

Rethinking The Gender Narrative: A Feminist Perspective of Akinwunmi Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Iyalode Ibadan

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Abstract

This paper examines Akinwunmi Isola's historical drama Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode Ibadan through a feminist lens. Traditionally, Efunsetan has been remembered as a cruel, monstrous leader. Recent scholarship, however, urges a re-evaluation of her narrative. Framed by African feminist theory, this analysis argues that Efunsetan's portrayal in the play reflects both the constraints of a patriarchal society and her own assertive agency. By analyzing gender roles, power dynamics, and female authority in the text, the study shows that Isola's "heroine" ultimately subverts imposed gender norms. This feminist reinterpretation highlights how Efunsetan resists a masculinist order and suggests a more nuanced understanding of women's leadership in precolonial Yorùbá culture. The paper draws on feminist criticism and African literary scholarship to reveal how the play critiques patriarchal power and reimagines a historically maligned woman as a figure of female empowerment.

Keywords

Gender Narrative, Feminist, African Feminism



I. Introduction

Akinwunmi Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Iyalode Ibadan (1970) dramatizes the life of Chief Efunsetan Aniwura, the second Iyalode (female chief) of Ibadan in the mid-19th century. In both history and folklore, she has been depicted as fearsome and ruthless wealthy trader who ruled Ibadan's women and even maintained private armies of slaves. Her story is one of power and tragedy: she became a mighty matriarch, then fell from grace in a political upheaval and died betrayed by those close to her. Past studies, such as Bolanle Awe's influential essay, have often portrayed her as a sinister and tyrannical figure who abused her power and terrorized subordinates (Awe 228). However, contemporary critics urge us to "recuperate and verify" Efunsetan's status by reading her life against the grain of traditional gender norms (Ogundipe 104).

This paper adopts such a feminist re-reading of Isola's text. The central thesis is that Efunsetan's character, rather than simply affirming negative stereotypes about powerful women, actually embodies resistance to patriarchal control. In a society where women could hold high chieftaincy titles (the Iyalode), yet were often circumscribed by male political structures, Efunsetan's assertive leadership and eventual downfall illuminate the tensions of gender and power. By applying feminist theory, especially perspectives sensitive to Yorùbá cultural context and the intersection of gender, tradition, and resistance this paper shows that Efunsetan's narrative challenges masculine hegemonic assumptions (Nfah-Abbenyi 17; Ogunyemi 67). Ultimately, Isola's portrayal of Efunsetan can be seen as a call for rethinking the gender narrative in African history and literature.

II. Review of Literature

Scholarly attention to *Efunsetan Aniwura* has grown in recent years, particularly around the axes of gender and power. In a pioneering study, Ladele and Oyinlola argue that although *Efunsetan* is often “vilified” as a “villainous, wicked and self-centered” woman, a feminist re-reading of the text reveals “contradictory undertones” in her characterization (Ladele and Oyinlola 122). They contend that Isola’s play, set in late 19th-century Ibadan, stages a political and ideological conflict between a powerful female leader and a masculinist oligarchy, suggesting that *Efunsetan* “resists and rejects the cultural prescriptivism and master narratives” enforced by male authority (123). Similarly, Ogunleye’s historiographic analysis identifies *Efunsetan Aniwura* as a historical drama centered on “the eponymous heroine who was the second Iyalode... of Ibadan,” and she observes that many Yoruba historical plays emphasize war, authority, and ideological struggle (Ogunleye 15). Ogunleye also critiques “male-centric” historical readings that marginalize female agency, noting how other women like Madam Tinubu are celebrated, while *Efunsetan* is demonized unless the narrative lens is challenged (16).

Beyond *Efunsetan*’s individual representation, broader feminist scholarship in African literature and Yoruba cultural studies provides essential context for interpreting gender roles. Muraina and Ajimatanraeje argue that traditional Yorùbá society was essentially “gender-neutral,” meaning women were not seen as subordinate but complementary to men, often wielding substantial authority in commerce and politics (Muraina and Ajimatanraeje 59). They maintain that the disruption of this balance came with colonial intrusion, which imposed binary Western gender hierarchies onto African socio-political structures. This is strongly supported by Oyèwùmí’s seminal work, where she asserts that precolonial Yoruba social organization “did not privilege biology” as a basis for hierarchy, and that roles were more kinship-based than gender-based (Oyèwùmí 44). She explains that in such a system, women could attain influential titles such as *Iyalode* or *Iyalaje*, acting as key voices in governance and community leadership.

Samuel Johnson’s historical study further reinforces this view, showing that Yoruba women had long engaged in organized political activity, with collective strength and independent voice (Johnson 102). The implication is that *Efunsetan*, as *Iyalode*, operated within a culturally sanctioned space for female leadership. However, as Muraina et al. argue, modern and colonial readings tend to marginalize or misunderstand this traditional structure (Muraina and Ajimatanraeje 63).

Additionally, African feminist theorists caution against uncritical application of Western feminist models to African texts. Obioma Nnaemeka introduces the concept of “nego-feminism,” a negotiated, relational model of African womanhood that emphasizes community, pragmatism, and compromise rather than confrontation (Nnaemeka 378). Similarly, Molaria Ogundipe advocates for “Stiwanism” – Social Transformation Including Women – a culturally embedded feminist paradigm that pushes for equity and recognition of women’s rights within African realities, not outside them (Ogundipe 547). These models are crucial in evaluating a character like *Efunsetan*, whose authority may be better understood through a framework that blends gender equity with cultural specificity.

Taken together, these studies highlight an important gap in the literature: while critics such as Ladele and Oyinlola have begun feminist analyses of *Efunsetan Aniwura*, there remains substantial room for deeper exploration. Specifically, a reading grounded in African feminist theory has the potential to reinterpret *Efunsetan* not merely as a

cautionary tale of female excess, but as a symbolic figure navigating the structural limitations of patriarchal and colonial influence. Such a re-examination allows us to view Isola's portrayal as a reflection and critique of both Yoruba traditional norms and postcolonial gender constructions.

2.1 Gender Narrative

Gender narrative refers to the culturally and socially constructed stories, assumptions, and frameworks through which societies understand and assign roles, expectations, and identities to individuals based on their perceived sex or gender. These narratives are deeply embedded in historical, political, religious, and economic institutions, shaping how femininity and masculinity are defined, performed, and valued.

1. Construction of Gender Narratives

Gender narratives are not innate or biologically fixed; rather, they are constructed and perpetuated through language, media, education, religion, and law. As Judith Butler famously argues in *Gender Trouble*, gender is performative it is produced through repeated behaviours and societal scripts that enforce what it means to be “male” or “female” (Butler 25). In this sense, gender is not something one *is*, but something one *does*.

For example, traditional gender narratives often portray men as assertive, rational, and leaders, while women are depicted as emotional, nurturing, and submissive. These binaries not only limit individual identity but also reinforce patriarchal power structures by normalizing male dominance and female subordination.

2. Gender Narratives and Power

The dominant gender narrative is closely tied to power relations in society. As Michel Foucault explains, power operates through discourse – including the stories we tell about gender to shape knowledge and social practices (Foucault 94). In patriarchal societies, the prevailing gender narrative often privileges male authority, relegating women to supportive or invisible roles.

This is particularly evident in historical and literary texts where women's experiences are marginalized or interpreted through a masculine lens. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, show how female characters in literature were often confined to archetypes like the angel or the monster – both shaped by male authors' perceptions of femininity (Gilbert and Gubar 17).

3. Disrupting and Rethinking Gender Narratives

Feminist theory seeks to deconstruct these dominant gender narratives and highlight the lived experiences, resistance, and agency of women. Feminist scholars argue that rethinking the gender narrative involves exposing how it has been used to justify inequality and marginalization, and then reconstructing new, inclusive narratives that reflect a broader spectrum of gender identities and experiences.

African feminists, such as Molaria Ogundipe and Obioma Nnaemeka, caution against imposing Western gender narratives onto African contexts. Ogundipe's *Stiwanism* (Social Transformation Including Women) advocates for a contextualized approach that addresses African women's specific cultural and socio-political realities (Ogundipe 548). Similarly, Nnaemeka's *nego-feminism* emphasizes negotiation and collaboration rather than confrontation, arguing that African gender narratives must be understood within the framework of communal responsibilities and indigenous values (Nnaemeka 377).

In Yorùbá culture, for instance, gender was historically understood more fluidly, with women occupying powerful roles such as Iyalode or Iyalaje. As Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí points out in *The Invention of Women*, colonialism imposed rigid Western gender binaries that previously did not exist in many African societies (Oyèwùmí 32). Therefore,

rethinking the gender narrative in African literature means retrieving and valuing these indigenous systems of female power that colonial and patriarchal narratives have obscured.

4. Gender Narrative in **Efunsetan Aniwura**

In the context of Akinwunmi Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*, the gender narrative becomes a site of tension. The play challenges dominant narratives by presenting a female protagonist who exercises political and economic power in a male-dominated society. Yet, the portrayal of Efunsetan as cruel and tyrannical may reflect the discomfort patriarchal societies feel towards assertive women. As Elaine Showalter explains, women who transgress gender norms are often rendered "monstrous" or unnatural in literature (Showalter 21).

Ladele and Oyinlola argue that Efunsetan's vilification is a product of Yoruba masculinist narratives that struggle to accommodate powerful women (Ladele and Oyinlola 15). Therefore, reinterpreting her story through feminist theory helps deconstruct the gender narrative that casts female authority as dangerous and deviant.

Gender narrative is a powerful ideological tool that shapes societal understanding of gender roles, identities, and power. Rethinking this narrative particularly in African contexts requires a blend of feminist critique and cultural sensitivity. In literature, revisiting gender narratives allows scholars and readers to uncover suppressed voices, challenge patriarchal assumptions, and propose more inclusive representations of gendered experience.

2.2 Feminism

Feminism refers to a political, cultural, and economic movement that seeks to establish equal rights and legal protections for women. It involves a body of political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference and advocates for gender equality across all spheres of life. Feminism also represents an active movement that campaigns for women's rights, equity, and empowerment within the society (Hooks 22; Showalter 3).

In literary theory, feminism is understood as a critical approach that explores how texts reinforce or challenge the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. It critiques the marginalization of female voices and interrogates how literature has historically reflected patriarchal values, often casting women in stereotypical roles or excluding them altogether (Gilbert and Gubar 11; Showalter 5).

The emergence of feminism in literature and society was fueled by the need for women to voice their experiences, assert their roles, and challenge the systemic structures that silenced or diminished them. As bell hooks articulates, feminism is fundamentally about eradicating sexist oppression and advocating for the full humanity of women (Hooks 24).

One core tenet of feminism is the belief that women are just as capable as men in all aspects of life. It challenges the narrative that men are naturally superior and argues that women should be granted the same opportunities and recognition. Feminists argue that whatever a man can do, a woman should be equally empowered and supported to do and succeed in that same capacity (Beauvoir 267).

The emergence of *womanism*, introduced by Alice Walker, extended the feminist discourse to include the specific needs of African and Black women, emphasizing community, family, and cultural specificity. Womanism addresses the racial and cultural blind spots within mainstream (largely Western) feminism and advocates for the dignity and agency of African women without necessarily creating antagonism with their male counterparts (Walker xi; Nnaemeka 377).

2.3 Features of Feminism

1. **Celebration of the Female Identity:** Feminism celebrates the uniqueness and strength of women, both within the family and the wider society. It insists that women's contributions are equally significant to those of men (Ogundipe 548).
2. **Advocacy for Gender Equality:** Feminist theory argues that the female child and women, in general, are just as important as their male counterparts and should enjoy equal access to education, healthcare, and opportunities (Oyěwùmí 34).
3. **Recognition of Women in Leadership:** Feminism contends that women are capable of holding and exercising political power effectively. It calls for equal representation in leadership and decision-making spaces (Ladele and Oyinlola 18).
4. **Resistance to Cultural and Religious Stereotypes:** Feminists argue that women should not be culturally stereotyped or socially and religiously marginalized. The movement advocates for the dismantling of oppressive customs and traditions (Ogundipe-Leslie 553).
5. **Rejection of Patriarchal Dominance:** Feminism challenges traditional philosophical paradigms that centre male dominance and seeks new, inclusive ways of addressing issues affecting all of humanity. It calls for the replacement of patriarchal systems with frameworks that emphasize justice, equity, and mutual respect (Butler 25; Showalter 7).
6. **Fight against Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:** Feminism aims to combat gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, and assault. It also promotes women's rights to own property, access reproductive health, and make autonomous life decisions (Hooks 33).
7. **Promotion of Gender Equality, Not Supremacy:** Feminism does not advocate for female superiority or the belittling of men. Rather, it seeks to dismantle sexism in all its forms, working towards equity and mutual respect between genders (Walker xii).
8. **Respect for Individual Autonomy:** Feminists emphasize the right of individuals to make informed and autonomous decisions about their bodies, relationships, and sexualities, without being subjected to double standards or societal judgment (Beauvoir 471; Nnaemeka 382).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in feminist literary theory, with particular emphasis on African feminist thought, which provides a culturally specific lens for interpreting gender in *Efunsetan Aniwura*. African feminism began to be formally theorized in the late 20th century as a response to the limitations of Euro-American feminist models that did not account for the historical, colonial, and communal experiences of African women. Scholars such as Molaria Ogundipe and Obioma Nnaemeka were instrumental in formulating these models.

Ogundipe first proposed Stiwanism (*Social Transformation Including Women*) in the early 1990s. She argued that African feminism must reflect the unique experiences of African women balancing attention to class, race, and colonialism while working toward inclusive social transformation (Ogundipe 547). She wrote that African women are “not just victims but agents of change” within their socio-political contexts (547).

Nnaemeka introduced “Nego-feminism” in 2004, emphasizing negotiation, collaboration, and situational pragmatism. She wrote that “nego-feminism stands for ‘no ego’ feminism and for ‘negotiation’ feminism,” arguing that African women often resist oppression through community-based strategies rather than individual confrontation (Nnaemeka 377–378). These models reject rigid binaries and instead focus on relational approaches to power.

As Muraina and Ajimatanraeje explain, traditional Yorùbá society was not patriarchal in the Western sense. Instead, it was organized through complementarity, with women holding formal titles like *Iyalode*, controlling markets, and influencing political decisions. The imposition of colonial governance systems brought along with it “Western-style gender binaries and hierarchies” (Muraina and Ajimatanraeje 60), which undermined existing forms of female leadership.

In this light, African feminism reminds us to seek culturally rooted forms of power and agency that may not align with Western liberal ideals. Efunsetan’s leadership must be understood not as a deviation from male dominance but as an assertion of authority within a historically legitimized structure.

We also draw from liberal and radical feminist theories to analyze the mechanisms of patriarchy in the play. Liberal feminism, developed in the 19th and 20th centuries by thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, and others, advocates for gender equality through legal reforms, education, and autonomy. This theory allows us to highlight Efunsetan’s pursuit of economic independence and political voice, as she commands wealth, status, and leadership roles.

Radical feminism, emerging prominently in the 1960s and 1970s with theorists such as Shulamith Firestone and Andrea Dworkin, critiques patriarchy as a systemic and structural oppression. Applying this to *Efunsetan Aniwura*, we see how the male-dominated council and her adoptive son exploit her vulnerability, attempting to neutralize her power through social and psychological means.

Another relevant lens is the concept of the “monstrous feminine,” a term discussed by Barbara Creed (1993) and Elaine Showalter (1985). These scholars examine how powerful or non-conforming women in literature and media are often portrayed as unnatural, threatening, or even evil. Creed argues that “the monstrous-feminine arises from the male fear of the female reproductive body” (Creed 3). In *Efunsetan Aniwura*, this framework allows us to ask whether the portrayal of the protagonist as violent and unstable stems from an unconscious narrative impulse to punish women who defy traditional gender roles.

African feminist theorists, especially Ogundipe, push back against such portrayals. She asserts that what appears as “feminine aggression” is often “a response to years of colonial and patriarchal trauma” (Ogundipe 548). Efunsetan’s harshness can thus be interpreted not as monstrosity but as a survival strategy a resistance against both male betrayal and cultural erosion.

Lastly, the study draws on indigenous Yorùbá feminist perspectives, especially the symbolic authority of the *Iyalode* title. The *Iyalode*, translated as “mother of the market” or “female voice of the town,” served as a formal representative of women’s interests in political councils. As Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí argues, Yorùbá gender systems were “non-biological and non-essentialist,” based more on social roles than fixed categories (Oyèwùmí 34). Therefore, in reading Efunsetan’s authority, we should consider her within a tradition of institutional female leadership not an anomaly, but part of a broader pattern of women’s political participation in pre-colonial society.

Yet by the mid-19th century, militarism and British colonialism had begun altering gender structures, narrowing women’s roles and reinforcing male dominance. This paper, therefore, analyzes *Efunsetan Aniwura* at the intersection of these influences: the legacy of Yorùbá female agency and the encroaching structures of colonial patriarchy.

2.5 Textual Analysis

Isola's play begins by establishing Efunsetan's extraordinary power and wealth. She is portrayed as a successful tobacco and slave trader, reportedly with "*two thousand slaves and multiple farms*" in Ibadan. In the dramatization, Efunsetan occupies the highest female title – second *Iyalode* of Ibadan – making her an official leader of women. Her opening portrayal aligns with Yorùbá traditions of female authority: a learned market woman, militarily supportive of the Ibadan army, and influential among chiefs. Yet Isola immediately shows a tension: Efunsetan is single and childless, having lost her only child. When she pronounces draconian rules (forbidding pregnancies among her slaves) and metes out brutal punishments for defiance, she is simultaneously exercising power and violating expected feminine roles. From a feminist viewpoint, her harshness can be seen as a coping mechanism in a society that values women mainly as mothers and wives. The tragedy of her childlessness (an issue introduced in her back story) suggests that her anger and cruelty are shaped by personal loss under patriarchal expectations of motherhood.

Throughout the play, gender roles are deeply contested. Efunsetan's character is at odds with the submissive, domestic ideal of a Yorùbá woman. Instead, she commands armies and courtroom authority. Men in power, especially the warlord Aare Latoosa, recognize her influence. Yet these men view her as a threat: Latoosa eventually charges her with "disobedience" and orchestrates her downfall. Isola shows court scenes where chiefs deliberate Efunsetan's fate. The play implies that tribal chiefs, who normally mediate male affairs, are uneasy with a woman breaking male prerogatives. Feminist analysis interprets this as patriarchal backlash: Efunsetan "resists and rejects the cultural prescriptivism" of men like Latoosa. In one confrontation, Latoosa's men disdainfully remark on her power and envy her wealth, hinting that her downfall is motivated by sexism as much as politics. The power dynamics in the drama underscore the patriarchal structures Efunsetan confronts. Although the Yorùbá system officially allowed an *Iyalode*, in practice only women of exceptional means could attain such rank, and their authority was often limited to women's affairs. Isola's text shows Efunsetan crossing into the male domain. For instance, she financially and materially supports Ibadan's war efforts. This generous patronage should earn her respect; instead, it fuels male insecurities. Ladele and Oyinlola note that Latoosa's actions against her were "politically motivated allegations" possibly driven by "*sexism and jealousy*". The play dramatizes this by depicting Latoosa's reluctant manipulation of Efunsetan's adopted son to betray her. In essence, the male oligarchy conspires to eliminate the one woman whose authority rivals theirs. Through a feminist lens, this is a classic case of patriarchy destroying a strong woman to reassert male dominance.

Despite these pressures, Efunsetan consistently demonstrates female agency. She makes unilateral decisions about trade, slaves, and religion, often consulting no man. She adheres to her own moral code: even when faced with treachery, she remains proud and defiant, refusing to beg for mercy. For example, when her adopted son leads her to the execution pit, she demands to know "*for what crime*" she is to die, publicly challenging the chauvinistic judgment against her (*Efunsetan* Scene 10). Her refusal to be silent or submissive, even in death, marks her agency. Isola depicts her death not as a docile surrender but as a tragic climax of her resistance. In Isola's hand, then, Efunsetan's final speech and refusal to yield can be read as a form of feminist martyrdom.

The play also complicates notions of victimhood. Efunsetan is responsible for cruelty toward her slaves, some of whom are women in difficult situations. Feminist critique might note this does not make her less of a feminist figure; rather, it shows how female power can be co-opted into a violent system. Her harsh punishments (such as the execution of

pregnant slaves) appear as extreme measures that betray her own vulnerability (the slaves remind her of the child she lost). Several scholars emphasize how her “*abuse of power*” is a theme of the play. A feminist reading does not excuse cruelty, but it contextualizes it: a woman who could not claim motherhood turns that loss outward in violence. Importantly, Isola does not hide these flaws; instead, he portrays her complexity. Ladele and Oyinlola argue that by presenting Efunsetan’s cruelty alongside her brilliance, Isola “*adumbrates possibilities for more equitable gender relations*”. In other words, acknowledging her faults is part of a realistic portrayal of a woman who exceeded traditional boundaries – a pioneering leader rather than a saint.

Finally, the narrative arc itself invites reinterpretation. Early in the play, local bards sing the praises of Ibadan’s warriors and founding figures, and Efunsetan is grouped with past *Iyalodes* and heroes. This framing suggests she belongs to Ibadan’s collective legacy. Only later do characters refer to her in monstrous terms. The shift hints at the “*master narratives*” of a masculinist culture that paint assertive women negatively. Feminist criticism teaches us to question who writes history. Isola was himself a male author reflecting on Yorùbá patriarchy. It is significant that within the play, other voices (like those of her female peers or slaves) are largely silenced; only through a feminist reading can we imagine what these perspectives might reveal. Thus, the text can be read as both a story of a woman’s rise and a cautionary tale constructed by men. The feminist reinterpretation suggests we should not accept the latter uncritically. Instead, we recognize that *Efunsetan Aniwura* offers a critique of its own patriarchal backdrop by giving its heroine a narrative presence at all.

III. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach rooted in feminist literary criticism, with a specific focus on African feminist perspectives. The methodology is interpretive and analytical, aiming to explore how gender, power, and agency are represented in Akinwunmi Isola’s *Efunsetan Aniwura*, *Iyalode Ibadan*. By reading the text through feminist and culturally contextual frameworks, the study interrogates both overt and implicit gender ideologies encoded in the play’s characterization, narrative arc, and dialogic interactions. This methodology is most appropriate because the study is not concerned with quantifiable data, but rather with meaning, context, symbolism, and representation as shaped by gendered discourses in literature.

3.1 Theoretical Orientation

The research is guided by African feminist theory, which emphasizes the intersection of culture, gender, colonial legacies, and societal transformation. Thinkers such as Molaria Ogunidipe, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí provide the theoretical grounding. African feminism is particularly crucial to this study because it challenges the application of Eurocentric feminist models to African texts and histories, instead calling for a contextual approach that respects indigenous structures and gender relations. These scholars argue that precolonial African societies – including Yorùbá had complex and relatively fluid gender roles that were disrupted by colonial imposition of Western patriarchal norms. This framework is therefore suitable for analyzing how a character like Efunsetan, a female leader in a traditional setting, has been represented and remembered within postcolonial literature.

Additionally, insights from radical feminist criticism are employed to scrutinize patriarchal power structures within the narrative, while liberal feminism helps assess Efunsetan’s

personal agency, autonomy, and aspirations within the sociopolitical constraints of her environment.

3.2 Data Collection Method

The primary source for this study is Akinwunmi Isola's historical play *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Iyalode Ibadan. This text was selected due to its focus on a powerful female protagonist and its basis in Yoruba historical memory. The text was read closely, multiple times, in both English to identify themes, symbols, linguistic choices, and dramatic techniques related to gender and power.

Secondary data was drawn from:

1. Scholarly articles and books on *Efunsetan Aniwura*
 2. Feminist literary theory texts (especially those by African scholars)
 3. Historical texts on Yoruba political and gender structures
 4. Online and library archives containing critiques and performance reviews of the play
- Materials were gathered through academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Nigerian university repositories, ensuring that the analysis is grounded in established scholarship and ongoing feminist debates.

3.3 Analytical Method

The method of data analysis is textual analysis, with an emphasis on discourse analysis and close reading. Textual analysis was used to interpret character development, dialogue, structure, plot, and symbolic devices in the play. Particular attention was paid to the following:

1. How *Efunsetan* is portrayed in relation to male characters
2. Language used to describe her authority, motherhood, and leadership
3. The contrast between her public and private persona
4. Moments of confrontation between *Efunsetan* and patriarchal authority
5. Her final moments and the narrative significance of her death

Discourse analysis was used to uncover the underlying ideological and gendered assumptions embedded in the dialogue and stage directions. For example, attention was given to the ways in which patriarchal institutions such as the council of chiefs and traditional religion are represented, and how their interactions with *Efunsetan* reveal the gender dynamics of power and resistance.

Through this dual approach, the study interrogates both what is said in the play and what is implied or silenced, particularly regarding women's voices, perspectives, and roles in Yoruba society.

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study is limited to *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Iyalode Ibadan as a dramatic text. While historical records and oral traditions inform the background, this is not a historical reconstruction of *Efunsetan*'s life but a literary interpretation. The study focuses primarily on gendered representations and does not extensively analyze other possible themes such as economics, slavery, or religion except where they intersect with gender. Performance-based analysis (e.g., stage directions, audience reception) is acknowledged but not the central focus due to limited access to recorded stagings.

Another limitation is the availability of feminist readings specifically addressing the play. Although several scholars have discussed *Efunsetan Aniwura*, fewer have done so explicitly through African feminist lenses. Thus, the research relies heavily on broader feminist theory and Yoruba cultural analysis to frame its arguments.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All secondary sources are appropriately cited in accordance with MLA style guidelines. Care has been taken to represent cultural, historical, and gender-related contexts without distortion. In working with African feminist theories, the study avoids imposing Western categories of gender and instead seeks to understand gender within Yoruba epistemology, honouring the call by scholars like Oyèwùmí to avoid anachronistic projections.

IV. Conclusion

By applying feminist theory to *Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode Ibadan*, this study has illuminated the multidimensional nature of Akinwunmi Isola's protagonist, moving beyond conventional readings that merely portray her as a tyrannical or tragic figure. Instead, Efunsetan emerges as a complex embodiment of female agency, resilience, and defiance within a historically patriarchal Yoruba society. Though her character is not without flaws her cruelty and iron-fisted rule are evident these aspects should be interpreted within the context of the gendered social and political structures that limited and often vilified women who wielded power.

The play dramatizes not only Efunsetan's rise to political prominence but also the systemic effort to suppress her influence a reflection of how deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies mobilize against powerful women. Yet, Efunsetan's leadership and vision also reveal the cultural spaces that existed for women to assert authority in pre-colonial Yoruba society. Her character stands as a testament to the fact that African traditions were not uniformly oppressive, and that African women have long played central roles in governance, commerce, and spirituality. Through the lens of feminist theory, particularly African feminist frameworks such as *stiwanism* (Ogundipe) and *nego-feminism* (Nnaemeka), Efunsetan's story is reframed as a narrative of resistance, negotiation, and reclamation of space within a communal order.

This reinterpretation challenges the "masculinity of dominance" that has for decades shaped the historiography of African leadership and historical narratives. In aligning with Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's critique of the Western imposition of rigid gender binaries and the erasure of female agency in African societies, this study advocates a more grounded, indigenous understanding of gender roles. Efunsetan Aniwura becomes not merely a subject of historical curiosity but a symbol of the urgent need to revisit and revise our cultural memory. Her life story invites contemporary audiences and scholars alike to recognize the complexity of female leadership and to question the narratives that have historically marginalized women in both literature and society.

Recommendations

This study therefore recommend that :

1. **For Literary Scholars:** There is a need to expand critical engagement with historical African female figures in literature. Characters like Efunsetan should not be confined to the margins of villainy but recognized as central figures who complicate our understanding of gender, power, and history. Comparative studies between Efunsetan and other African female figures such as Queen Amina, Moremi, or Nana Yaa Asantewaa could further enrich feminist literary discourse.
2. **For Educators and Curriculum Developers:** African literature curricula at secondary and tertiary levels should deliberately include works like *Efunsetan Aniwura* and apply

feminist and decolonial lenses to their interpretation. This promotes not only literary appreciation but also gender sensitivity and historical awareness.

3. **For Theatre Practitioners:** Directors and producers are encouraged to stage performances of *Efunsetan Aniwura* with an emphasis on feminist interpretation, challenging audiences to re-evaluate their assumptions about gender roles in leadership. Costuming, casting, and dialogue delivery should reflect the nuanced power dynamics embedded in the text.
4. **For Historians and Gender Researchers:** The case of Efunsetan suggests the need for a more inclusive historiography that prioritizes women's roles in precolonial African governance. Oral traditions, indigenous records, and cultural artifacts should be revisited to recover these obscured narratives.
5. **For Policy Makers and Advocates:** Stories like Efunsetan's can inform contemporary advocacy for gender equity, especially in political and economic leadership. Her story can serve as a cultural reference point to legitimize and inspire the participation of women in modern governance.

This researcher hereby concludes that, *Efunsetan Aniwura, Iyalode Ibadan*, when examined through a feminist lens, offers more than a dramatized biography it provides a compelling commentary on the politics of gender, memory, and power in African contexts. It urges us to recognize the historical presence and potential of African women and to rethink dominant narratives that obscure their contributions. Through such critical engagement, both literature and society move closer to justice, balance, and true representation.

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