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The drama of Ahmed Yerima : studies in Nigerian theatre

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Appendix 1: Interview with Ahmed Yerima

This interview of Prof. Ahmed Yerima was conducted by Julius-Adeoye R.J. at National Theatre of Nigeria, Lagos, and at Kwara State University (KWASU), Ilorin between November 2009 and July 2010. After the interviews I have on many other occasions engaged Professor Ahmed Yerima in discussion relating to his works of which he readily obliged me more information to enrich my research.

Julius-Adeoye R.J. (J-A.R.J): *Sir, you are a dramatist of note in Africa and apart from being a dramatist you are also a social commentator, I read many of your creative works that attest to this fact. Though I have read virtually all your published plays, I found The Wives, The Sisters, Kaffir's Last Game, Hard Ground and Little Drops as works that realistically discuss Nigeria's current socio-political state. My conclusion is that you are a social realist dramatist. I will like you to comment on this issue of social commentary and how it affects your writing.*

Ahmed Yerima: I think I'll like to start from the point of where you asked and also the environment where the playwright writes. I find myself in a third world-a developing third world country and I find that issues in this third world country are issues which we must talk about. People must examine them and I don't believe in ideological points of view that have no roots. I believe in ideological points of view that the roots are firmly on ground and they are even in the domestic lives of the people. I believe that the problems of the society starts from a man, on man and spreads to the society, and for us to get that right, there is a need for us to examine these things through whatever medium that we want to use- medium of play-writing, prose, and poetry. Drama, for me is a very touching medium because we are able to take the people physically and create them and put them on stage. Another fascinating thing that makes me love drama is because the characters are able to talk, the playwright in different characters is able to talk to the society from where he has drawn the materials, drawn history, drawn the topic, created the story, and has also drawn the characters. Usually, if you say I am a social commentator, I don't mind that but I don't think a playwright is a prophet. I think he is more of a commentator who is part of a wheel of incidences or a wheel of activities that he gets to a point and says: "please can we just stop for a while and think. How did we get here? Where are we coming from? There is Mr. Bad who was pushing us, there is Mr. Good who we didn't listen to, and this is why we are here."

J-A.R.J.: *Thank you sir, you said something about a playwright not being a prophet but I've seen from works of Soyinka and some others who have taken time to use fragments of what happened in their own time to project into the future of their societies, and overtime we have come to realize that what they said in those plays have played out in our present society. A very good example is The Trials of Brother Jero play that was written in 1960, at the time of writing the play, the issue of religious proliferation was not a big thing then but at the moment it really is a big issue. Although you comment on recent happenings in Nigeria in your works, yet some of the things you wrote in your plays like Silent Gods and Kaffir's Last Game fifteen or twenty years ago we can still relate to at this present time. What do you have to say to that?*

A.Y.: Soyinka is a philosopher I am just a story-teller, I think that is the great difference between us. Soyinka may be like he wrote "a playwright is gifted beyond that" maybe and again sometimes his prophecy is radical condemnation which is what frightens me about him. He is closer to the society. He antagonizes the society to a point where he gives himself as the carrier of the problems of the society. We have them, we just lost one Gani Fawehinmi⁵⁸³, and then when society fails him even after carrying these problems for them he damns them. That is why you have something like *The Wasted Breed* where Osofisan was saying *No More The Wasted Breed* because you cannot condemn a whole generation of people. But I think Soyinka does that, because he says: "I am here, I have prophesied you didn't listen, I have written you didn't listen so I don't think you people have hope", which is different from me. What I do is take an issue and say this is the problem and the problem is caused by you and me. Like *Hard Ground*, I said this problem we are having in the Niger-Delta is going to eat us all up, it is going to get to a point where children are going to kill fathers, parents. Adults' looking for positions and things and it is the wrong ones, negative ones they are looking for: Capone, foreign titles. This is going to destroy us if we don't curtail them, it is beautiful now but if we are not careful this thing will go out of the cubic and become a nightmare and that is what it is becoming, and I can see things like that but I can't prophesy. I can't go before the society. Maybe because I'm in government now and I see a lot of things but there is a limit to what I can say, like *The Silent Gods*, the June 12 thing was very pertinent in my mind. I couldn't understand why an election well guided should turn out that way and that is why the gods in my play said they'll be

⁵⁸³ Gani Fawehinmi (1938-2009) was a famous Nigerian human right lawyer and pro democracy activists who was in the vanguard of the struggle against military dictatorship in Nigeria. He is also reputed to have challenged government of Nigeria on many anti-people policies.

silent, you go and pick your leader, we are tired of picking leaders for you and when we pick them you either kill them or destroy them. I'll be very happy if you say that there's an element of prophecy in those plays but honestly I'll be more comfortable to be seen as somebody who lived through a period and didn't let it pass and said there's a need for me to say something, I must say something before this period, this moment goes because it may go forever.

J-A.R.J.: *I agree with you to an extent, I want to take it from another angle. Let me drop this issue of social commentary and prophecy aside and now talk about the issue of philosophy that you brought in. Some of your plays can be ranked among existentialist plays, for example the plays where you talked about pain, death, incest and what have you. I will really love to call them religious plays or fantasia but within the drama genre we don't have fantasia we have existential plays. If you say Soyinka is more of a philosopher, reading those lines in your works makes you a philosopher too, you talk about ethics, morals...*

A.Y.: Yes, but my ethics are seeped and dipped in tradition and cultural beliefs. Take a play like *Aetu* and you look at the issue of making over a woman from one man to another within a family where three brothers make over this girl to a point where she gets angry and curses even the children's children unborn through her. I take those topics from the traditional point of view and try in my little way to see if I can reason out any common sense in them and in that way pain comes in. I have always been afraid of death, I know it is going to come one day but it plays such a prominent role in our society that there is no way you can escape it. It is like my play *Mojagbe*, I had to finally pull death out of my consciousness and bring her, because I felt maybe we were even getting it wrong. I mean death cannot be this wonderful that great kings and men will follow if it is not a beautiful woman. I give death that kind of transformation and imagery. If you say that is philosophy okay, but I'm happy that they emerged from the good stories I want to tell. I want them to be part of the story and then let them be like the moral of the story. And I know in your doctoral thesis you will want to raise the moral to philosophical and ideological positions but honestly that is the comfort. Maybe that is why it is easier for me to write as many plays as possible because I can sit down and moralize without knowing about Descartes, about Heidegger, about all these great philosophers and moralize within the traditional African concepts of our morals and ethics.

J-A.R.J.: *That takes me to TheWives, incest and issue of polygamy. Like I said earlier that polygamy to me in the play is not an issue because it is part of the African culture and it is not a negative part of our culture, but the subject of*

incest is a moral issue. Juxtaposing polygamy and incest side by side, is really an issue.

A.Y.: Yes, but you see in African traditional societies-because I make it a point not to write for Hausa alone or Yoruba or Ibo people- incest is a damnable offense. It is so bad in *The Sick People* you remember that the root of their problems is that the woman slept with two brothers, twins. And I am always interested in the effect within the family of traditional taboos like incest and that is why Auntie mi in the play *The Wives* is portrayed in the most central and important role in the play and yet she is involved in this damnable offense which she thought has been washed away by the death of her son. While the man has a smile on his face even in death, for me it is not more of the incest but he believes that he has conquered both life and death and that's it. So everybody tries to turn the side of pity and glory that they have of him to the corpse, which is why the corpse is on stage from the beginning to the end of the play.

J-A.R.J: *But there is something I do not understand in that play. The play is beautiful as dark comedy from the beginning, but towards the very end becomes something of a tragedy, the tragedy of a family. There is this strand that tends to be missing. One is Auntie mi not realising the elderly man is her brother...*

A.Y.: She recognizes everybody, those two people from the village recognise her, they know her.

J-A.R.J: *But she did not until the last and she said 'who are these people?'*

A.Y.: She knows them, but it's the others who didn't know them. The wives didn't know them very well, I think the first wife knew one of them but Auntie mi knows all of them that's why the problem wasn't even that. The problem for them was that you who knows us, knows our traditions, who knows the circumstance of a great man, the Araba dying, is joining these people in dancing and singing around the Araba, is there something you people are celebrating that we are not aware of? And I've had to on several occasions and discussions tried to defend Antimi that she was not aware that her son was alive and that the lawyer was her son.

J-A.R.J: *But she is the one who says, "you, here". She points to the lawyer.*

A.Y.: Yes, because as the story unfolded, she now knew. It's almost like *The Sisters* when it got to a point, although I always enjoy it when the audience argue, "it's Nana, no another woman is going to come in." For me that was the only thing I could hold. By the time she said she was told by her brother after the birth that the child died, she accepted it, but she now knew why the brother

was going to Ibadan all the time, why the brother went to Ibadan to bury this old woman who had taken care of the lawyer, how he would accept the lawyer like his son. You know there are certain things people like to say, “let’s look for where you kept your laptop, you woke up this morning then you said you think you left it in the car of Yerima, then you say ‘I’m not too sure, before I entered that car I went to eat’ and then this man who you said followed you, “yes that is the man, that was where I lost it between eating, talking to this man and entering Yerima’s car.” I think that was how Auntie resolved the issue.

J-A.R.J: *I’ll take it from that angle, so, that settles it the strand I was looking for in the play all through. What about the theme of incest as a moral issue?*

A.Y.: Incest is a very moral issue, but I’m interested in it as traditional element for telling my story and also for destroying a powerful character, because I always believe in the inner being, inner person. I believe that this is the Yerima, this is the Julius-Adeoye you are seeing, well-dressed shirt, handsome looking, but by the time like a banana peel you begin to unpeel and the people you meet, the stories you hear, you say this man is an animal, not a human being and they say, “but he writes well” and you say “I don’t care about his writing anymore, I now care about what I heard and what I saw.” And I always like to do that, which is why I built him up to national level, the president sending a delegation and yet the women in his life he had used them. His sister is an example. I wanted to show man’s callous and powerful yet traditionally supported power to use human beings, especially women around them.

J-A.R.J: *I want to talk about the issue of feminism in the play. In most of your works we’ve taken time to see the female hero and the issue of their place and how the society has positioned them. Their being positioned side by side the male characters is mostly to subject them under male domination in society, but in your plays you always try to raise them psychologically above the situation and at the same time situate them within the African culture which trapped them in the first place, though they are receptive they can be assertive as well. This strand is also seen in all the women in The Wives including Auntie mi, the banker and the one that you call the tiger, she use her womanliness to put the late Otunba Gbadegesin “the Araba” in a situation that makes him dance to her tune and then give in to whatever she demands. This means she use her position to get what she wants. What is your position regarding the female hero?*

A.Y.: The female hero for me is a contradiction within the Nigerian reality. It’s a contradiction in the sense that the “modern” you and I want the woman to be independent, we want the woman to be powerful, to be educated and yet we

have created traditional stumbling blocks on her path. The more we empower her, the more another stumbling block will bring her down. In a new play I'm writing, the woman who is Ibo wants to leave her husband and she has gone and built a house in the village in her father's compound, this is regarded as a taboo, nobody will come and live in the house and yet she is a successful bank manager. She has everything but she doesn't want to marry her husband anymore, she wants to marry a young man and yet because of what she has done, she must go through a cleansing period – which is going to bring all her degrees to zero – for her to be accepted by the society one more time. I believe that that is always the thing about the African woman. It is good to say we are talking about empowerment but look at all the women from the First Lady in *The Sisters* they all crumble all because they were brought up by an ambassador – wonderful, handsome father – who taught them that this is his ideal. And the more they believed that that was the ideal when they left the protective arm of their father they found that they could not cope. All of them, the three of them failed. And that is my painful process of presenting woman within the feminist angle that the society creates room for her to grow but it also creates traditional stumbling blocks and when the stumbling blocks are not there the husbands – if they are married – create the stumbling blocks. He just says, 'ok, you are well-dressed to go to work, I feel like making love to you, come back, undress' or go and make me pounded yam with this your suit.' These are the problems that my women encounter. Look at Onirode in *The Sick People*. Onirode has tried everything until she now finds out that she is the problem and until she goes this family will not find peace. Just a little sin she committed, yet she helped her daughter to cleanse herself, she helps another one to have a child, she saves her grandchildren but she must go. Have you read *Akuabata*? The woman here is a woman who finds love only for her to realize that she was made over to a god who says "go and have children but the children are mine" and she says 'no'. She becomes a catholic, a Christian, and she has a daughter who wants to become a reverend sister. In anger, the god comes back and starts to kill the people of the village just because of her action and at the end take her begotten and beloved daughter away. So the society creates those blocks for them, even the judge in *The Mirror Cracks*, even in *The Portrait*.

J-A.R.J: *I was going to The Portrait but before I get to The Portrait, I want to stick to The Sisters which you mentioned earlier, your heroine in *The Sisters* is Nana. How come you who said you want your female hero to rise above the society dictate did not allow Nana to rise in The Sisters?*

A.Y.: But the ironical thing is that Nana did not, because of the society. Nana was even an accident of birth within the modern setup; it's like me taking a child home. My wife will kill the child. And yet what I wanted to show is the contradiction, she was the most behaved, she was the one who kept to her word. Remember on the ambassador's deathbed he had made her promise to take care of the girls as her sisters and when offers come for her to marry, she didn't marry. She kept an eye on all of them and she didn't talk back to them.

J-A: *She could have done that even while she was married.*

A.Y.: She wouldn't have the time because the society, the parents had spoilt them. In trying to make them modern women – the modern women whom they eventually became, they couldn't cope and that was why she was moving from one person's house to the other to take care of them and yet they took her for granted. I just had to compensate her.

J-A.R.J.: *Does that mean that the women in The Sisters apart from Nana are shallow minded?*

A.Y.: No they are not shallow minded. What I was trying to show with those three women is that no matter how empowered a woman is, when it comes to matters of the heart, when it comes to the sustainability of temper, of mood, of manner she cracks.

J-A.R.J.: *That takes me to the First Lady and her position.*

A.Y.: She didn't have a child because she wanted to keep her shape and so at the first excuse the husband says, "it's ok, it's alright, I don't want anything to happen to your shape." She is gullible, she does not realize... and at the end of the day that is what the family told her: "it is the person who has children that we know, if you don't have a child we don't know you." Look at Taiwo - Tai Tai - who is the most brilliant of them all, the most resolute, the strongest willed person in the family, she cracked.

J-A.R.J.: *The strongest willed on a wheelchair.*

A.Y.: I purposely put her on a wheelchair because I gave her too many strong lines so her mouth was going to be stronger than the legs. She was the one embodied and endowed with the pen, she could write poetry, she could appreciate lines and yet when it came to being strong enough to take the challenges of life she took everybody as an enemy. She fought the world.

J-A.R.J.: *I read The Sisters from the angle of feminism and I read under the lines that it is not feminism; it's your own way of talking to the society, the government of the day, your own way of saying "well – well – well, this is the house that I'm not privy to but I believe this will happen within that confine. Can you say something about that?*

A.Y.: I think I wanted to write about women, I'd gathered enough material but what I didn't like was the pretentious lives most educated women were living. My first and former wife is a judge so you find the judge character, the lawyer character running in through *The Sisters* to *The Mirror Cracks*. But in *The Sisters* I set out to show the trappings, because that was the period of Beijing spirit, you know and women empowerment, everything came in, so I wanted to have a laugh. For me it's more of a lampoon, a lampoon on feminism. It's ok to say: "I'm Carol, I'm a woman, I was born in so and so, I went to Leiden University, I've got my PhD, I got a double PhD that year: Literature and then Drama, I've been teaching since and I'm a professor." And yet when you read all that CV, Africans brings just one useless tradition and culture and take it all away from you and that's it. My cousin came with all the PhD and we couldn't get a husband for her. All the men including those who had PhD were afraid of her, they said she was too aggressive – "a woman doesn't look into the eyes of a man." She got so angry that she told me: "get me a mechanic, a tailor, all I want is just to show these useless people that I'm a woman, I want to marry, I want to have a child." It became an obsession until she went back to the US and finally found an American who could understand at that point, her level, but she can't come back home and she loves home. So, this is what we do to our educated women. The element of politics is there, but I really wanted to write about women and this is why I'm always angry when people do not see me as a genuine feminist. I've tried everything but I must place them within that reality they are in.

J-A.R.J: *But sir, I want to see you as a feminist playwright, not from the angle of The Sisters but from the angle of Erelu Kuti. You tend to make us understand that the African woman from inception has always been given the position of leadership, position of power and authority; you either see them as heads of the market guild superseding over the men to the extent that Erelu Kuti becomes the King of Lagos. Lagos seemed to be a powerful Yoruba state within that period and for her to have risen that high shows that you really tried to portray the woman from the African perspective that no matter how, within the Yoruba cultural setting, there has always been respect for the womenfolk.*

A.Y.: I loved Erelu Kuti's history, I loved the story and I was commissioned to write it by the present Erelu Kuti and the late Oba Oyekan. Both of them gave me all the materials. But what I found fascinating in the first Erelu Kuti was that she was dedicated, she was committed, but see what happened to her. She rose to be king because her brother trusted her. Her brother was asked: "look, take somebody you trust that can give you back this throne when you come

back, you are not well, we need to treat you and we need to take you away from Lagos, as long as you are on the soil of Lagos you will not get well.” He told his sister and she said: “go, come back and took it.” He came back and she gave it back to him. But look at what he did, when he wanted to say thank you to a common Babalawo, Alagba, the smelly old Babalawo who took care of him he went to his daughters and said: “daughters, I want you to marry my Babalawo” and they refused because they were princesses. He went to his sister and she said: “if that is what will make you happy ok, I will do it.” In modern society, it is bringing down of the first order. I have an Optician whose sister is not married in Lagos, if I told her: “this man assisted me, he got me well, he is my driver and I want you to marry him.” Even though she is not married, she will kick me and the man out of her house, she will even tell the police to arrest me for having temporary madness.

J-A.R.J: *But in those days you could not reject a King’s edict.*

A.Y.: This man was very poor; he wasn’t even a Lagosian he was from Ibafo, that was how Eyo came to Lagos. The problem was at the point she married the Babalawo.

J-A.R.J: *But the Babalawo was the one that advised the King to place somebody that he is so sure of on the throne.*

A.Y.: But he didn’t know it was his sister he was going to bring, he could have brought anybody. He could have brought his son.

J-A.R.J.: *But I think it’s just the love of the sister for her brother...*

A.Y.: That was what I respected: the love of the sister for her brother.

J-A.R.J.: *That is womanhood and that is an African example of a feminist, a woman hero.*

A.Y.: But the problem is: how far did he take Erelu, he didn’t. If the man was not even kind, by the time she married her gesture has been forgotten.

J-A.R.J.: *But Erelu’s son later became the King.*

A.Y.: Up till today, the mantle said “from now onwards the two most important lineages from you. You will produce the king and you will produce another great...” You know she had two sons, Balogun something and that was how she became the most important woman in Yoruba history, but she was humiliated by tradition.

J-A.R.J.: *The tradition that humiliated her is the same tradition that is worshipping her now.*

A.Y.: Yes, but you see, this is the problem I’m talking about. Maybe Africans are not ready for feminism, maybe Africans are not ready to give a woman full position of trust, of power. If you put a woman here as an artistic director and

she does Ahmed Yerima's plays twice they will not say she loves Yerima's plays. The society will say "Yerima must be sleeping with her", or they will say "no, it was Julius-Adeoye; he came, told her he did a PhD on him and that was where they started the affair." They will never say that she had chosen the plays on her own. The society is always suspect of the success of a woman. If my wife who is a Deputy Director in the government organization comes and says she has been appointed as Acting Director, instead of her friends to call me and say congratulations they will say: "sir, *efura, efura gan ni*⁵⁸⁴, I don't know where this promotion is coming from, what was she? What did she read?" And that is what pains me each time I write a feminist play or a play that places a woman at a very high level. I find that the society itself has created points that must be reflected in the play.

J-A.R.J.: *Why don't you create a woman that is near perfect?*

A.Y.: Is there a woman near perfect? Would she be true of my society? In which world will she be near perfect?

J-A.R.J.: *I want a situation whereby you'll re-enact the character of Taiwo in another light.*

A.Y.: Taiwo yes, but I couldn't make her perfect because God doesn't make people perfect, he always leaves a little comma and once your characters are perfect, the audience cannot relate to them. The audience relate to Taiwo because they are sorry for her and I love the way Joke Silva played the role. She made it so powerful and she put a lot of power there. When she got up from the chair the audience in Abuja was so happy (because they didn't know her) that she wasn't a cripple after all, thank God. Look at Imaguro, just because a chief told the King: "I trust my wife" and the king went out of his way to destroy that marriage using his power and position.

J-A.R.J.: *That takes me back again to Existentialism. I will not want to discuss naturalism, but realism into your characters instead. When you develop your female characters, you tend to develop them putting in mind their socio-cultural make-up. You defined them from the angle of the society in which they grow up and their own psychological and physical development. I derive that you write having in mind Emile Zola's definition of naturalism.*

A.Y.: No, my own is that it must be natural and recognizable. My audience is not a sophisticated audience. If you give to them symbols and images they might not understand it. I tried absurdism in school, I tried writing *The Flood*, *The Movement*, *Asylum* and I found that I couldn't go far with the storytelling

⁵⁸⁴ The statement is commonly spoken by the Yoruba's, loosely translated as "Sir, be suspicious, be truly suspicious."

and I found the only way I could get my audience who have a very short attention span and who are in constant conflict with the attraction of film video, is that I must make my characters interesting, they must come alive, they must be so naturalistic in such a way that the audience can say, “yes, I recognize this person.” In fact one of the reasons why NLNG in their citation for the award of best prize for Nigerian Literature 2006, they said: “Yerima’s characters appear as if they live next door, they are so real you can almost touch them even as you read.” And I love it when some of my senior colleagues read it, like Professor Olu Obafemi who said: “I didn’t put it down because the characters kept telling me finish this story before you put it down.” And that, for me is my source of power, the ability to be able to create characters, to see them and to put them on stage so that they can talk to the audience and in that way they can appeal to the audience, they can get my message through, they can become figures of criticism for the audience, they can become figures of damnation and figures of praise. Once they do that for me, then my story has sold.

J-A.R.J.: Thank you sir for the way you’ve taken time to decipher pieces and throw your work so open for me. I agree to a great extent to the realist and naturalist analysis of your characters. I will want to discuss *Uncle Venyil* and *The Portrait*, at the same time I will like to discuss *The Bishop and the Soul*, and *The Twist* because I noticed in these plays, conscience and identity; the internal conflicts of characters, I mean, fighting ones’ inner self. This issue of conflicting identity in one man that I notice in Venyil is in *The Bishop* and also in many other characters of your plays. Bishop is torn between two worlds the same way Venyil, Reverend Noah, and Otunba Ojuolape are torn between two worlds.

A.Y.: Conscience and identity, I wrote those plays at a time when I was getting out of my first marriage and I was trying to answer some questions, I was trying to find myself, I was trying to move on to the second stage of my life and I kept asking myself how prepared I was for the battle ahead. *Uncle Venyil* which is one of my favourite plays – you catch me reading it again, one, because of Kaka. Kaka is a woman that emerged from a close look at my present mother-in-law, she is so strong willed, she is a very strong Christian and she is ready to fight anybody, she even fought me before I married her daughter and we became friends later. The central there was Abacha’s government, it is also a very political play, Dr. Fasheun is uncle Venyil in my play. Remember Fasheun was put in prison in Ikoyi cemetery and he said he kept asking what he had done to come through that.

J-A.R.J.: I was looking at a union leader.

A.Y.: It was Fasheun.....

J-A.R.J.: *I want to continue our discussion on your feminism ideology. What really informed your interest on this feminist issue? Actually you said something about your personal encounter, your sister, your niece and people around you who are well read and finding it difficult to come to terms with the African tradition and what is expected of them. Sir, that aside, I want you apart from their own personal experience, what really informed your own decision to align yourself with the women issue.*

A.Y: I think the first thing for me was to realize that your story cannot be complete without predominantly the people who inhabit the world with you, which is women and children and so I find myself each time you want to tell a story you must be able to tell the other side of the story. And Africa is such a very masculine society where all the rules are set for us, where even though because my father was married to about two, three wives all the other women including my mother couldn't call me by name as the first son. I was either called the head or our husband or our man- you understand what I mean- it gave you this sense of supremacy which for me is very false but at the same time I found that man had cleverly-even within the twenty-first century- created those stumbling blocks that the women find difficult to climb and no matter how empowered they are, even in the twenty-first century where the empowerment of women and equality of women is so well sung about you still find that these structures, these little taboos; a woman doesn't whistle or else she'll call down evil spirits upon herself. A woman does not climb or walk across somebody lying down, you know those little things that have been put there already have put a form of restriction on them and when I now grew up and found cousins, sisters going to school I said 'good, these people are educated, they are now prepared to go over and above the treatment of women in the traditional way and then you find that even then they are trapped and becomes a very interesting issue to look at when you want to write a play and you begin to look at different aspects; why a woman cannot build a house in her father's home, why a woman cannot take certain decisions even though she may have the wherewithal, the funds, the capital to do it.

J-A.R.J.: *But sir, do you think the woman, apart from the fact that the traditional setting has taken time to inhibit their free expression, do you think on their own they'd not taken time to see themselves as being under male.*

A.Y: I think the male domination is so strong that they have – I don't want to say they cower – but they have learnt to accept the society and the way the society has placed them, they've kind of accepted it and they have said "ok for

peace to be I'm willing to conform. If my husband beats me and not too much I can stay for the sake of the children rather than to stay for the sake of myself. Even though I'm married to an animal that beats me, for the sake of the children I am ready to stay, you understand." And they started looking for other convenient reasons that would make them say: 'this is why I stayed.' And this is why in *The Mirror Cracks*, the judge and her husband the ambassador are people of the 21st century, they want to be successful, the ambassador wanted to be the best, the judge also wanted to be the best...

J-A.R.J.: *That takes me to their daughter and The Portrait...*

A.Y.: Yes, take it to the daughter because it's almost the same situation.

J-A.R.J.: *Her own situation, she grew up – I am in The Portrait now although the situation in The Mirror Cracks is almost the same – she grew up in a society or in a kind of society where the father and the mother are independent people. And she is within that world of being independent minded, however, she is also putting herself in a kind of cocoon, a situation that will put her under the domination of a man. She wants to marry, not minding that the man is younger than she is by many years. As an independent minded/liberated woman she wants to damn the society by marrying a man of her choice no matter the age gap between them, yet she is listening to the same society by accepting to be part of the marriage institution. I think that is a contradiction. Don't you think that putting herself within that very institution determined by the society will affect her independent and women empowerment mind?*

A.Y.: I think that in both *The Portrait* and *The Mirror Cracks*, I was looking at families. ...if a husband and wife are not together what you create becomes a portrait of yourself. And when you look at the mirror of the child that you have created it always cracks. Look at *The Mirror Cracks* they didn't know their son; they had a totally different view. They thought that going to the best schools - going to King's College Lagos, going to Oxford University – that would make him a gentleman. And yet to them, this is what you want isn't it? This is the mirror you want to see, but he was an animal. And so when they heard what he had become it became a problem. But the girl in *The Portrait* is the portrait of the contradiction of the lives of the two parents not wanting to grow together, not wanting to respect each other. All that the woman would have said was I'm sorry and she says it the day the man dies. But it's too late. What I was trying to say is that, yes it is good for a woman to fight to be successful, to be empowered, but the problem still remains with the cultural roles given to women within the African setting. If you want to fight to become

an independent woman, you will miss out these cultural roles and what you will create in terms of your children, the harmony in your family will be scattered.

J-A.R.J.: *You don't come up to me as someone who is an apologist of the feminism, you are more in line with the womanist ideology because you tend to tow the same line as Zulu Sofola. To her, the tradition is not to be jettisoned but you should try and find your own world within that very frame of tradition. See the kind of freedom and the kind of liberty that the society leaves for the woman to grow in. That is the way I see it because at every point in time the women don't tend to defeat the culture because at the end of the day they often compromise...*

A.Y.: The difference between Zulu Sofola and I is that Zulu Sofola traps her characters within the cocoon of tradition. I show you characters who attempt to fight this tradition, they want to break away from the cocoon but the sad irony is that the more they fight to break from the cocoon the more they are held back. I mean look at *The Wives*. All I'm trying to say there is no matter how empowered a woman is her heart is still that of a woman. She must fall in love. And because the man knows he has the power of love over them either through comfort, through money, wealth, whatever, man will dominate.

J-A.R.J.: *This issue of womanism and feminism ideology takes me back to your play Little Drops. In Little Drops I have come to see that this ideology is well pronounced there than in the other plays that I've read. In this play, the women are pouring out their minds, seeing the negative things that the so-called male ego has done to destroy the society and I think: 'this is it.' You came to see the she-hero as the other woman. Even the Queen in the play starts to explain her reason for staying around the king, how she has taken time to talk to the King, that don't do this, don't do that. I tend to see it that this is a more direct way of exonerating a woman from the so-called decadence that has come into the Nigerian polity in the 21st century. What is your take on this?*

A.Y.: I think the word that I was waiting for you to use was that for the first time the women are more direct, but the women are more direct because they are women talking to each other. I find that women are more honest with themselves and once a man is there they are no longer honest. They don't want the man to see their weakness; that is the point about them. And it is the same problem I had when I wrote *The Sisters* where it was four women trying to talk about their problems and I was more interested in breaking them down because I wanted to show the inadequacy, the harsh faces even at the point of empowerment. But in *Little Drops* the women are more honest because the she-hero Memekize is able to say: "look I have problems too, the four graves you

see there are my people. I buried them myself and people are fighting, I don't know why they are fighting and yet I keep losing and I may lose all of you if I don't take care of you. And one of them actually says: "I thought I had a deep wound—the Queen—not knowing that yours was deeper than mine." When it comes to sharing not within the expensive, wealthy world in *The Sisters*.... When it comes to sharing within the realistic down-to-earth-look-we-are-poor-this-is-who-we-are world in *Little Drops* the women had to be honest. But look at what happens immediately Kuru came, they came back to becoming the dreamers, "I want to go to Port-Harcourt, from there I'll get another job. I'll be able to teach, I'll become a nurse." In fact it was interesting the first day we read it, somebody was saying oh I think Mukume will marry Kuru, oh it is the Queen, oh no it is Bonuwo. You understand, because they quickly go back into their roles and that is the problem I have. I have a problem with each time a woman finds a man around-the African woman-she hides under "you are the man, lead." And this was the man who was ready to kill them just five, ten minutes ago, yet they are ready to elect him the leader to take them to the freedom land in Port-Harcourt, giving him back all his guns, trusting him. What of if he kills all of them? Just by swearing, biting a knife, they believed him. I don't understand, I don't know whether it is womanhood or feminism I'm always afraid of being trapped in terms of ideology. I think it is the *storyhood* that creates that kind of woman.

J-A.R.J.: *You are trapped within the world of domestic tragedian that you have become because virtually all your works are within this domestic squabbles and domestic....*

A.Y.: Yes but it has to be because life itself is there, there is no way. I have found out that the only way to hold an audience together is by telling them what they are, who they are, where they are coming from and if you don't know these people, they live next door and that I think forever I will treasure the judges' report on *HardGround* where they said "why Yerima's play won is because the characters appear to you, they live next door, you can recognize them, you can say that's that woman who lives down the road."

J-A.R.J.: *You had a problem with the government based on Hard Ground and the revelation in Little Drops seems to be deeper than what you revealed in Hard Ground when you are talking about the youths and what they are facing and what they tend to face afterwards. What do you think will be the government's take on this one?*

A.Y.: Well I'm leaving government soon, but that's not it, I think a play must be objective the facts are there. I used to think the Niger Delta was just a group

of people, maybe eight million or maybe at most 10 million but when I read that they were twenty-eight million out of a hundred and forty million, I found that there was a need to pay serious attention to the issue of Niger Delta. And I find most times that what we do in Nigeria is to draw a dichotomy - you are travelling on Sunday I'm not travelling so there is no need to worry myself I'll just stay in bed, if you were not travelling on Sunday you would have had our dinner with us but you are travelling- you understand, we always look for reasons to say it is his problem, it is not my problem. Ebonyi, Bayelsa, Rivers are all so far away to a man who stays in Lagos and that was what we all felt during the Biafran war. I was tucked away in a private school in Abeokuta, St Benedict private school and that's where the children of most of the army officers were put. So the war could have swallowed the whole of Nigeria and it wouldn't have touched us because we were there with Reverend Sisters, we were children of God, it would take a heartless soldier to bring a gun and come and shoot us. But the point was our fathers were the ones doing the war and that created problems for me. And I feel that when you have to tell a story and the story has information, people are going to come. Like we have J.P. Clark coming as the special guest of honour on the command performance, and you know J.P. Clark, if he sees the play – yesterday when they gave him the invitation card and the letter he said he wanted to speak with me on the phone (I won the JP Clark award with *Hard Ground*) and he is going to come and say look I want to see what this is all about and he is one of the fighters, one of the voices of the Niger Delta- and if I write rubbish he will just take the microphone and say, “look, this play is rubbish.” And that's why I was happy when my friend, the Judge from Ogoni area saw the play at rehearsals and said, “fantastic, but the play is not to be shown in Lagos and Abuja because they will not understand it”, he said “bring it to us, I understood even the sound of the guns, I could tell you which one was an AK47, which one was a Tommy rifle, which one was a pump action.” He said he could say it even from the recording. I think the government must be honest to be able to say this is it, and I think they have tolerated me this long, from *Silent Gods* where I spoke about June 12. A playwright must be relevant and if you are not relevant to your society then, you are not honest.

J-A.R.J.: *I think that will make me go personal a bit, because I remember when I delivered a paper on your work on Lottery Ticket in South Korea, I was looking at the situation in Lottery Ticket side by side the situation in Lao Tse's Tea House. For me, the environment of the two plays seems alike. In Tea House, they are under a hostile colonial system, while in Lottery Ticket it is a*

stifling system where the dictatorial government was making things difficult for people. And I looked at it and said, you have a relationship with the government. For me relationship is a two way thing, you have a good relationship and a bad relationship with them too and within the good relationship you are probably romanced as representing the Northern part of Nigeria in government one way or the other, so, the censorship will be tolerated. On the other hand the government may be saying, let us give him a voice because he is one of us so let him just talk nobody will listen to him, because Nigerians don't come to see the plays. From your own perspective do you think that your appointments within the government establishment reduced your capacity as a serious dramatist?

A.Y.: No, I don't think so; I think the play that really brought me close to knowing full well between writing in the University setting and writing with a government appointment is *Silent Gods* and because Soyinka had taught me Iconoclasm, where he said you could allow the story to be so buttered and beautiful that you hide the criticism and you could abuse government like he did in *Opera Wonyosi* (Ope ra Wonyosi). You will do it in such a way that you will be laughing and the government will be laughing even when they are being insulted and I thought I could get away with it but I didn't. I think the problem I've had is that I've been suspect by the government: "let's watch what he does and what he says", and suspect also by the society especially the Press. The Press for a long time did not want to accept me; they felt this was a "propaganda man and what he was just doing was pretending to abuse the government and then give them the real story of what he wanted until the government said no, the gods must not be silent when you bring this play to Abuja, the gods must speak and that was that." I think again another play was *Attahiru* and then *Tafida*. In *Tafida*, both the President Olusegun Obasanjo and the then Vice President Abubakar Atiku sat down to watch it at the Yar'adua Foundation it was their night and we did it for them. And then *Attahiru*, the whole hall was so quiet. I played *Attahiru*, Bayo Oduneye was the one who directed it. And there is a photograph which I would always treasure. I came down and was introduced to shake hands with Mr. President and I brought out my hand but he hesitated, and it was during that period when there was this Sharia thing going on quietly in the country. And what I found out was I knew that if I didn't tune down.... in fact the play never left Abuja. They just understood that the play was going to arouse some spirit especially the comments on why Lord Lugard treated the North that way, he left them alone and I remember President Obasanjo telling Vice President Atiku: "You see why

I left Sharia alone? People are asking me to make comments, to ban, to ban, if Luggard was wise enough not to ban, like this play is saying and leave the Northerners alone then either way I can't get out of it." It is either you say I am a pampered Northerner or as I said in an interview, an adopted Yoruba son because I've written more Yoruba plays than Hausa or Ibo plays; but the point is my own sincerity to myself. If you read *Dami's Cross* you will find out that I criticized the government. I didn't like the way the government treated Gwari people. Gwari people own the land and what they (government) have done is to enrich some of them who have sold the culture and gradually they (Gwari) are moving. When you get to Abuja now they are expanding the road and that means they are driving them more and more away. Yes they are migrants, they came from Chad and they are migrating. But the problem is: what plan does the government have for them and I asked that question in the play and it was also supposed to have been done, instead craftily and quietly the government of Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) refused to do it. The issues in Nigeria demand attention ... that is why I have not allowed brain-drain to take me out of the country. I've had quite a number of invitations: "come and work here, come and teach here, you are wasting your time in Nigeria" but I have stayed on because I believe that from my plays – maybe they will learn something. I try to be sincere with the topics that I treat, I am not sensational and I don't seek attention instead I allow the works to be the ones that will get the attention ... I hope you believe me.

J-A.R.J.: *But you tried as much as possible on many occasion to escape the Northern-child theme. Specifically, I have taken time to go around some of the issues that affect me in your work, especially in The Twist. I was initially at a loss on the theme of the play... in the play you brought in so many stories ... but only resolved few of them. For example, the Reverend's prostitute sister, even the supposed son that killed the original son and the mother that was coming in but did not enter at the end of the end of the play. Where is the "twist" really? Is the twist on Reverend Noah's realization that he is the real father of the murdered young man? Is the twist on fate as we find in *The Bishop and the Soul*?*

A.Y.: I always look at religion... I was born a Muslim (Ahmed), I was brought up my early years a Catholic, attended a Baptist school and married an Anglican wife. In *The Twist* I wanted to know the difference between being an Anglican and a Catholic and the issue of forgiveness, faith and destiny. In *The Twist* I tried to play on all these, I have found that in most plays that you raise quite a number of issues, I never intended to solve them. What I wanted to do

was, I wanted that twist, I wanted for you to know that the play was going to start all over again especially when a woman comes in and all that has happened is between the man and another man and they were looking at the issue of faith. The Anglicans believe that if I offend you I should come to you and say: “please I am very sorry, your laptop I mistakenly pushed it” whereas the Catholics believe that if I offend you I can send an intercessor, someone to intercede on my behalf and that’s that. And I was now saying, within all that what if a man who is Anglican comes in and the dramatic irony is that he ends up becoming someone who is used to intercede and later also becomes the root of the crime, the father of the crime and also finds fate playing a joke on him. That is what I did with *The Twist*. Maybe I didn’t do it successfully that is why you find all these obvious mistakes. I also fell in love with Lagos as I grew up and I still am in love with Lagos and as I’m preparing to leave Lagos again because I have to go to Kwara State University to teach after I’ve finished here. I find that in Kwara I am more comfortable. There people call me Ahmed Yerima, Hausa-Yoruba which makes me comfortable. They look at me, speak Hausa and obviously just go into Yoruba. The beauty of Kwara is that the people are historically Hausas but physically and realistically Yorubas. I find them more interesting to stay with because I am trying to do a new play on “Afonja” and I’ve found somebody who said he will give me materials, I want to look at the story of Afonja critically. I want to know why there is Balogun Fulani, Balogun Gambari, and then the true Yoruba in Kwara. I want to be able to look at those three themes, these are what interest me about writing plays, and there is always something to write about. But when it comes to *The Twist* I did it unresolved because I was just coming from J.P. Priestly *An Inspector Calls*. I enjoyed it. I watched the play in England and I had to read it for a course and then teach it later. My late favourite British actress was in it. I saw the play every night because I was a stage hand in the play. I fell in love with the play and fell more in love with her, but what I now did was to say this can happen in Nigeria. At that time my father-in-law was Chief A.M.A. Akinloye. What I liked about the play was that the play ends where it starts. That is what J.P. Priestly was able to do to end the play when it started. At the end of the play he says: “may we now sit again.” I think, let’s take it all over again. And I wanted to do that, do my own story that would end that way and that is what I did. And when he looks at the family photograph on the wall and says “is that your wife?” There is something I always do, I always like to see somebody I’m going to meet from afar and then be able to prepare myself. “You don’t mind if

I look through the window? Is that your wife, it can't be." And then I leave that part un-ended.

J-A.R.J.: *So, there is a bit of you in the play?*

A.Y.: A bit of me in the play, a bit of me in my ending in *The Sisters*. I also did that with who is our sister, it is me and the audience says: "it can't be." I liked it.

J-A.R.J.: *You have a play that I loved so much when I read it, but unfortunately I've not seen on stage, that is AmehOboni the Great.*

A.Y.: We did *Ameh Oboni*. It was the independence play for 2005.

J-A.R.J.: *I heard it was staged in Kogi State as well, the home of Ameh Oboni.*

A.Y.: I was happy because that was the first thing on Ameh Oboni that they will ever do. I was overwhelmed. And why I was very happy was that the night it was shown in Abuja, his son came to see it and he was in tears as he spoke to me on the phone. He told me that they have always wondered why their father committed suicide. He thought I came close to explaining it. What amazed me was why would a King who at that time was so powerful in terms of traditional medicine, chieftaincy power, you know. The whole of the Middle Belt under Ameh Oboni was very powerful, and yet the envy of (I can't get the name), the man he sent to Kaduna House of Reps was what destroyed him and he got Muffet to decide with his D.O. (District Officer) to dethrone him. I didn't even understand Ameh Oboni until what happened to me at the national Theatre happened, where there was a split of my kingdom. People who were friends the night before suddenly became those with the long knives. I now started to understand why a man would take decisions and everyone thought I was going to end up back in University of Lagos (Unilag) where I had thought for eight years as adjunct Visiting Professor, but I said no. I didn't trust anybody around the environment; I just wanted to go to a village or somewhere different where nobody knows me. I can walk in the streets and they are more interested in what I have in my brain than. I don't care. And it is lovely now when I go to shops in Ilorin and just say look "do you have this" and the man says "do you read news on Telly?" And I say "yes, I used to." He is trying to remember where he has seen the face, and that is good for me. But *Ameh Oboni* for me was very touching, it was a painful experience. I drove round from Lokoja to Ayangba to Dekina to Ankpa and I did not see any statue, any school, anything named after him. And when I eventually went back to Dekina where he killed himself I asked and they said it was taboo for an Ayangba man to commit suicide. And I said why? If the King knew it was taboo why did he do it? And I started to find a reason why a king of his eminent stature will commit suicide.

And just a simple reason that if he died on the throne then his children could become kings but if he allows himself to be dethroned that is the end of his lineage.

J-A.R.J.: *Sacrifice. When I read the play, I had to read it again ... three times. When I did the analysis I was looking at this trend of British imperialism and colonial rule that I find in Attahiru and The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen. Actually that was what I wanted to touch in the play. Instead I found the theme of sacrifice, a situation where a man puts down his life in order for his people not to be trampled upon. Ameh Oboni carry's the cross for the whole people. So that is what I was looking at. I was really trying to find that thing you put in as a Great Hero, if I die, my children will continue. That same play says it is a taboo for a King to kill himself, but for Ameh Oboni to kill himself marked the end of his lineage as Monarch of Igaland. So I now said there is a problem with this story.*

A.Y.: Yes, there is. There was a big problem. And I was trying desperately not to beg people to say I am a hero. I want people to say this was his destiny, he could not escape it. And assess him especially when the spirit comes to him and says "what are you trying to do? Your life is not yours to take." In all my plays I always say that the King is a sacrifice. In fact the new one that has not gone to press, *Ajagunmale*, that is what I try to prove. After everything happened to me here, I now said ok, let me take a bow, let me understand. And that is what I always use plays to do, certain plays that I write. I want to use it to understand what is going on in my own life.

J-A.R.J.: *My discussion is going to be basically on your existentialist or religious realist plays where you to talk more about your fear of death and the mystery of life. Apart from the fear of the unknown, do you have more reason for writing such plays? Are you trying to use it to speak allegorically to African people and leaders? Do you know that those plays comment on the socio-political issues in Africa?*

A.Y.: Basically, I always start from self, my own personal fears and hopefully leave it to scholars and critics like you to expand the meaning and give other meanings to it. But for me I am always afraid of death, the finality of it. And yes, to a great extent you almost want to believe that death should be like a warning isn't it? To a bad ruler for example that look, if you are a bad ruler remember that you are going to die, and if you die how do you want to be remembered by the people, and for what? Legacy... what kind of legacy is it you want to leave behind? And because of that I am hoping that fear of death, fear of the mystery of it would help one correct his ways or her ways,

especially the leaders, but usually I'm very afraid of it, the process of transition. I am afraid of it because I know that once it takes place it is taking place and it's difficult, though I believe also in ghosts as you find in *The Angel*, it is only to correct a few things, to come on visitations just to say oh, I have a beloved one here, oh, I need to sort out something I forgot to say, but usually it is still a final end. That line, that passage which Soyinka talks about, that chthonic realm once crossed, is crossed. You get my point.

J-A.R.J.: *The strand of death tends to cut across many of your plays, apart from that there is also the issue of questioning one's self. For example, ThePortrait is about self examination. When I read it what I was able to deduce was that the mother and father of the main character of the play see their own mistake in their daughter. The mistake they did not want to repeat itself is actually happening in the life of their daughter. So what really motivated you into writing that?*

A.Y.: *The Portrait* for me was again the fear of what people do to hurt themselves. I was going through a divorce at the time. And from that marriage I had three sons and I was afraid because my wife then was as ambitious as I was. And I was afraid that in her trying to make it as a Judge which she later became and I wanting to make it as a big guy in government which I hope I became....

J-A.R.J.: *I am sure as a Director-General of the National Theatre and the National Troupe of Nigeria you did attain that position in Government. Thank you, sir, for your time.*

Appendix 2: Biographical Note on Ahmed Yerima

Ahmed Parker Yerima was born on May 8, 1957 in Lagos to a Police Officer father and Petty trader woman. In 1963, he attended Saint Barnardette Private Nursery and Primary School, Abeokuta, and from 1969 to 1975, he was a student at Baptist Academy, Lagos where he sat and passed the O'Level Certificate Examination. At the encouragement of his Literature-in English teacher, he wrote and staged his first play at Baptist Academy. In 1977, Yerima entered University of Ife to study Law, however, with the news that there is no space for a new student in the department for that year, he became a student of drama under the distinguished Professor Wole Soyinka. While in the Dramatic Arts Department, University of Ife, he wrote and staged his first four matured plays. While at Ife, he assisted the Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka to write satirical revue for his Guerilla Theatre. Also in 1977, as a fresh undergraduate student in the University, he acted the role of DeeJay in Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi*. In 1981 after graduating from University of Ife with both Certificate in Drama and Bachelor of Arts (Dramatic Arts), he proceeded to University College Cardiff for a Postgraduate study. He obtained his PhD degree from Royal Holloway College, University of London in 1986 and returned to Nigeria to take up a position in Dramatic Arts Department, University of Ife. Due to the internal politic among the faculty of the department as regarding Yerima's position in the department, he moved to Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria as a Drama Lecturer. While at ABU he adapted JB Priestley's *An Inspector calls* and Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* to "The Inspector's Call" and "Sikapin Seriki Wayo" respectively. He was impressed by JB Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* which he acted in London before returning to Nigeria, and regards the play as one of his favourite. As a Senior Lecturer in 1991, Yerima left the university environment briefly to take up appointment with the National Troupe of Nigeria as Assistant Director. Between 1991 and 2004, Yerima rose to become the first and only Director-General of the National Theatre of Nigeria and The National Troupe of Nigeria. He took over the position of the Director of The National Troupe and National theatre from one of Nigeria's greatest theatre director Bayo Oduneye, and Femi Osofisan. While working at the National Troupe, Yerima wrote more than twenty-four plays that were directed by Bayo Oduneye. In 2004, Yerima also added the position of Director-General of Abuja Carnival to his position thereby overseeing all the Nigerian Federal Government owned Arts and Cultural Institutions until 2009. Despite holding many positions and having such a busy schedule, Yerima

accepted an adjunct Visiting Professor position at the Creative Arts Department University of Lagos, Nigeria. In 2006, Yerima's *Hard Ground* a play on the Nigerian Niger Delta won the prestigious NLNG Literature Award and the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA/NDDC) Drama Prize. In 2010, Yerima's *Little Drops* made the final 3 lists of NLNG Literature Prize. Yerima resigned his position as the Artistic Director of National Troupe of Nigeria in January 2010 for a Professorial Chair at Kwara State University (KWASU), Kwara State, Nigeria, and became the pioneer Provost of the School of Performing Arts after he had been made a Professor by the same university in November 2009. In July 2011, Yerima accepted the position of Professor of Drama and Cultural Studies at Redeemer's University (RUN), Lagos, Nigeria and left KWASU in October the same year. As the present, Yerima has written and published more than thirty-six plays. Since 1986, Yerima has supervised numerous M.A. Thesis and PhD Dissertation, and has acted as external examiner to many universities in Nigeria. Ahmed Yerima has served as a member of many professional bodies, including: Society for Theatre Research (STR), London, International Theatre Institute (ITI), Nigeria, Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Nigerian English Studies Association (NESA), Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA), Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (ANTP), Literary Society of Nigeria, West African Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, World Dance Alliance and many more.

Appendix 3: Chronology of the life of Ahmed Yerima

May 8, 1957:	Born in Lagos to a Police Officer father and a Petty trader mother
1963-1969:	Attended Saint Barnerdette Nursery and Primary School, Abeokuta, Nigeria
1969-1975:	Attended Baptist Academy, Lagos where he sat for his O`Level Certificate
1974:	Participated in the Royal Commonwealth Essay Competition
1976:	Participated in the Kennedy Essay Competition
1977-1978:	Admitted into the Dramatic Arts Department of University of Ife, Ile-Ife, Nigeria to study for Certificate in Drama under Prof. Wole Soyinka. He was the first and only student of the Department in 1977
1978-1981:	Graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) Honour Degree in Drama and Literature at University of Ife, Ile-Ife
1980:	Staged and published his first plays “Asylum”, “The Flood” and “The Movement” as <i>Three Plays in Transition</i> , Ogunbiyi Press, Ile-Ife, Nigeria 1980.
1981:	ublished the Monograph <i>Reflections: Axworthy and the Development of Nigerian Theatre, (1956-67)</i> , Lace Publications, Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
1982:	Studied for a Postgraduate Diploma in Playwriting & Acting at University College, Cardiff
1982-1984:	Awarded Federal Government of Nigeria`s Scholarship for a Postgraduate Studies
1982-1984:	Became part-Time Lecturer at Royal Holloway College, University of London
1982-1986:	Wrote and defended his PhD Thesis titled: “Changes in the Nigerian Theatre with special Attention to Four Post- Soyinka Playwrights” under the Supervision of Professor Katherine Worth at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, School of Drama and Theatre Studies, University of London, London.

- 1984-1985: Became a Lecturer at the Dramatic Arts Department, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
- 1986-1991: He was appointed a lecturer at the Department of English and Drama, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, Nigeria.
- 1987: Published "Wole Soyinka's Experiment: Guerrilla Theatre at the University of Ife" in *Odu Journal of West African Studies* No. 32, 1987. 145-159.
- 1987: Published "Zulu Sofola and her concept of Tragedy" in *IVIE: Journal of the Bendel State Arts Council* 4th Edition. 28-33.
- 1988: Published "The Guerrilla Theatre as a Tool for National Re-Awakening: A Study of the Soyinka Experiments" in Ernest N. Emenyonu (ed), *Literature and National Consciousness*, Heinemann Nigerian. 181-204
- 1988: Published "Literature and Social Relevance: It's Application to Writing in Nigeria" in *Work in Progress*, No. 6. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University (ABU).
- 1989: Published "The changes in images and symbols to effect understanding in Contemporary use of folk stories for children" in Vol. I *Faculty of Education Research and Developments* Vol. 1. Zaria: ABU, 1989. 64-68
- 1989: Appointed contributing Editor and Assessor Matatu: Journal of African Literature, Germany
- 1989: Awarded the British Council Visitors Scholarship to England to study Administration. He presented a paper titles: "Literature and Social Transformation. The Writer's Reality in Nigeria" at the Silver Jubilee Conference of University of Kent, ACAS Canterbury, England. August 24-31.
- 1990: Staged and published with Kasumu Yero his bilingual play-text *Sakapin Sarkin Wayo*, an adaption of Moliere's, *Les Fourberies De Scapin*. Kaduna: Alliance Francaise Centre

- 1990: Published “Wole Soyinka: A Review of James Gibbs Book”, in *MATATU: Journal African Literature*, (ed) Verlag Holger Ekling (ed), Frankfurt. 45-46
- 1990: Member, Editorial Board, Work in Progress, Journal of the English Department, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria.
- 1990: Published “The Contemporary Nigerian playwright in Search of New Mythologies: A Study of Sowandes and Osofisan” in *SAIWA: Journal of English Department*, ABU.
- 1990: Appointed Guest Writer and Contributing Editor, New Agenda Newspaper.
- 1991-2000: Appointed as Deputy Artistic Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria
- 1993: Awarded the United State Information Service (U.S.I.S) Visitors Grant to USA. He presented two papers titled: “Dance Survival and Dance Presentation in Nigerian Societies” and “Advocacy and Funding of the Arts in Nigeria”, at the First World Dance Congress, International Dance Institute, San Francisco, State University U.S.A. October 20th-24th.
- 1995: *The Silent Gods* is premiered at the National Theatre, Lagos
- 1996: Published *The Silent Gods*, Ibadan: Kraft Books
- 1997: The premiere of *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* in Benin, and Lagos.
- 1998: *Kaffir’s Last Game, The Bishop and the Soul with Thank you Lord and The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*: Ibadan: Kraft Books
- 1999: Published *Attahiru*, Ibadan: Kraft Books
- 2000-Feb. 2006: Appointed as Artistic Director of National Troupe of Nigeria.
- 2000: Published *The Sick People*, Ibadan: Kraft Books
- 2001: Published *The Sisters, Tafida, and Dry Leaves on Ukan Tree*, Ibadan: Kraft Books
- 2002-2010: Appointed Associate Senior Lecturer at Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos and later as

- Adjunct Professor. Published *Yemoja*, and *Lottery Ticket*, Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- 2002: Edited with Ayo Akinwale, *Theatre and Democracy*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- 2003: Published *Otaelo* (an adaptation of Othello by William Shakespeare), Ibadan: Kraft Books. Published *Fragmented Thoughts and specifics: Essays in Dramatic Literature*. Lagos: Bookplus Ltd., and *Basic Techniques in Playwriting*, Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- 2003: Appointed Artistic Director, Commonwealth Head Of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Abuja 2003 cultural opening ceremony.
- 2004: Published *The Angel and other plays*, Ibadan: kraft Book *The LimamandAde Ire*, Ibadan: Kraft Books “Soyinka, the Director and the Nigerian Stage” in *Wole Soyinka @ 70 Festschrift*. Dapo Adelugba, Dan Izebaye and Egbe Ifie, (eds.), Ibadan/Lagos: LACE Occasional Publications/Dat & Partners.39-66. Edited with Olu Obafemi *Ideology and Stage-Craft*, Lagos: Bookplus Ltd.
- 2005: Published *Modern Nigerian Theatre: The Geoffrey Axworthy Years (1956-67)*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, and with Bakare Ojo-Rasaki and Arnold Udoka, (eds.) *Critical Perspective on Dance in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- 2005: Appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abuja Carnival
- 2006-August 2009: Appointed as the first Director-General, National Troupe and National Theatre of Nigeria.
- 2006: Published *Ameh Oboni*, *Hard Ground*, *Idemili*, and *Erelu Kuti*, Ibadan: Kraft Books. Won the NLNG Prize for Literature (\$50,000) with his play *Hard Ground*
- 2006: Won the Association of Nigerian Authours ANA/NDDC Drama Prize with his play *Hard Ground*

- 2006: Became a Fellow of Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA).
- 2006: Appointed Technical Director, Abuja Carnival
- 2007: Published *Aetu*, and *The Wives*, Ibadan: Kraft Books, *Playwright Thinking, Essays in Playmaking and Dramaturgy*, Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd., and *Theatre, Culture and Politics, Essay in Dramatic and Cultural Theory*, Lagos: Concept Publications Ltd, 2007.
- 2007: Chairman Editorial Board, SONTA Nigerian Theatre Journal 2007-2009
- 2008 to Present: Appointed as Visiting Professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. Published “The Future of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*” in *LARES: A journal of Language and Literary Studies*, Vol. 16.No.3, 1-11. Published *Akuabata, Tuti, The Ife Quartet* and *Mojagbe*, Ibadan: Kraft Books. Edited with Duro Oni, *Trends in the Theory & Practice of Theatre in Nigeria*, Ibadan: JFR Publishers, 2008.
- 2009-January 2010: He is returned back to National Troupe of Nigeria as the Director-General and Artistic Director
- 2009: Awarded the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA) Leadership Award. Premiered “Little Drops” at the National Theatre, Lagos. Published *Little Drops*, and *Dami’s Cross and Atika’s Well*, Ibadan: Kraft Books. Published *Discourse on Tragedy*, Minna: Gurara Publishing. Edited with Lizi Ben- Iheanacho *Abuja Carnival in Pictures*, Lagos: Galaxy Publishers.
- 2009 Nov.-Sept. 2011: Appointed Professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Kwara State University, Kwara State, Nigeria. In January 2010, he assumed the position of Provost and Head, Performing Arts Department, Kwara State University.
- 2010: Published “An Appraisal of the Nigerian Cultural Policy” in *Culture, Identity and Leadership in*

Nigeria, Dandaura, E.S. and Adeoye, A.A., (eds.), Ibadan: SONTA, Kraft Books. 42-52. Published *Ajagunmale*, Ibadan: Kraft Books

2011 July-present:

Appointed Professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Redeemer`s University (RUN), Ogun State, Nigeria. Published “Issues and Development in Contemporary Nigerian Drama and Theatre Practice”, in *Development in the Theory and Practice of Contemporary Nigerian Drama and Theatre*, Duro Oni and Sola Adeyemi (eds.), London: Alpha Crownes Publishers. 47-67. Published *Ipomu* to complete a trilogy on the Nigeria`s Niger Delta unrest.

2012 Sept:

Appointed Dean, College of Humanities, Redeemer`s University (RUN), Nigeria.