Between Inheritance and Intimacy: A Nego-Feminist Reading of Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* and Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives*

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Abstract
This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* and Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives* through the theoretical lens of Nego-feminism. It interrogates the representation of secrecy, sexual transgression, polygamy and the contest between property inheritance and emotional inheritance in both texts. While Yerima situates his drama within the complexities of African patriarchy, Fisher explores the psychological dimensions of marriage and identity within a Western context. The study further interrogates religious hypocrisy and the dilemma of adaptation and coincidence in the thematic and structural intersections between the two works. Drawing on Obioma Nnaemeka's Nego-feminism, which emphasizes negotiation and compromise over confrontation, the paper argues that both texts reveal women's strategies of survival, negotiation, and resistance in patriarchal societies. By juxtaposing these narratives, the study highlights the universality and cultural specificity of women's struggles, thus contributing to feminist discourse on gender, power and inheritance.
Keywords: Nego-feminism, Polygamy, Gender politics, Comparative literature, Ahmed Yerima, Tarryn Fisher.

Introduction

Ahmed Yerima occupies a significant position in the trajectory of postcolonial African drama. A prolific playwright, theatre director, and dramatist of monumental stature, Yerima's plays have been staged at both national and international levels. His literary fecundity and dramatic profundity render his works invaluable as sources of cultural documentation and transmission. One of Yerima's immediate preoccupations is the deployment of theatre for pedagogical and informative purposes. In *Iyase*, for instance, he dramatizes the Benin personality and its cultural nuances, while in plays such as *Yemoja* and *Orisa Ibeji*, he interrogates the mythic dimensions of Yoruba deities, Ogun, Esu, Sango, Obatala, and explores their contemporary relevance.

Marriage, as a social and cultural institution, has remained a fertile ground for literary exploration across the globe. In African societies, where polygamy has historically been practiced, literature often interrogates the tensions it produces in gender relations, inheritance structures, and cultural identity. In contrast, contemporary Western fiction frequently presents polygamy not as a normative institution but as a disruptive narrative device employed to dramatize secrecy, psychological conflict, and the fragility of intimate relationships. Despite the different cultural contexts, literary representations of polygamy in both traditions reveal strikingly similar anxieties about rivalry, betrayal, secrecy, and the disempowerment of women. Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* (2007) dramatizes these concerns within a Nigerian setting. The play centres on the aftermath of the death of Chief Theophilus Olowokere, a wealthy chief whose wives and relatives must confront not only their rivalries but also the corruption, secrecy, and moral decay surrounding his legacy. Through sharp dialogue and satire, Yerima critiques

patriarchy, the commodification of women, and the hypocrisy of Nigeria's political elite (Owoeye, *Kowode*). Similarly, Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives* (2019) immerses readers in the disturbing psychological world of a woman who suspects that her husband may be living multiple lives with multiple wives. Fisher does not treat polygamy as an institutional reality but as a destabilizing motif that exposes the fragility of trust, the paranoia of secrecy, and the unravelling of female identity (McCann 112).

Existing scholarship on Yerima has largely focused on his treatment of politics, history, and cultural values, with critics emphasizing his interrogation of the intersections of power, corruption, and gender (Adeoti 27). Fisher, by contrast, is often studied within the tradition of "domestic noir" or psychological thrillers, where unreliable narrators and claustrophobic domestic spaces generate suspense and paranoia (Mason 64). However, little comparative work has examined how these two texts, though emerging from divergent literary traditions, African satirical drama and American psychological thriller deploy the same marital structure, polygamy, to highlight the vulnerabilities of women within patriarchal systems.

This gap provides the basis for the present study. The paper argues that Yerima and Fisher, though writing from different cultural and generic frameworks, converge thematically in their use of polygamy to foreground the emotional, social, and psychological costs imposed on women. Yerima presents polygamy as a cultural and political reality that exposes fractures in Nigerian society, while Fisher reimagines it as a psychological trope that destabilizes intimacy and identity. By juxtaposing both works, this study contributes to comparative literature by showing how the same marital structure reflects not only localised anxieties, inheritance, corruption, secrecy, and decay in Nigeria but also universal themes of rivalry, betrayal and female agency in Western contexts.

Yerima is often studied within African socio-political frameworks without comparative engagement with Western texts, while Fisher is largely examined within the tradition of psychological thrillers without recognition of how her themes intersect with African realities. While polygamy has been extensively explored in African literature, its use as a motif in Western psychological fiction remains underexplored. This paper therefore bridges that gap by undertaking a cross-cultural comparison of Yerima's and Fisher's *The Wives*, revealing how both writers deploy polygamy to interrogate questions of gender, power, secrecy, and morality across divergent traditions.

Synopsis of Yerima's *The Wives*

The play opens with the lying-in-state of Chief Theophilus Gbadegesin Olowokere, whose coffin is draped in the national flag. His sister, Auntimi, dressed in a long black gown and wig, sobs as she addresses his coffin. Her apostrophe reveals that the late Chief had desired a quick burial after his Will was read, but this wish is thwarted. Baba Ajagbe, the *Olori Ebi* (head of the family), insists on viewing the corpse before burial, while his three wives also demand a chance to bid him farewell. Complicating matters, rumours spread that the church will not partake in his funeral rites because of his membership in a suspicious Club whose objectives contradict Christian doctrine. Auntimi laments that the church even threatens to erase his name from the Bishop's chair and piano he donated, while ignoring the church house he built. To her, this is unfair.

She mourns her brother's indiscretion and regrets that he concealed certain secrets from her. While Chief desired to be buried in Lagos, the villagers insist he must be interred in his hometown. Auntimi promises to stand by him, even if others brand her a witch, and consoles herself that his lying-in-state has attracted dignitaries: the President's entourage, royal fathers, captains of industry, and governors all of whom turned the occasion into a carnival befitting a statesman.

As Auntimi grieves quietly, Angela, the Chief's first wife, enters in black attire, wig and dark glasses. Peering at the coffin, she weeps and complains that the undertakers have disfigured her husband with excessive makeup, making him resemble "a cross between a black American pimp and a prostitute at Ojuelegba." Auntimi agrees that the body is deteriorating and urges a quick burial. Angela bitterly recalls that her husband never listened to her in their thirty years of marriage, and reveals the circumstances of his death: he spent his final night drinking wine, singing Frank Sinatra, and ended up in the room of his youngest wife, Tobi, where he died at midnight. Though medical reports attribute his death to an enlarged heart, Angela suspects foul play.

Angela explains that her children, residing in London, will not attend the burial because of rumours surrounding the Chief's membership in the Club. She fears particularly for Seyi, the first son, who is believed destined to replace his father in the Club. Seyi has already narrowly escaped a fatal accident, which Angela attributes to diabolical forces. Auntimi, however, insists that Seyi must attend his father's burial, accusing Angela of hypocrisy benefiting from the Chief's wealth but denying him the honour of a son's farewell. Under pressure, Angela agrees to bring Seyi from London.

After Angela exits, Tobi, a 19-year-old, enters, announcing that she is pregnant for the late Chief, whom she fondly calls "Tiger." She confirms the autopsy report of an enlarged heart. Auntimi pities her but reminds her that unborn children cannot inherit Theo's estate. Tobi narrates how she met Chief Olowokere on a flight to London, where he proposed marriage. Auntimi reluctantly accepts her as a wife, offering financial support to open a shop rather than return to flying. Tobi, however, declares her undying love for the Chief, wishing she could join him in death.

Angela re-enters, embracing Auntimi but ignoring Tobi. Tension grows between the wives: Angela accuses Tobi of complicity in Theo's death; Tobi professes love and loyalty; and Cecelia, another wife and a successful banker, joins in, leading to bitter rivalry. While Tobi flaunts her youth and beauty, Angela claims seniority, and Cecelia recalls her estranged marriage to Theo, during which she took their children abroad. Their quarrels reveal Theo's complex marital life, including his visits to Cecelia shortly before his death to request a large bank loan, which reignited their intimacy.

Ajagbe, the *Olori Ebi*, enters and expresses shock at the wives' presence around the body, denouncing their disregard for tradition that forbids them from seeing the corpse or dancing for three years. He hands over the Calabash of Life to Ifagbayi, who smashes it on the coffin to officially announce the Chief's death. Ifagbayi questions the wives about Theo's death: Tobi admits he died in her arms but denies guilt; Cecelia refuses to swear, citing her Christian faith, but is exposed for lying about her estrangement.

The tension escalates when Ifa divination declares that though the wives are innocent, Theo's death is still linked to a woman. The riddle of his true first son emerges. The Will, read by Lawyer Akande, bequeaths all of Theo's wealth to his first son. Confusion erupts as no one can clearly identify who this son is. Shocking revelations follow when Auntimi confesses to an incestuous relationship with Theo, resulting in the birth of a son, Sholomonu Akandeola, the very lawyer present. The play closes on this tragic revelation: the family is shattered, the wealth and honour of Theo's legacy are mired in scandal, and the shadow of incest leaves a haunting stain on their lineage.

Synopsis of Fisher's *The Wives*

The novel follows Thursday, a woman in a seemingly unconventional marriage. Her husband, Seth, is a polygamist with two other wives known only to her as Monday and Tuesday. Thursday never meets them in person and only sees Seth on the day of the week that belongs to her. At first, Thursday convinces herself that this arrangement is a sign of her husband's honesty and commitment, but unease gnaws at her. She becomes obsessed with the other wives, imagining what their lives must be like. When she stumbles upon the name of one of them, curiosity pushes her to break the rules and track the woman down.

What begins as innocent curiosity spirals into a dangerous investigation. Thursday discovers inconsistencies, secrets, and lies that make her question not only Seth's motives but also her own grip on reality. As the truth unravels, she realizes that her marriage, her husband, and even her own identity are not what they seemed. The story is packed with twists, paranoia, and shocking revelations, blurring the line between truth and delusion. In the end, readers are left questioning whether Thursday is uncovering her husband's sinister manipulations or whether her own mind is betraying her.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts feminist criticism as the theoretical lens for interrogating Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* and Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives*. Feminist criticism, broadly speaking, seeks to expose gendered imbalances in literature, critique patriarchal ideologies, and foreground women's agency, subjectivity, and lived experiences (Moi 1985; Tyson 2015). Within the diverse strands of feminist thought, African feminist theory, particularly Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism, is most relevant to this study.

Nego-feminism, described by Nnaemeka as the "feminism of negotiation" or "no-ego feminism," resists confrontational modes of dismantling patriarchy and instead privileges dialogue, compromise and contextual pragmatism (Nnaemeka 2004). It rejects both Western Universalist feminist impositions and violent oppositional approaches. Rather, it insists that African women can subvert patriarchal structures through culturally grounded strategies of negotiation, give-and-take, and relational compromise. According to Nnaemeka, "African feminism (nego-feminism) knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or around patriarchy in different contexts" (377).

This framework is particularly illuminating for Yerima's *The Wives*, where the rivalries among Theo's widows after his death over the sharing of his inheritance dramatize both women's vulnerability and their agency within patriarchal structures. Initially, each wife lays

claim to the man's estate in self-interest, but resolution is only achieved when negotiation and compromise are deployed. The play suggests that women's survival in patriarchal contexts often depends less on outright rebellion and more on the ability to engage in pragmatic dialogue, echoing the principles of nego-feminism.

By contrast, Fisher's *The Wives* can be read through the intersecting lenses of feminist criticism, secrecy, and psychological violence within intimate relationships. The novel illustrates how patriarchal manipulation, secrecy, and emotional abuse destabilise women's identities, trapping them within cycles of suspicion and control (Hassan 2021). While not explicitly African, Fisher's narrative still foregrounds the tension between women's vulnerability in patriarchal relationships and their eventual assertion of agency, thereby dialoguing with global feminist concerns about intimacy, power, and survival.

Taken together, both texts highlight the ambivalence of women's positions in patriarchal societies. While Yerima emphasizes Nego-feminist strategies of negotiation to resolve conflict among women, Fisher dramatizes the psychological costs of secrecy and betrayal in intimate relationships. Both works ultimately foreground women's resilience, vulnerability and creative strategies of agency in contexts of gendered oppression.

Textual Discussion

Secrecy and Sexual Transgression

One of Yerima's central concerns in *The Wives* is the theme of incest, which he presents as a disturbing manifestation of sexual dysfunction within society. From a moral perspective, incest represents a social malady that erodes both family integrity and communal values. In the contemporary context, where sexual immorality appears increasingly normalized, Yerima's play offers a sharp critique of society's moral decline. As Olaniyan observes, Yerima consistently uses his plays to "unmask hidden transgressions in family and society, dramatizing their corrosive impact on tradition and morality" (Olaniyan 77). This strategy is vividly realized in *The Wives*, where incest surfaces as both a cultural taboo and a spiritual abomination.

Yerima situates incest within dual frameworks of religious and traditional condemnation. The Old Testament, under Mosaic law, prohibits sexual relations with close kin: *"The nakedness of thy sister, the daughter of thy father, or daughter of thy mother…thou shalt not uncover"* (Leviticus 18:9). Violations of this law attract divine judgment and defile the land. In traditional African belief systems, incest is similarly regarded as a desecration of sacred cultural order, drawing punishment from the gods. The dramatic weight of Yerima's play lies in the shocking revelation that Auntimi's incestuous relationship with her brother, Theo, produced a son—Akande, the family lawyer. This revelation, hinted at earlier by Ifagbayi's suspicion of Auntimi's unusual closeness to Theo, redefines the family's structure and taints the Chief's legacy. The exposure of Auntimi's hidden sin also parallels Cecelia's hypocrisy: despite claiming to be a "born again" Christian, she conceals her continued adultery with Theo. In this way, Yerima underscores the biblical injunction that *"nothing is hidden that will not be revealed"* (Luke 12:2).

A comparable preoccupation with secrecy, sexual transgression, and the destructive force of hidden desires appears in Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives*. Although Fisher does not directly confront incest, she interrogates infidelity and marital deceit as violations of the sanctity of

marriage. Her narrator, initially complicit in her husband's polygamous arrangement, discovers that the marriage is riddled with manipulation, secrecy, and betrayal. As Hassan notes, Fisher's fiction "exposes the toxic entanglements of modern relationships, where lies and concealment displace trust and intimacy" (Hassan 214). Just as Yerima dramatises incest as a violation that collapses the sacred boundary of kinship, Fisher dramatizes polygamy and deception as violations that collapse the sacred boundary of monogamy.

Both Yerima and Fisher, though writing from different cultural and generic contexts, converge on a central concern: the destructive consequences of sexual immorality and secrecy. In Yerima, incest undermines cultural taboos, religious laws, and family order; in Fisher, deceit within polygamy destabilizes trust, identity, and marital cohesion. The female characters in both texts bear the emotional burden of male sexual indulgence, yet they are also complicit: Auntimi through silence, Cecelia through hypocrisy, and Fisher's narrator through denial and self-deception. Ultimately, both writers affirm that hidden transgressions, whether incest or adultery, polygamy or deception, cannot remain concealed indefinitely; when exposed, they bring devastation to family, culture, and personal identity.

Polygamy in Perspective

The institution of polygamy has long been a subject of intense debate and literary exploration across cultures. In African societies, it is rooted in tradition, symbolizing wealth, fertility, and continuity of lineage (Mbiti 132). Islam also sanctions it under regulated conditions, permitting a man to marry up to four wives provided he treats them equally (Qur'an 4:3). The Old Testament similarly reflects its acceptance, as seen in the marriages of patriarchs such as Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon (Genesis 29–30; 1 Kings 11).

However, with the advent of Christianity, particularly evangelical strands, polygamy became delegitimised and was equated with adultery (Baloyi 3). Many African theologians regard this rejection of polygamy as a colonial imposition designed to suppress indigenous religious practices and cultural values (Chitando 27). On the other hand, African feminists critique polygamy as a patriarchal institution that fosters female rivalry, disempowerment, and commodification (Nnaemeka 6).

African literature has been one of the most powerful spaces where the challenges of polygamy are critiqued. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* satirizes the chaos and absurdity associated with polygamous households (Rotimi 52). In response, Bode Ojoniyi's *Our Wife Has Gone Mad* inverts the trope by presenting polyandry as a way to expose double standards in gender roles (Ojoniyi 14). Similarly, Efua T. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* dramatizes the transactional nature of marriage, while Ama Ata Aidoo's Anowa interrogates the burden of patriarchal traditions on women. Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* remains a seminal feminist critique, portraying the psychological trauma of women caught in polygamous marriages.

Northern Nigerian writers also foreground polygamy in their literary imagination, often exposing how it is used as a tool for female subjugation. Abubakar Gimba's *Sacred Apples*, Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*, A'asha Abdulkareem's *Yar Fari*, and Razinat Mohammed's *My Daughter, My Blood* collectively highlight how polygamy, under the guise of Islam and culture,

perpetuates child marriage, rivalry, and denial of women's agency. These narratives show that polygamy often functions as an instrument of oppression rather than cultural preservation.

Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* places polygamy at the centre of Nigeria's elite class, exposing how it fosters rivalry, secrecy, and corruption. In the play, polygamy is revealed not only as a cultural practice but as a mechanism of control, often coming to light most dramatically in inheritance disputes after the death of the husband. Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives,* though written within a Western psychological-thriller framework, similarly depicts polygamy or its illusion as destabilizing, leading to fractured identities, paranoia, and emotional manipulation. While Yerima portrays polygamy as a socio-cultural system that fuels conflict among wives, Fisher situates it as a psychological experiment in power and deceit. Both works converge in portraying women as victims of patriarchal structures and agents of rivalry, showing how polygamy whether cultural or psychological remains a contested site of gender politics and identity struggles.

Property Inheritance versus Emotional Inheritance

In Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives*, the struggle over the inheritance of the late Chief Theophilus Gbadegesin Olowokere emerges as a dominant theme. The chief's death triggers a bitter contest among his surviving wives, Cecelia, Angela and Tobi, who each seek to secure their share of the deceased's wealth. In African society, inheritance is not only a matter of material possession but also of social recognition and security, especially within polygamous households where economic disparities and educational differences among wives and children often intensify conflict (Ibhawoh 47). Consequently, inheritance disputes frequently spill into lengthy court battles, as in the widely reported litigation over the estate of the late Chief Rotimi Williams, SAN, whose children, many of them lawyers, contested his vast property. In other cases, families resort to supernatural or cultic means to eliminate rivals in their bid for control of wealth (Falola and Heaton 212).

Yerima dramatises this complex reality through the rivalry of Chief Olowokere's wives. Angela, the senior wife, insists on her right to inheritance while accusing Tobi of complicity in Theo's death. Cecelia, however, challenges Angela's claim by reminding her of her estrangement from the deceased. By tradition, Feyi, Theo's first son through Angela, should inherit his father's property, yet the revelation that Sholomonu Akandeola, born of Theo's incestuous union with his sister, Auntimi, is the actual first son disrupts the established order of succession. The discovery raises pressing cultural and legal questions: Will the family accept Sholomonu as a legitimate heir? How will they handle Auntimi, whose incestuous act constitutes a grave taboo in African society? While the law may favour Sholomonu's legitimacy, tradition might reject both him and his mother, potentially banishing them from the community (Osibanjo 104). Thus, Yerima underscores the fragile intersection of law, custom, and morality in property inheritance within polygamous African families.

By contrast, Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives* shifts the focus of inheritance from material property to emotional legacy. Here, inheritance is not defined by estates or wealth but by the scars of deception, secrecy, and betrayal. The protagonist, Thursday, inherits the psychological trauma of her entanglement in a toxic, modern polygamous arrangement. Fisher demonstrates how dysfunctional relationships transmit emotional residues, jealousy, mistrust and shame, that

extend beyond the dissolution of the union and linger as inherited psychological burdens (Hassan, 215). Unlike Yerima's wives who inherit tangible wealth and rivalry, Fisher's characters inherit fractured identities, guilt, and lasting emotional wounds.

Both playwright and novelist highlight that inheritance, whether physical or emotional, can be a source of conflict. Yerima portrays the cultural and legal battles surrounding material property within African traditions, while Fisher exposes the psychological costs of deception in intimate relationships. Together, their works reveal that inheritance, broadly conceived, is not merely about possessions but also about the enduring legacies of human relationships.

Religious Hypocrisy

In *The Wives*, Yerima foregrounds the theme of religious hypocrisy, a motif recurrent in African postcolonial literature. Wole Soyinka, for instance, satirises spiritual fraudulence in The Trials of Brother Jero (1964), where the prophet exploits religion for personal gain. Similarly, in Yerima's Tuti, "Father," a respected elder, is implicated in the embezzlement of church funds. These works, like *The Wives*, reveal the contradictions between professed faith and actual conduct in African religious life. In *The Wives*, the hypocrisy is dramatized through Cecelia, Theo's second wife. Following Theo's death, Baba Ajagbe demands that the widows swear an oath to prove their innocence. Cecelia resists, insisting: "I will not swear any oath or partake in any ritual practices. I am born again in Christ" (Yerima 47).

She recounts her conversion experience after leaving Theo a decade earlier, declaring herself "washed in his blood" and "married to Christ" (48). However, her testimony is later exposed as deceptive. Through Ifagbayi's oracle, the audience learns that Cecelia has been engaged in adultery, not only rekindling a sexual relationship with her late husband but also cohabiting with a white lover: "Woman, you committed an abomination. You killed our son. Sleeping with two men at the same time. There is the picture of a bearded white man in the same room" (Yerima 49). Cecelia's subsequent confession, "We ended up in my house for lunch... and later in bed. Nothing was planned really" (50), destroys the credibility of her religious claims. Yerima thus uses Cecelia as a metaphor for modern-day hypocrisy, where professed piety masks moral corruption.

In Christian theology, the doctrine of being "born again" (cf. John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17) signifies radical transformation into a life of holiness. Cecelia's lifestyle, however, contradicts this, embodying instead the duplicity prevalent among many contemporary "born-again" adherents. Scholars such as Orobator (2018) argue that African Christianity often risks degenerating into performative spirituality, where outward religiosity cloaks hidden sins. Likewise, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) critiques the "prosperity gospel" movements in Africa as producing Christians more concerned with appearances than with authentic transformation. Cecelia is depicted as a symbol of the spiritual rot in society.

This motif of religious hypocrisy is not unique to African drama. In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), the Salem witch trials expose how leaders manipulate religious authority to conceal personal sins and persecute rivals under the guise of spiritual purity. Similarly, Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884) depicts characters whose moral pretensions are undone by hidden sins and lies, echoing Cecelia's double life. By placing Yerima alongside Miller and Ibsen, we

see how religious hypocrisy functions as a global dramatic concern: a critique of the distance between proclaimed faith and lived reality.

By contrast, this theme is not central in Fisher's *The Wives*. Fisher's play interrogates women's negotiations within patriarchal structures but does not foreground hypocrisy within religious discourse. While Yerima presents Cecelia as a religious fraud whose life undercuts her testimony, Fisher's women struggle more with secrecy, inheritance, and identity than with spiritual duplicity. Thus, Yerima's treatment of religious hypocrisy is distinctive, broadening the thematic terrain of African drama by engaging not only with patriarchy but also with the moral failings of religious zealots.

Adaptation or Coincidence: Interrogating Creative Boundaries in *The Wives*

In comparative literary studies, it is a common and accepted ethical practice for playwrights to declare openly in the prefaces of their works that their plays are adaptations, while also stating their reasons for such re-creations. For instance, Femi Osofisan clearly notes in the preface to *Wesoo Hamlet* that it is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Osofisan vii). Similarly, he acknowledges *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* as an adaptation of Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (Osofisan ix), and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* as an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* (Osofisan 11). Ahmed Yerima also recognizes that his *Otaelo* is adapted from Shakespeare's *Othello* (Yerima xii) and *An Inspector Calls* as an adaptation of J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (Yerima, 99). Likewise, Wole Soyinka affirms that his *The Bacchae of Euripides* is drawn from Euripides' classical play, *The Bacchae* (Soyinka, viii).

This practice of transparency has become a scholarly convention and an ethical standard in academe (Hutcheon 7). However, Yerima's *The Wives* presents a puzzle: nowhere in the play is there any acknowledgment that it may be an adaptation, transposition or literary response to Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives*. Yet the similarities between the two texts are conspicuously indisputable. Both critique polygamy, foreground rivalries among wives, and, curiously, even share the same title. Are these similarities mere coincidences? Could it be an omission on Yerima's part, or a deliberate choice to leave the relationship between the texts unstated?

Comparative literature often grapples with these possibilities: deliberate adaptation, subtle imitation or coincidence (Sanders 20). Scholars who argue for coincidence maintain that since artists "drink from the same semiotic pot," overlaps are inevitable (Barthes 146). Others attribute such resonances to the universality of human experience, which transcends cultural and geographical boundaries (Damrosch 4).

This creates a dilemma for me as a critic of both Yerima's *The Wives* and Fisher's *The Wives*: what accounts for these striking similarities, given that there is no historical evidence of any direct connection between Yerima and Fisher? Furthermore, denouncing Yerima's work as unethical proves difficult, not only because he is a celebrated and profoundly creative playwright of monumental stature, but also because of the legal implications such a charge would entail. If, however, we conclude or assume that the similarities between Yerima's *The Wives* and Tarryn

Fisher's *The Wives* are merely coincidental, then Ahmed Yerima must be commended for his creative ingenuity and literary sagacity, which enable him to reimagine universal themes with fresh dramatic intensity and cultural relevance.

Conclusion

This study has comparatively analysed Ahmed Yerima's *The Wives* (2007) and Tarryn Fisher's *The Wives* (2019), demonstrating how the two works, despite their distinct cultural contexts, converge thematically in their exploration of polygamy, patriarchy, secrecy, and female agency. Yerima situates polygamy as a cultural institution in Nigeria, where it exposes the tensions of inheritance, rivalry, and survival among women in patriarchal households. In contrast, Fisher employs polygamy as a narrative trope in a Western psychological thriller, dramatizing deception, identity crises, and the manipulation inherent in intimate relationships. The analysis shows that both texts underscore how patriarchy, in its cultural or psychological forms, creates spaces of rivalry, insecurity, and betrayal among women. Yet, both also illustrate the persistence of female agency, however fragile, as women seek to negotiate visibility and power within oppressive systems. Importantly, the cross-cultural juxtaposition highlights that while polygamy has different meanings in African and Western contexts, it consistently serves as a lens through which gender politics and social anxieties can be interrogated.

Thus, this study contributes to comparative literature by bridging African drama and Western popular fiction, revealing how diverse narrative traditions engage with similar thematic concerns. It also advances feminist literary criticism by showing the universality of women's struggles against patriarchal domination, even when shaped by different cultural logics.

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