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## Femininity vs Masculinity: Re-defining (Gender) roles in Alobwed'Epie's *The Lady with A Beard*

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### ABSTRACT

In line with the latest “UNDP Gender Inequality Index” which ranks Cameroon 150th among a total of 189 classified world countries, Cameroon is determined a heavily patriarchal society. Many gender critics still hold a binary concept of gender to be male and female. Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One* in an attempt to counteract the binary gender view (which places a man at the centre of power based on his male sex organ), highlights that Freud’s phallogocentric concept of women’s penis envy is man’s vulnerability and weakness. Developing gender to be a social construction rather than a biological attribute is a powerful achievement given that roles will be awarded accordingly and not based on genetic traits. Gender grows beyond every limit if it’s not tied down to sex. Therefore, it should be redefined as a process of activity and not a static label. However, this paper aims to show that in spite of this position which Cameroon occupies, Cameroonian writers like Alobwed’Epie in his novel, *The Lady with A Beard*, redefines male and female stereotypes and roles. With a remarkable representation of his heroine in an evolving Cameroon, Emade surges her femininity through freedom of choice. Through self-consciousness, self-referentially and irreverence, Emade infringes a stagnant Bakossi cultural heritage, thereby, also challenging the ideology of definitive gender roles of masculinization and feminization. In re-defining both gender roles, this study adopts the Postmodern theory to debunk perspectives of a grand narrative, universality and stability in the novel to enhance gender configurations.

**KEYWORDS:** Femininity, masculinity, gender configurations, Postmodern theory, Bakossi-Cameroon

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**Introduction**

Gender which is supposed to be a congruent issue has suffered disputations since conception. Various cultures, traditions and societies have their own conception when looking at gender and politics. This is because of the values they believe in and the different ways which the female or male is socialized to be in the society. The issue of sex, class, age, race, identity and ability are also paramount with regards to this widespread ideology of being either male or female. These have brought forth many differences in this supposed congruent existence. Gender in itself is “Being” and is highly concerned with rationality.

From the passage of time, the male have assumed being more energetic and superior over the servile female. In the 1800s, the white man and woman were used to represent all sexes and race. This disregarded the fact that each race and sex had and still has distinctive and peculiar experiences, which tie closely with the feminist philosophy postulated by Kate Millet that, “the personal is political”. The men in Africa nations that were once colonised became domineering and felt the women were below them and therefore should be treated as the second class citizen of society. George Nyamndi in his article “Elechi Amadi’s Women: Voices of Reason” posits that, “The further back one goes in West African fiction as a whole... the more pronounced is society’s gender bias in favour of masculinity. This trend is in keeping with the return to the mainspring of traditional culture and ultimately to its patriarchal beginnings” (80). African men adopted a culture that placed a man above a woman and as such, a woman was assigned limited roles and even their ability to do certain things was questioned. This raises many critical views not only from women but equally from men who think women had more potentials than they were ascribed. Shortly after, we start having critical works by both men and women in Africa and the Diaspora addressing gender discrimination that was peculiar to the woman’s plight (Steady, 1981) where the woman is enlightened and empowered, striving for equality with fellow men through conscientised male and female writers.

African authors and critics have greatly written on gender, especially towards feminism like Filomina Steady, Ogundupe-Leslie, Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Juliana Makuchi, amongst others. They advocate a brand of female-centred gender with roots in African realities like poverty, malnutrition, polygamy, female suffrage and Africa in general. Looking at the contemporary Cameroonian English literary society, a growing body has emerged from the late 1990 to present with writers focusing on varied subjects. Amongst these is Alobwed’ Epie, a Bakossi author, who has been able to contribute to Anglophone Cameroon literature through his works centering on varied subjects. He also dwells on gender configurations in his presentation of a woman in his text. This indicates that a woman’s role is inextricably linked to traditional and patriarchal conceptions in spite of her abilities.

It is crucial to state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and especially in the contemporary Anglophone society, that the issue of gender and politics can still be regarded as degrading, despite the pernicious effects of patriarchy and male chauvinism. Although much has been done to improve on gender equilibrium, more still needs to be done. This study will attempt to investigate if the women will still be suppressed and considered weak and irrational if given the same or similar opportunities as the men. The study aims at showing how female gender has more often than not been the subservient one under the male. The woman in the modern context, has in the rise, been empowered and strives for configuration in equity. The study explores the relationship between literature and feminism with the aim of understanding how both genders contrast and complement each other in critical discourse, through postmodern lenses. This paper also seeks to explore other concepts which can be seen as primordial to the configurations involved in this work. However, patriarchy and matriarchy will be analysed in juxtaposition. The rebellious heroine and finally existentialism in the independent woman will also be discussed with respect to the dispositions involved in gender analysis. The Bakossi culture is also significantly incorporated relating to the context of Alobwed’ Epie’s novel, *The Lady with a Beard*.

**Matriarchy Versus Patriarchy**

The concepts of matriarchy and patriarchy are always handled with dichotomy. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* holds that “women are conditioned to serve men and that it is because the patriarchal ideology permeates the culture that women are assured of being confined to their caste like status” (35). This implies the cultural teachings which also permeates the patriarchal socialisation of women to respect and depend on their men’s authority, thus, leading to the social construction of the woman’s subservient abode in the society.

It is worth noting that such constructions are deconstructed because of the way women are currently presented with varied assumptions even different from the pre-colonial times. Gadjigo Samba et al in their 1993 book titled, Ousmane Sembene: Dialogue with Critics and Writers insist that “for Africa to develop, ‘our forefathers’ image of women must be buried once and for all” (100) and alongside the totalitarian patriarchal system. If this is not done, Africans will remain with the same old and corrupt ideologies copied from foreign cultures, hence, growth will become very difficult. The idea of women not handling certain responsibilities in a typical African setting because such responsibilities are ascribed to men limits the growth of the nation especially when the men are not available. Although some women are comfortable with the roles assigned to them through patriarchy, Emade, in Epie’s novel understudy finds it limiting when she tells her sister, Ahone, that “if you look around, there are no men to lead us. We have to assume the position.” This implies that women must rise from their slumber and take certain responsibilities in their society to push it forward.

Many theorists have used the term patriarchy in the African context to refer to the organisation of social life and institutional structures in which men have ultimate control over most aspects of women’s lives and actions (Gordon, 1997:7). However, the inferior role of women is currently reinforced through the valorisation and implementation of matriarchy. This, thus, debunks the malevolent patriarchal orders against equality between the genders.

Thus, Matriarchy involves a social system which gives power and authority to women against men or a society in which females (or mothers) have central roles and mostly overrule the men in a society. Although anthropologists hold that there are hardly societies that are unambiguously matriarchal, in reality women centred societies are apparently without exception – it also facilitates the egalitarian process. That matriarchy is a hopeless fantasy of female domination, of women being cruel to men, is a conditioning of the interest of the patriarchs. One is made to feel the disillusionment in patriarchy as natural. We are nevertheless likely to question this misconception and less likely to direct our energies in ending it. With instances from *The Lady with A Beard*, the heroine, Emade, will be discussed as an embodiment of matriarchal ideology.

To begin with, when Emade’s husband, a notable in the Atieg village dies, she is asked to move from her husband’s compound, given that it is the first house at the village entrance. It is equally where the men incarnate the Muankum which is a strictly masculine masquerade in the Bakossi land and women are not allowed to be involved in whatsoever way. The gender disparity of why Emade should stay at the entrance to the village is explained by Munge when she says:

I remember very well when Nye Emade’s husband died twelve years back. Ntube was just four months old. The chief and his councillors wanted to move her to the village because, in a village where men incarnated Muankum, a woman could not occupy the first compound the entrance into the village (17-18).

Emade’s power as a notable’s wife becomes threatened with the absence of her husband. The village entrance is a representation of power, authority, protection and influence which the villagers think a woman is not capable of handling. They think a woman should be in the middle for supposed protection or usurpation and not at the entrance. Emade “categorically” refuses to move and even when invited by the councillors, she mesmerises them. It is said that “this went on until the village succumbed to her and moved the grove...” of Muankum. “... so, Nye Emade is a boulder we can’t take for granted” (18) as explained by Lombe in a flashback. Her decision here is nonetheless respected, thereby challenging the grand narrative of the patriarchal order. Hence, she outweighs the men (councillors) and community with her decisiveness, which is crucial to participation in decision of the community’s welfare with herself inclusive. Emade’s stand is in support of the view of Ama Ata Aidoo in “*The African Woman Today*” when she highlights that:

In the meantime, if, like men around the world, African men harbor any phobias about women moving into leadership positions, then they had better get rid of them quickly. After all, men have monopolised leadership positions in Africa over the last five hundred years, and still overwhelmingly do.... It is high time African women moved unto center stage, with or without anyone’s encouragement. Because in our hands lie, perhaps, the last possible hope for ourselves, and for everyone else on the continent. (48)

Here, Aidoo is encouraging women to rise and ascertain their rights themselves because no one can do it better than them who are in such conditions. To Aidoo, men have been the ones ruling and they

will definitely set roles that benefit them perhaps to the detriment of those not them at the periphery position: if women fully come to the consciousness of their limitations and contest to see the table turned, they will not only do it for their benefit but for the benefit of their entire communities and world at large.

Emade's decisiveness, assertiveness and strong willed nature, coupled with such abilities projects her in a supreme locus. Espoused in a speech by her fellow woman in a meeting held to deliberate on Emade's resistance on the community, Esunge says that: "the men took a united front but failed...and as a craftswoman Emade will devise manoeuvring strategies. That is what broke the men's resolve..."(18). Emade, an intelligent and powerful woman, deconstructs the conventional position of a woman in the Bakossi society to the point that not even the men could destroy her strength or question her courage. Emade, who has often than not been seen as a threat by her community in Atieg and the others she visits, accredit her with outstanding matriarchal qualities. She is fearless, daring and capable of doing all that she puts effort to; coupled with her strategic approach in the speech. When the men try to take advantage of her after her husband's death, she stands her grounds and does not give them the opportunity. She further explains to the tapper that she has not been in good terms with her husband's family after his death, "Not because [she] offended them but because of [her] occiput" (116). The brothers of her husband see the death of their brother as an opportunity to have Emade satisfy their sexual desires. She is seen as helpless to them and needs no such man to support her. She explains that, "When my husband died, the men tried to use the position of my compound in the village as a way by which they will be putting down my occiput. I told them no, and my no stood" (26). One is tempted to question the real reason why Emade is asked to leave the village entrance when she goes further to say that "The people of my village thought that with the death of my husband, I shall become an elephant killed at the crossroads, but I refused to be one" (116). This is an indication that women are seen as tools in the eyes of men to satisfy most of their selfish desires and some fall prey to it because they are unable to resist and have been blinded by the patriarchal ordeals. Gerard-Marie Messina in "Patterns of Culture and Women's Struggle for Equality in Alobwed' Epie's *The Lady with a Beard*" (2014), highlights that:

The African woman seems to always have been relegated to the background, but seizing the opportunities of the societal changes of the world, she is slowly and radically imposing herself rather than remaining a mere spectator, aiming at turning things around. The essence of her struggle is to give herself a sense of self as worthy, effectual and contributive human being. (202)

From Emade's reaction, we see the changing role of an African woman who is not there to consume what the society and men presume for her, but she does what she considers the right thing to do. She does not allow culture or patriarchal encroachments to influence her actions.

Most women in Atieg are considered prostitutes whether they are married, unmarried or widowed. This is because they consider themselves helpless before their fellow men and this makes the men to take advantage of them. Unlike other women, Emade stands as an exceptional character who takes constructive decisions and stands by them. This makes Mboke to respect her courage and use her as an example to the other women who conspire against her. Mboke reiterates that:

Nye has been a widow in this village for the past twelve years. Can any woman here say that (in spite of her compound being isolated) she has contested her husband with her! Can any woman say (that Nye Emade is a widow) she has cupped her hands before her supplicating for help! If men-mongers, husband snatchers connive to do such an illustrious lady you follow them sheepishly! (19)

Mboke sees the other woman as foolish when they conspire to frustrate their fellow woman instead of joining her to fight against the patriarchal community and the limitations they have as women in that society. Mboke admires Emade's pride and dignity as a woman and wishes all the other women could act like her in order to destroy the typecast of women being called or seen as prostitutes.

Furthermore, it is often said that one's behaviour and ways determine the type of person and capacities possessed. Also, the adage that "to be a man (successful human) is not a day's job" could be related to Emade in a bid to codify her as a matriarch. Through her endeavours, encounters and experiences with both men and women of her community, she can be codified as a "matriarchal heroine" when she postulates that:

When male rain fell on me I didn't wear raincoats. Now it is female rain, shall I bother myself? As the file wears out the cutlass, so does the cutlass wears out the file. Atieg men and women take bouts of problems... in each case I win. If I had an iota of guilt, I would have been long dead. (26)

This emphasises the qualities she needs to make up for power, authority and why not the postmodern woman who repeals, rebuilds and even rules the community which has made several attempts to frustrate her (and as a widow), yet she survives. The on-going hypothesis stands out in that; Emade being the strong-willed woman that she is outweighs especially, the men and other women in her community. Thus, there is the need to eradicate female subversion, subjugation, totalitarianism, in as much as nobody is able and competent to impose a role on a particular sex/gender due to particular weaknesses or strengths because sex does not determine ability.

### **Resistance and Rebellion**

In traditional African and Cameroonian societies, differences concerning roles and status have been given to the different genders. By so doing, the woman (female) is not supposed to overlook her duties to do those socialised to be men's. She is positioned in the home; raising and nurturing children and not partaking in any activities meant for the man; whereas the man does the reverse. The Lady with a Beard captures a rebellious and resistant heroine, Emade, who feels she is capable of doing whatsoever she can, irrespective of gender-based occupational stereotypes.

According to The Random House Dictionary, Concise Edition (1983), the word rebellion can be defined as the resistance to or defiance (open disregard or bold resistance) of any authority or rule (732). Alobwed' Epie's heroine, Emade, is an epitome of the whole concept of rebellion. Almost everything she does in the novel is disregarded for a woman or female in the various communities of Atieg, Muabag and Mbuogmut. The elders and villagers constantly complain about her doings and she remains reproachful when approached. First of all, Emade approaches a scenario where her daughter Ntube, falls, breaking her most cherished eating bowls when she (Ntube) is sent to deliver food to Ewang-Ename. Villagers gather wondering, talking and castigating, but she defends her daughter as she explains thus:

All children break utensils. Any person who has a child, or sends one should expect that. So, let each and every one of us go and blow her wet-wood fire and not intrude in other people's affairs. For one thing, she who organizes a hunting expedition, and she who actually kills, are equally responsible for the death of the animal. If what happened was the work of wizards, then all of you who are magnifying it are witches. (16)

It is believed that breaking pots or utensils is a sign of ill-omen when Ntube falls on her way to deliver food to Ewang. Emade who does not believe in such superstitious views of Atieg villagers, thinks that breaking utensils is common among children and the case of her child should not be different. She approaches and takes Ntube back home where she realises that upon their arrival, her hut is filled with smoke. Here, Emade orders the few well-wishers who accompany her home to stop shouting for male intervention as she tries to put out the fire. When she jumps out of her hut coughing, she rebukes and boasts that "I shall defeat the wizards of this village. I Emade' Akwe, slaughterer-of-slaves, lion of the unbroken tradition, widow of the upstream-python. I shall defeat you – principalities of the night... Emade chest-pounded herself in defiance of what had happened" (12).

She boasts that she will deal with the situation herself. She also attributes the ongoing predicaments of the community to witchcraft, practised in her community. The act of hiding the stools so her sympathizers will not have a place to sit is an act of rebellion and an indication that their sympathy is not welcomed. Here, she rebels against her community and sympathisers who try yelling to bring in male intervention to help put out the fire in her hut, which is considered a manly duty. She stops them and pleads with them to return to their homes for her to rest, despite their invitation to her and her daughter for an evening meal. But "immediately the last woman left, Emade locked her door and roasted three plantains for Ntube and herself" (12), which raises the pride contained in the rebellious Emade. Eduke does not find this funny and this makes her to assemble the village women against her. By trying to assert herself, Emade's action is considered by the village women as haughtiness and arrogance and their wish is to see her fall when they say "a deep rooted mushroom, loses its crown" (18). By this, they mean that no matter how strong Emade claims to be, no matter how deep she thinks her roots are planted in the ground, she can still be

destroyed. Despite all of these notifications, Emade remains unshakeable and proves to be the lady with a beard, the manly woman.

Another rebellious episode can be seen when Emade loses her half-sister, Mechane, to death. While other women use crying to announce her death because that no male is present at the time she dies, Emade instead uses the drum to give the announcement. She does not only beat the drum, but she makes statements like, “women who guard village entrances must not only understand but must also know how to play the drum, not only the drum announcing death but also the drum announcing war” (35). She defines herself as powerful and a personality with authority and courage. An ordinary woman cannot guard the village entrance, therefore, she perceives herself as a human with extraordinary qualities, not lower than those of a man. This therefore buttresses the fact that what matters is one’s ability to do something and not roles ascribed according to gender stereotypes. To this effect, the men of the village grossly frown at her action because they find it challenging to their masculinity. Emade is seen as a threat to the men in her community because they feel she is challenging their position as men by going contrary to the gender roles set for women. Even some women at this point are not happy with Emade and as a way of punishing her, she is sanctioned from the women’s group and other activities that concern women. Although majority of the people are against her, she still attracts some like Mboke, who constantly reports to her about the plans which the other women muster to plot against her. Emade is not afraid to be referred to as an island in Atieg. She is more interested in being proactive void of any restriction from anybody given that things are done the right way and on time.

There is a turn of table when the men find entertainment and pleasure coming from the sound of the drum Emade plays at the funeral and no one is courageous enough to challenge or stop her. Even the women who used to castigate Emade for doing what is considered a man’s job find pleasure in the tune she plays and they conclude that what is fundamental is the entertainment of the people and not who entertains them when they declare that if hens crow instead of cocks, the day will still break. The women here have been transformed consciously or unconsciously to think out of their boxes and not to follow the conservative way of looking at things. Even the men are transformed as they find entertainment in the sound of the drum without questioning the player and find no fault seeing a woman doing it. The women think that if the men have become lazy and cannot handle certain responsibilities or they now see the women capable of handling it, they should give way and watch the women prove their capabilities given that what is essential is for the dawn of a new day to be announced and not who does the announcement. The women at this stage feel proud and empowered to see one of their kind carrying the crowd (in a role ascribed to be for the men) including the men.

Moreover, Emade takes upon herself the initiative to dig the grave of her half-sister, Mechane, who dies in Muabag village. To her, Mechane, a very hospitable woman, is not well treated by the villagers as she is being rejected and neglected by the same people she has been good to. This act makes Emade see no reason why the villagers of Muabag should be involved in her burial preparation and ceremony. The villagers only get involved because her sisters, Ahone and Wobe insist. Even though it is considered a man’s duty to dig graves in the Muabag community, Emade takes upon herself to do so because according to her what is important is for something to be done and not who does it. Her view is evident when she says “if a woman digs a grave does she remain in it? If a wake is not heavily attended does the corpse refuse to be buried? (43). Emade is interested in doing the assignment and not challenging the men as most critics will think. In the absence of the men, some responsibilities should not be left unattended to. This is the reason she thinks that there should be a flexibility of roles.

Despite all warnings and pleas, she continues to dig even when her sister denies strongly. The singing which comes from the boys at the wake-keep admit that “if they allowed her to go on, she would deprive them from the grave-digging entertainment. Furthermore, it would be a challenge to Muabag manhood” (45). Emade still feigns deafness, pouts and continues to dig in the middle of the courtyard when she has been told to stop by other men in the like of Messape. He in a compassionate tone says that: “We shall dig the grave for you. And of course not here, but behind the house near to where Neh Mechane’s husband was buried” (45). The role assigned to men in this society could also be seen from the question Ahone asks Emade: “What special merits does a woman have for digging a grave men are willing to dig? (47). The bone of contention here is not the willingness but the ability and availability to do it.

Despite all efforts at restricting her, she remains adamant and says that; “Mechane...will be buried where I have chosen” (47). This however, deconstructs the conception of women’s servility

and inability in doing certain duties in relation to traditional values. Emade independently succeeds to dig up to the level of the knee-cap. Despite her rebellion and resistance, she is asserted in the decision of grave's position, thus participation and control in the welfare of the society with respect to gender studies.

Although the protagonist of Epie's *The Lady with a Beard* does not conform to most of the happenings in her community regarding gender constrictions, she castigates the idea of a woman marrying out of her village. She explains that Mechane may not have died if her daughter, Wobe, had married from her tribe because she would have realized her mother's sickness and probably would have taken good care of her – the fact that she marries an Ibo man limits the time she spends with her mother. Emade wants her only daughter, Ntube, to marry Ewang-Ename, a man from their tribe, so that she will be able to spend her old age not far from her. She indirectly indicates to Ntube the disadvantages of marrying out of her village by taking her to Mechane's house to see the lonely life she lived with the absence of her daughter.

### **Existentialism and the Independent Woman**

With regards to existentialism, the plurality of power formation, historical encounter, beliefs and conceptions, shape our experiences across time and space. Hence, there is need to be precise on individual gendered experience and how it connects to and is different from the experience of others. The existentialist philosophy embodies the idea of existence as preceding essence. It also reverberates that no predetermined nature or a sense that controls neither what we are nor what is valuable to us, as we radically are free to act independently of determination by outside influences. This helps to create our own human nature and values through our choices.

This philosophy ties closely to our heroine in *The Lady with a Beard* who with individualistic tendencies, pushes through life's experiences and challenges. Emade intertwines her existence with essence that qualifies her as an independent woman. First of all, Emade is a widow whose husband passes into eternity, leaving her with a daughter of just four months old, Ntube, whom she struggles as much as needed to carter and nurture; characteristic of womanhood and duty embedded in feminist thought, although single-handedly. This however earns her, the independence in struggles to make ends meet in her family without reducing essence in this existence/experience.

In theorising the changing modalities of the Cameroonian woman's experience, we could recognise the different traditions and cultures that necessitate the building of contemporary Cameroon and Africa with cultural experiences worldwide. This is currently challenged usually because of emergent awareness and enlightenment. This could be evident in Emade's undertaking to measure up with the men and carry out manly tasks against cultural traditions (like Emade playing the drum to announce death (34). From this perspective, 'culture' and 'tradition' could be seen as unfinished projects that continually are being transformed by modern tendencies, thus debunking of the former as explained in Bibi Bakare-Yusuf's *Beyond Determinism: The Phenomenology of African Female Existence*.

Furthermore, an instance which captures the idea of the independent woman can be discussed from the point of view of independent Emade in the midst of other women. When women come to sympathise with her, the next morning after the incident of her daughter's fall and the fire which caught up in her hut, Emade reprimands them saying that:

Although I am grateful for the concern, I was shocked last evening to see the whole village turn out to witness and tell tall stories about a child's fall and breaking of utensils. I am equally shocked this morning that you have abandoned your chores and taken interest in an insignificant event. All children break utensils. Any person who has a child, or sends one should expect that. So let each and every one of us go and blow her wet-wood fire and not intrude in other people's affairs. (16)

Emade shows up her feisty and self-reliance amongst the women folk and community at large. She does invoke awareness into the minds of these women to follow her example and learn to attribute priority to deserving issues, rather than trivialities which do not benefit them in any way, although we understand that most African communities breed solidarity.

However, existentialist feminism which is derived from Simone de Beauvoir's school of thought postulates that the woman is not always powerless and does not always need to be dependent in a male-female relationship. This could be related to the instance when Emade stubs her ill-

omen foot on her way to take her daughter back to her house from the mission. With the negative repercussion involved in this foot-stubbing, a mishap or an impending doom could be implied. Because Emade is responsible woman and mother and does not want that anything should happen to either Ntube or herself due to negligence, so she decides to consult a foot-stubbing diviner and soothsayer. In so doing, she decides to consult only female ones. This singular act of hers heightens the notion of female independence and solidarity raised in *The Changing Conditions of Women in African Literature* as Romain Babagbeto states that: “women’s experience of her solidarity can also take the form of the defense of man’s honour” (15).

Drifting to the end of the text, Emade continues the search for a reliable diviner for over three years. She is asked by another lady diviner to consult a male diviner who could help her out. She at last is determined to go meet a very powerful prophetess at Nzom, Nyango Madiba, who is highly respected by men. On her way, she meets a palm wine taper who tells her to go home and make peace with her people and community (116). Later on, the prophetess confirms that her divination was already given by the taper. In relation to a person’s responsibilities and discipline which are crucial to the existentialist philosophy with regards to the independent woman, Emade’s endeavours and experiences are galvanised in this said process of individuation. This is coupled to the fact that despite women’s strengths and abilities, the wholeness of a society also demands the presence and activities of men. Thus, gender will be configured through the inescapable co-existence and merger of genders.

### **Conclusion**

The presentation of Alobwed’ Epie’s *The Lady with a Beard* helps to juxtapose the female heroine as he challenges female gender stereotypes in the face of patriarchal hierarchical orders. Although Emade is a complex character, she has not been entirely reduced as a stereotype. She is shaped by a particular social, political and historical condition from the author’s portrayals which can thus be an attempt to reduce the level of antagonism in the literary dialogue of gender. Florence Stratton complementarily posits in her book, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, that the joint effort to transcend the Manichean allegory of gender marks a new moment in African literature where one looks forward to the re (emergence) of more sexually egalitarian societies. The study has as conclusion that women are still victimized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but if they are given wider and equitable opportunities to freedom, cultural adjustments and nation building like the other gender, the society will not just be a better place but a magnanimous habitat.

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