (also sometimes referred to as *Ani*) is actually a female deity; the goddess of the earth, which alludes to the power of women to protect, nurture and bring to life. That Yerima refers to *Ala* as a god, a male deity appears to be a dramaturgical tool—an attempt to ‘manipulate’ that aspect of the Igbo ethos, in line with the patriarchal sensibility of the play’s world. Besides, it makes sense to see how *Ala*, a male deity, is complicit in the Osu tragic cultural practice.

and inhuman, but also utterly debased to say the least, is regarded as a “curse from his late father” or as Agbo tells us of “rash spirit ruling his mind” (*Otaelo* 31).

Rather, Igwe's action makes him not to be a “real” or “man’s man”, according to Ruth. She notes that if a man should decide to be different by not enforcing the patriarchal rule the “people will punish him for his deviation, through rejection, ostracism, ridicule or formidable signs of hostility. Because he is not a ‘man’s man’ or a ‘real’ man, he is apt to find himself ill-received both in traditional male environments and among many traditional women” (Ruth,51) [emphasis added]. But, liberal feminist concern for equal opportunity and welfare of all gender can be illustrated by Yerima’s characterization of the Igwe. He also underlines this fact in the conversation between Otaelo and his adopted father, Ebuka:

**Otaelo:** I don’t understand.

**Ebuka:** I do son. Remember who you are.

**Otaelo:** Oh old man there you go again. Always you want me to grovel in the mud searching for who I am. *Does blood not flow in my veins? Do I not cry, laugh or feel the pangs of pain like anybody?*

**Ebuka:** *But you are...*

**Otaelo:** I know what you say I am. You think I can forget so soon? But can’t I aspire, protected still by Ala, the great earth god, to become somebody else?

**Ebuka:** No.

**Otaelo:** No? (*Pauses*) But what did I do that the air I breathe must also remain thick with shame?

**Ebuka:** Your mother’s son...

**Otaelo:** Oh, old man unburden my heart with my mother’s load of sin. It was her who killed my father, her husband by mistake when he beat her with me, their unborn child, in her womb. I was not even born yet. It was her in order to run from the punishment of death, ran to the shrine of Ala for protection. There she became an Osu, and after I was born, she was still used for sacrifice to the god she ran to for protection. You brought me up like your son. Why must I always lose everything? Why can I not just be a man? (*Otaelo*34-35) [Emphasis added].

This conversation is very illuminating in a number of ways. First, it brings to light certain ontological views, which bother on the question of the essence and dignity of human beings, especially in relation to practices sanctioned by culture and other related ideology. Second, it questions the rationale behind the classification and treatment of women in the society as “underdogs”, who can only be seen and not heard; as the “Other” through whom the standard of the Centre, that is men, is measured; third, and most importantly, it engages the issue of the debilitating condition of women as mere objects and tools that men exploit and manipulate under the guise of cultural practice. These women always end up as victims of these ‘rites’, and tragically too, with such fate being inherited by their children, especially girls as reflected in the fate of the other female characters in the play.

The operation of this system of heightened patriarchy is stressed by Li and Bolaria as “a societal phenomenon marked by the domination of certain men over other men, all women and children. A system of ruling where power is exercised as domination over others and stems from the historical emergence of the oppression of women” (Li and Bolaria 1994,84). The encounter also underscores Yerima’s pro-feminist stance, by

his engagement with questions of violation, and the sense and dignity of the human person through some obsolete practice.

In the same light, Greek tragedy also provides a vivid background to an understanding of the tribulation of the “Other” in the drama and/or theatre of most African dramatists, who have somehow found in Greek plays a great deal of “cultural diversity and specificity” (Taiwo 1997, 121), to their own experience in terms of an understanding which demonstrates the dynamism of a certain culture to mirror another. According to Hardwick, Greek drama in performance “acts as an agent of transformation enabling us to experience simultaneously and in tension, different cultural perspectives and aspects of being. This capacity is partly a function of Greek drama’s creation of critical distance between ancient and modern, early modern, modern and postmodern traditions” (Hardwick qtd in Ferguson 2007, 41-42). The “transformation” here connects classical Greek and Shakespeare/Elizabethan dramatic worldview with the African/Nigerian sensibility in Yerima’s adaptation of *Othello* which, in engaging and speaking for and/or on behalf of the marginalized female, the “Other,” draws a parallel with *Medea* by Euripides. Such semblance subscribes to Hardwick’s idea that “classical referents are a sign of a double consciousness which recognizes both the assimilationist impact of classical texts on colonized peoples [...] and also the capacity of writers to use texts and referents to create new works,” knowing that such efforts yield “double consciousness into a more pluralistic and multi-layered awareness” (Hardwick 2004, 42).

Following up on this line of thought, Padel observes that “in the Greek male worldview, anything female, dead, or wild is easily perceived as ‘Other’” (Padel 1992, 9). One fact of life in Greek society is that any non-Greek was the “Other” or a barbarian and *Medea* is both barbarian and female, woman, as the ‘other,’ an anomaly that Euripides appears to repeatedly point out in his plays about women. Vellacott, a translator of Euripides’s plays, has noted of the Greek dramatist’s dramaturgy in regard to the fact of “the readiness of the Greek male to set the blame for everything upon a woman [...] a fact of which Euripides constantly, though nearly always ironically, reminded his contemporaries” (Vellacott 1956, 15). With *Medea* as in the rest of his plays centering on women, Euripides challenges his society, through themes such as “the destructive folly of violence; the sordid ugliness of revenge, and the subjection and suffering imposed upon the female by the injustices of the male” (Vellacott, 38). According to Vellacott, Euripides always questions the Greek perception on issues ranging from reason and irrationality, human and divine, civic order, virtue etc. As a result, the knowledge of the dynamics of a society “ruled by a certain kind of men wielding a certain kind of power [...] a society that reflects the underlying values of the traditional male ideal” (Ruth 1990, 45), is often brought up in the hope that the imbalance and injustice can possibly be effectively tackled and addressed.

Thus the tragic universe which Zeitlen considers to be “one that is other than the self originally imagined it to be” (Zeitlen 1990, 76) will serve to tie *Medea* to *Otaelo* judging from the peculiarity of experience shared by the two women at the centre of the conflict in the plays, namely, *Medea* and *Otaelo*’s mother from whom he inherited his Osu/Other status. For a proper conception of the subject, we view Yerima’s concern through its elaborate expression in Euripides’s oriental (mis) fortune, so to speak, by connecting with Said’s argument that; “Oriental mysteries will be taken seriously, not least because they challenge the rational Western mind to new

exercises of its enduring ambitions and power” (Said 1978,57), and, much more in the light of the fact Bajpaie expresses that within the text, lies the “life-giving power of imagination” (Bajpaie 2007, 1), which essentially “represents, animates and constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond the familiar boundaries” (Bajpate,57), by which the text (*Medea*) has often been interpreted.

Medea’s disposition toward Jason is more of love, devotion and dedication as a dutiful and supportive wife in all ramifications. In a background to the tragic play, we are made to be aware that she used her power to help Jason “discover” the Golden Fleece; she even bore him two sons which, in the Greek phallogocentric society, is something of significant pride. But, Jason’s betrayal changes all of that. Rather than be ashamed of his conduct and betrayal, or at least express some guilt, he exhibits the usual male ego that characterizes Greek way of life and boastfully tells her “I shall enumerate how much you gained: first, you joined the civilized; you live among the Greeks and not Barbarians; you have been taught what justice is, and how law rules in place of force. And you have gained a reputation for cleverness among the Greeks, a fine renown” (*Medea* 573-77). This kind of thought and arrogance permeates Greek life. The prevailing questions and tragic consequence that such perception and attitude to life bring about are dramatically underlined by Euripides in the play. Medea’s brutal reaction to Jason’s betrayal, that is, the murder of the two sons she had for him and the princess he plans to marry after abandoning her, is not only tragic as Wilner and Azar explain it. Rather, it sends across a message about the danger in female marginalization and suppression, with enough clarity of purpose.

In their opinion, Wilner and Azar observe that “a veil of morality covers the brutality of vengeance[but] Euripides strips this veil away” (Wilner and Azar 1997,10), to show Euripides’s “affinity for the feminine and some kind of new intellectual trend that confuses and unsettles the older, simpler values of the city” (Zeitlin,90). For Jason to have practically abandoned Medea to chase after another woman, a Greek woman, she (*Medea*) becomes a “sex-thing” (Ruth 225). Jason, however, also aptly fits into a broader perception of how males dominate females according to Ruth’s outline; “in patriarchy, women in sexual roles are ideally to function not as self-affirming, self-fulfilling human beings but rather as *beautiful dolls to be looked at, touched, felt, experienced for arousal, used for titillation and ultimately used up and traded in for a newer model thing*” (225)[emphasis added].

However, it is morality as opposed to irrationality that is called to question here and in Dodd’s opinion “One is the ethical question concerning the source and the validity of moral and political obligation [and], the other is the psychological question concerning the springs of human conduct---why do men behave as they do, and how can they be induced to behave better?” (Dodd 1957,183). In this regard, Geddie (2005) assertion that *Medea* takes place “in a chaotic world where vows are broken, trust is impossible, and every human value is brought into question,” also alludes to the spate of irrationality in Umuagu of *Otaelo*. It is a community where vows of love and sanctity of marriage are broken at will; where nothing holds true for anybody, not even the Igwe who tries to lift the Osu beyond the society’s debased standard; or the die-hard, fiendish “culture-activist,” Agbo, that finds in ritual practice a ready and deadly weapon to unleash destruction on a young man who intends to overcome the burden of his society’s foible and grasps, and then finally with Ala the supposed god of protection “acting” as a willing collaborator in the eventual rapid death and melancholy that befall the society.



In the play, Agbo personifies the chronic fatalistic tendency of the community and its incurable patriarchal system that combine to destroy the female members and the core emotional and physical cum psychological elements that will ensure continuity of life in the process. His sated desire to destroy the Osu, the use of dark manipulative schemes, firm twist of rational thought subjected under jealousy and rage fit into Bradshaw's summation of what occurs in a heightened patriarchal set up; "Blind obedience--upon which patriarchy stands; the repression of all emotions except fear; the destruction of individual willpower; and the repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure's way of thinking" (Bradshaw, qtdfrm hooks 4). Still, a consideration of the thematic concern of another play by both Euripides and Shakespeare, through drawing from the characters who, in a critical perception, Clark (1978) humours as "heroes," will provide a varied context to examine the nature of Yerima's Otaelo's humanity or tragic reality as a flawed character, whose hubris is either innate or foisted on him by society or even the combination of both. Otaelo's striking character as "a man so embroiled in his own bitterness" (*Otaelo* 31), connects with Othello in *Othello* and Richard, of *Richard III*. That he (Otaelo) starts off on a noble note of courage and life that is full of promise despite his shameful past is commendable. Unfortunately, that he ends up succumbing to wicked thoughts and tragic actions which lead to the death of loved ones and his own ignominy, is definitely Shakespearean. Otaelo, like Othello, is by no means comparable to a character like Richard who is bad from the onset; he convinces his brother King Edward IV to imprison their brother Clarence whom he later has slaughtered while pleading his cause; captures his young nephew Edward V, whom he sends with his brother to the Towers of London, where both are murdered as he had their uncle. Remarkably so is his way with women; for example, the widow he woos after killing her husband and the mother of the boys he kills, and thereafter sweet tongues into agreeing for him to marry her daughter and niece to the murdered boys.

These character traits serve to draw a comparison between Shakespeare's heroic characters and classical Greek tragic heroes, especially Orestes. Brockett and Ball's argument that "*Orestes* shows the evolution of the concept of justice as personal revenge being replaced by the impersonal judgement of the state" (Brockett and Ball 2004, 64), obviously connects with Bowra's claim on heroism (heroic poetry specifically) that "the admiration for great doings lies deep in the human heart, and comforts and cheers even when it does not stir to emulation" (Bowra, qtdfrm Clark 5). However, a closer look at Orestes shows a character who groans under the burden of guilt in the light of the tragic catharsis of a son who kills his mother to avenge his father's murder by her. Also, behind the facade of vengeance, one perceives the sated desire to massage the Greek male ego. We pity him more when he declares "None from outside can help; we must ourselves cure our own case," and Euripides's suggestion that the gods of the Greek myth are morally corrupt comes handy to explain his irrationality. In the presence of a "sick" society like classical Greece which seems to applaud Orestes heinous act of matricide, and Richard's Shakespeare's Elizabethan/Jacobean era, Clark's remark, that they cannot be described as some "truly organized society where there is rule of law" (Clark 1978, 13), becomes very relevant and apt. Yerima's awareness of gender classification, and the pains of seclusion of the "Other" should be applauded. Better still, the heroism of Otaelo and his mother; the nameless female-protagonist, should be acknowledged.

Even if both of them do not measure up to the standard of Oedipus who suffers in the pursuit of truth, or Caesar who dies a stoic death, the fact that she is able to rise above suppression and fight back while other women and men watch in submission means a great deal; even if he fails at the end to make meaning out of his abused life, we must at least acknowledge that by drawing inspiration and fighting spirit from his mother to bring down Agbo, who symbolizes the society that oppresses the Osu and its' like, they should both be commended. Through his heroic death, Otaelo shows how the "freeborn and the Osu share the same level" (*Otaelo* 57). But, if Agbo's death is deserving, the same cannot also be said of Princess Chinyere, who must not be mourned or honoured with state burial according to custom and tradition. Rather, her body will be thrown into the bush and the hut she once lived in burnt to ashes, perhaps to completely obliterate her memory from the land of her birth, having died by the hands of the untouchable. She certainly deserves our sympathy for her innocence, and willingness to please and make her father happy in spite of everything; also for her loving willingness to marry Otaelo, an Osu despite the risk of ostracism by the community. Like her father, the Igwe, she breaks protocol, what political scientists call "class suicide" in order to follow her mind and show the entire corrupt and "sick" community a glorious example of how humanity should behave. However, Yerima shows the destructive depth of the Osu cultural practice and how it drives people to insanity by her death in the hands of the same Otaelo she wants to "refine" and treat like a "real" human being that he so much wants to be, but who kills her out of jealousy and rage propelled by mere suspicion of infidelity orchestrated by Agbo. Also by closing *Otaelo* in a rapid end of deaths and melancholy is an ingenuity of dramaturgy which draws attention to the plight of the "Other," pushed to self-immolation by a society that he devotes his whole life serving just for him to be accepted, to love and be loved in turn.

## Conclusion

Adaptations and/or appropriations as alternative vehicles of narration create "an ideology of relevance" (Irele 1982, 2) and by connecting Greek, Elizabethan and African societies through adaptations, much as this paper has tried to demonstrate, it shows the repetitiveness of human nature and how Otherness is perceived as a social construction which is experienced from gender and class perspectives across time and space. Yerima's gender consciousness is shown through his feminist concern for the plight of women in his play, *Otaelo* and their contribution to society in some of his other plays, such as *Igatibi* as well as the ululation of womanhood in *Aetu*. Kande, a character in the play, *Aetu*, offers an explanation for this artistic sensibility; "Some women stay with their husbands, who beat them, who abuse them, and who dehumanise them, yet they stay, for the children. Some even live for those moments of sanity, when the man thinks like a husband from his heart, not from his fat strong arms and private parts" (*Aetu* 44). *Otaelo* shows that male dominance has taken place, for the man's possession of a "phallus" with which he dominates the female body, and confines the female species to take the back-seat status. Through ritual and cultural practice, he constructs the woman as "Other" and, according to Khalil Hammad (2009), such practice "suppresses and represses the female/feminine body and determines that what should prevail is male-related".

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