

GENDER CRISIS: FEMINISM VERSUS WOMANISM IN TESS ONWUEME'S *TELL IT TO WOMEN*

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Abstract

Most critics see women and their relationship with their spouses and the entire society as a fair description of their status through the ages, while some feminist writers query this natural dichotomy between the man and the woman, others, especially within the African feminist group, are influenced by this mythological justification by the Bible. They seem to suggest too, that even the domestic division of labour practiced in African culture based on sex and gender was ordained by God and therefore to change this would be to antagonize the creator. This has been the major problem of African feminist activities. There has been a strong disagreement within this sphere, while some believe in the western approach toward solving the woman emancipation problem; others see the approach as not workable in the African region. Thus, this disagreement among our feminist scholars has brought about the multifaceted approach to the women question in Africa and indeed Nigeria. While in the Western world, there is the agreement among feminist scholars that women are subjugated, marginalised and need to be liberated, most of our African scholars now advocate the womanist approach to women liberation, they are still engaged in a battle of deciding whether our women are really deprived, they argue that the strength of a woman lies in her womanhood and therefore should not be tampered with. To them, African women are only attending to their naturally ordained responsibilities of womanhood and motherhood.

In view of the foregoing, this paper shall explore the feminist and womanist tendencies in the selected text and in effect, the traditionalism and modernism dichotomy reflected in the text.

Key Words: *gender, feminism, womanism, traditionalism, modernism*

Introduction

The culture of Africa is varied and manifold, consisting of a mixture of tribes that each have their own unique characteristics. It is a product of the diverse populations that today inhabit the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora. African culture is expressed in its arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music and languages. Africa is so full of culture, with it not only changing from one country to another, but within a single country, many cultures can be discovered. Even though African cultures are widely diverse, it also when closely studied, seen to have many similarities.

Intra-gender politics and class inequality has always been a prevailing and challenging issue in the sociopolitical African society. The nature of African society is indisputably that of a multiethnic setting where people have different beliefs and cultures. Africa is primarily a traditional society that places high premium on tradition and customs as well as parental authority; all of which rule the possibility of the power of the individual especially the female to make a choice. Although traditional societies in pre-colonial times had spheres of power and influence for women in closely-knit organizations that helped them maintain a voice, African women are often adversely affected by the grid of patriarchal power and dominance. It is not surprising therefore that in recent times; African literature has been enriched by the voices of women writers expressing their concerns. Generally their output has been feministic in portraying the female characters' various reactions to a subsuming life. It is seen from their various discourses that feminism is not found only among the city-

dwellers and educated women but also among the rural women. Male chauvinism seems to make no distinction as both category of women come under the masculine yoke. The only difference is that the educated women are able to free themselves from this masculine yoke quickly because of economic empowerment education bestows on them.

So with women education came exposure and awareness and the inevitable reaction. Thus, feminism as the reaction is an assertion of being, rights and status. Through colonialism the beacon of light of women's western education and exposure propelled the African women to the outer wider world and recognition of the commonality of women's subjugation world-wide. Thus, African women joined women in other nations in their quest for right, opportunity, relevance and recognition.

Gender

Gender segregation and unequal treatment given to the female gender in respect to the male gender has many causes. The term gender has been used to refer to social, cultural and psychological aspects of masculinity and femininity. Gender is also known as the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person. Gender is defined by Scott in Zinsser (1993:54) as

Constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, the knowledge that establishes meaning for bodily difference.....

This extract emphasizes the social differences between female and male and it is this difference that prevents women and men from participating equally in social, political, economic and cultural life. Stanley (quoted in Jackson & Scott, 2002:31) states that gender refers to culturally ascribed notions about "femininity" and "masculinity".

Gender is used as basic category, and once people decide what you are, they interpret everything you do in the light of that. People make gender attributions; they decide whether someone is male or female when they see them. These gender attributions form the foundation of understanding other components of gender such as gender role (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male).

Gender stereotypes also play a role in social inequality. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) gender is embedded so thoroughly in social institutions, community actions, social beliefs and people's desires, that it appears to society as completely natural. Thus, simply knowing that an individual is female implies that the person will have certain physical characteristics (soft voice, dainty, graceful actions, and certain psychological traits- nurturing, dependent, weak, emotional) and will engage in particular kinds of activities (child care, cooking, gardening).

Sex is related to gender. Some people even confuse sex and gender or sometimes they are used interchangeably. Sex refers to the physical, biological components of masculinity and femininity (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:153). Sex marks a social division; it serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominators and those who are dominated. Patriarchy is very important in the discussion of gender issues. Patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. In the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures hold authority over women and children. Some patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organization of a range of different cultures.

Pilcher and Whelehan (2004:93) say that patriarchy literally means “rule by the male head of a social unit” (a family or tribe) in her theory of patriarchy, Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. She identifies six structures of patriarchy: household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and culture. Male domination is very pervasive in African society. Women are regarded as inferior; the female is not regarded as a “whole” being, she is viewed as unfinished, physically mutilated and emotionally dependent. On the other hand, men are designed to be dominant. Hence, gender inequality is linked to the relationship of power between the sexes. Typical of KoKo in the play, *Tell It To Women*.

Koko: (Authoritatively.) Yemoja, if you are my wife, turn right back now and follow me! (58)

Koko: what has become of you women? You are certainly beginning to overreach yourselves or maybe you are drunk? But it is not for me to take you. That will be left for the Elders.... I am only here to take my wife. (59)

Ajie: Step aside and let me talk to these women in the only language they understand...force! (61)

Sherifat: ... a wife deserves to be treated like a daughter and not something that you possess, reject or crush whenever you will. Why should anyone lose her rights because she becomes a wife? (62)

The African woman was never culturally defined as a housewife. She was employed and contributed to the economic support of the family. Since economic prowess was the key to social and political accession

in the traditional African culture, irrespective of sex, men and women complemented each other's efforts in economic acquisition by dint of hard and sincere work.

Feminism

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public parlance much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*.

Feminist Theories

Feminism could be described as the organized movement which supports and promotes equality for men and women in political, economic and social issues. The feminists believe that women are oppressed simply because of their sex and they quickly cite the ideology of patriarchy as reason for their belief. Many descriptions are made about feminism and they all depend on a number of factors ranging from beliefs, history and culture. The theories advanced in feminism are as many as the feminists' scholars themselves. I will briefly go through some of them to help us identify the preoccupations of the feminists of the developed world.

Radical Feminism

Mary Daly is said to be the advocate of this group. It advocates a total change of the cultural structure, eliminating the domination by men completely. They seek to free both the men and the women from rigid gender roles that society has imposed upon them. The radical feminism is sub- divided into two; radical liberation feminism- which

emphasizes that there production role of the woman limits her capacity to contribute to the society. This group prefers that the woman should essentially be androgynous. To achieve this they recommend artificial means of reproduction so that less time is devoted to pregnancy giving way for worthwhile things. They believe that abortion should be allowed and also promote the use of contraceptives. The Radical-Cultural feminists see sex and penetration by the male as male domination. They believe women should encompass their femininity. They see a link between sex, female subordination, rape and other abuses. They also believe men control production through a technical means.

Liberal Feminism is another stand of which Betty Freidan is the major advocate. This group is of the view that both men and women are created equal by God therefore, they deserve equal rights. They believe women have the same capacity as their male counterparts and should be given the same opportunities in political and economic spheres. As a matter of fact, this feminist group is responsible for the legislations that support women welfare, reforms, education and health.

Socialist Feminism theory is championed by Alison Jaggar. They see a link between class structure and the oppression of women. They see that women production in the domestic sphere is not valued by the western society because women do not produce a tangible tradable commodity. This according to them gives the men the upper hand over the women. This group also totally condemns ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy.

There's also **Cultural Feminism** which has Carol Gilliganas the major advocate. This group believes in making the best of what is biologically endowed with women. To them, a woman is inherently more kind and gentle. They also believe that if women ruled the world would be a better place. While the men value independence, hierarchy

competition and dominion, the women uphold interdependence, cooperation, joy and trust.

Ecofeminism - Van Dana Shiva, the propagandist of this theory believes there is a link between the women and nature. Men look forward to conquering both women and the environment to have complete power. To them there is a deep connection that men cannot understand between the environment and women, hence terms like Mother Nature, Mother Earth.

It can be seen from the cursory look at these perspectives on feminism in the Western world that the arguments advanced by the western feminists group are all geared towards the issue of empowerment and the liberation of the women from oppression even though they use different approaches. They unanimously agree in the treatment of their objectives that really the western women need liberation from the men. It is only the approach that differ and this is because they all target different issues but all working for liberation of women.

An Overview of the African Feminist Theories

Most notable among the African feminism theories are **womanism** and **motherism**. The term womanism is said to have been coined by an African- American poet and novelist, Alice Walker who sees womanism as deeply rooted in black women's history, in racial and gender oppression. According to Rosemary Asen (30), the term was taken from the southern black folk expression of 'you acting womanish' as a mother admonishes the female children. To Alice, womanish means mature, responsible, courageous and confident behaviors of adult females as opposed to frivolous behavior of girlish females. Womanism is thus summed up to be growing up and being in charge. H.F. Chidammadiz as cited by Rosemary states; Womanism is not apprehensive of womanhood, wifehood or motherhood, the womanist appreciates the natural design of femininity as a given

factand aims to promote and preserve the pride of being a female human being (31).Womanism is the result of the black African-American women's agitation to emancipate themselves from the double enslavement of both their white male owners and their black male spouses. The black African -American women initiated this movement to address their peculiar state of subordination. Sometimes the approach of this group is at variance with the core western feminism. It also has a touch of Africanness. The theory of womanism is centered on the precincts that the biological attribute of the female necessitates her being apportioned some duties and roles in the society. It is however controversial in its acceptability. While selected womanist activists believe a woman is unjustly treated and subjugated because she is defenseless in a society which upholds arbitrary laws, others agree otherwise, that men and women are not created the same, that nature has biologically defined roles for each sex and one sex certainly is more gifted in some areas than another. Therefore to say a woman is dehumanized because she performs dutiful functions would be to refute the idea that men and women have different sex-anatomies.

It can be readily seen that the African womanist theorists have disagreed among themselves. While one group see discrimination of women, the other sees only the performance of legally, religiously and socially assigned roles of women.Womanist emphasizes women's commitment to their motherhood and the fact that marriage and children are the key to their womanhood. Traditional culture often plays a prominent role in oppressing women; traditional African culture in many ways still discourages equality between the sexes. African womanism therefore can be said to be an offshoot of the communality of traditional African societies that insists on the complementarity of the sexes, it views the African concept of power in a new and different light from the borrowed Western feminist vision

that has come to form the fundamental ideological stronghold of the women elite.

In essence, womanism as an ideology portrays the awareness of African women who recognize their interests and needs, and are diplomatically and gender-aware struggling to attain them while not losing sight of their vocation as mother and the welfare of their families (husband and children) and communities. This philosophy is fully encapsulated in the principles of Africana womanism.

Africana womanism

Africana womanism fundamental foundation is built on traditional values. Some of the traditional values forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness and order. Thus, Africana womanism centers on some key components or characteristics such as: Self-Naming, Self-Definition, Family-Centeredness, Wholeness, Role Flexibility, Adaptability, Authenticity, Black Female Sisterhood, Struggling with males against oppression, Male Compatibility, Recognition, Ambition, Nurturing, Strengthen, Respect, Respect for Elders, Mothering and Spirituality. Each of the characteristics listed above have a specific meanings that collectively establish a basis for Africana Womanism. The first principle Self-Naming discusses the importance of self-identifying as an African woman in society. Self-naming is the period of recognizing the need for an Africana movement with its own name. The second principle Self-Definition, begins to describe realities that African women face. Self-definition explores gender inequalities and stereotypes in the modern patriarchy—Self-naming and self-definition are the first two couple of characteristics of Africana womanism. The principle of family-centeredness focuses on the entire black family unit. The interest in the success of the black community as a whole maintains a

sense of wholeness. The principle of Wholeness describes the importance of self-sufficiency that an African woman must have in order to upkeep her household. Wholeness also stresses the required self-esteem that emanates from within an African woman who must be strong for not only herself, but for her family and community as a whole. Completeness, going hand in hand with Wholeness, is defined as the unbroken unity that an African woman is responsible for upholding inside the home and out. The Role Flexibility principle acknowledges and discusses the fact that the Black woman has never been a subjugate. African women are active in the workforce, take part in leadership opportunities presented, and do not need to be domestic. In history, Black women have experienced flexible gender roles meaning that Black women not only had experience working outside of home along with men but all within the home.

The third and last clustering of characteristics are strength, male compatibility, respect, recognition, respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality. This principle of Strength is often the one that is attacked by non-Africana oppressors because their goal is to force submission upon the powerful group that is Africana women. Therefore, the principle of male compatibility is based upon mutually beneficial relationships between a well-respected African woman and a supportive, like-minded, man. Respect and recognition go together; that is necessary for a healthy respect for Africana womanists and it helps them relate to others. Respect and recognition also contributes to the self-love and admiration, and respect for elders or older members in the Black community. To dissect both principles a bit further, Respect refers to reverence an African woman has for herself, absent of the colonized standards. Determining one's worth, while ignoring politics, is a crucial to becoming a confident African woman. The pillar of Recognition refers to the acknowledgement of humanity, capability, and power of Black women. Recognition plays

a large role in keeping communal peace and ensuring the Black women's effectiveness in the struggle for equality⁴

The principles that outline the caring nature of the Africana womanist are defined in Respect for Elders; this is an extension of the historical African tradition of ancestral reverence. Ancestral reverence is the habitual act of caring for elders, and eventual ancestors, within a community or society. Once the elders become ancestors, they will be responsible for providing wisdom and guidance which is highly valued. The Nurturer and Motherer are both described a call for all community members to play an active role in the rearing of the community and propaganda of the race through care. It is an African woman's duty to not only care and nourish her family, but to provide the care and nourishment for her race as a whole. By fostering and guiding fellow women, the Africana Movement is advanced. The initiative taken to further the public's appreciation and education about the Africana Movement exemplifies the principle of Ambition.

The final principle is Spirituality, which stresses the importance of the reverence for traditional African spiritual systems. These spiritual systems call for a collection of the principles including Ancestral Reverence, Oneness with oneself, and with nature as well. Africana womanist are also very spiritual and believe in a higher power and their mothering and nurturing is tradition.

Motherism: Motherism arises as an African alternative to the female model of motherhood. The traditional mother role of women is recognizable in many African female symbols. Hence, motherism as an African feminist theory sees the relationship of a woman in terms of reproduction and child-care. The relationship in the family and duties of mother in the home is the main focus of this theory. Most Africans see the child's up-bringing as the sole responsibility of the woman (no matter how highly or lowly positioned she could be). The man is not, or must not be charged with changing the babies' napkin or even

simply baby- sitting the child for a few minutes as the woman is already attending to some womanish chores. Here, too, involves two different schools of thought. The first believes that women should not be solely charged, with the responsibility of child care, that the men should equally be involved since they too are parents. Moreover they donot see any biological inhibitions in bringing up and caring for the child. The second group sees no part a man can play since women are biologically endowed with certain characteristic such as breast milk. They see the women having an edge over the men by virtue of carrying the child in their womb for nine months.

This alone, according to them brings and strengthens the ties between mother and child closeness. Acholonu who is the loudest voice of the Afro-centric feminism called motherism believes that women are not marginalized by men as claimed by western writers and some African feminists. According to her, western writers often fail to recognize that the African society is made up of diverse cultures within its diverse regions. What is practiced by one region could be the opposite in another. To buttress this she says: It is difficult if not impossible to make generalizations about the woman's place in Africa. This is because African ethnic groups or cultural groups are indeed nations unto themselves, each possessing its own traditions and customs which set it apart from the rest. Acholonu argues strongly that what affects development in African society is not gender related but economic power. She sums up that a rich and educated woman who is outspoken, hardworking and fearless can hardly be looked down upon by any member of the society. The question is what is the population of the group so described by Acholonu? Again how much influence do they exert on their societies and does the existence of this group change the fact of the marginalization of women?

Osonye Tess Onwueme

Osonye Tess Onwueme is an award winning Nigerian author of many plays. She is one of Africa foremost women writer engaging with the social problems of the continent and championing the cause of women. Since leaving Nigeria for the United States, she seems to have acquired a deeper orientation of the concept and theory of feminism, especially feminism as praxis. The totality of her plays since *A Hen too Soon* explains clearly the place of time, location and culture and the artistic growth that every good writer experiences. The early sign of the renounced writer's feminism is seen in her works *The Broken Calabash* and *The Reign of Wazobia*); while *Tell it to Women* and *Then She Said It* reflect the concept of African womanism.

Tell It To Women

Tess Onwueme in the play under analysis seems to be supportive of these cultural women who are seen and perceived as not "educated enough to understand true empowerment. That is not to say that Tess detests the western idea of feminism, rather she advocates a better architectural design to suit the cultural woman and not that total dependence on the western approach. This ideology is strongly felt in, *Go Tell It to Women*, The play is about two different classes of women; the modern and the traditional woman. The modern woman is represented in the play by Ruth and Daisy who have other females around them who equally pledge fellowship to their struggle. The traditional woman is represented by the women of Idu, championed by Adaku, Yemoja and Sherifat who in turn represent the opposing force of the rural woman.

In the play, some city women visit Idu, a rural community to incorporate the rural women into the Better Life Programme they have planned for them (rural women). Initially, the urban women faced a stiff opposition but are later accepted by the rural folks. To strengthen

their acceptance of the project between the Idu women and their city counterparts, the urban women asked the rural women to send some representatives to accompany them to the city for further logistics. Yemoja is chosen to follow the urban leaders who are Ruth and Daisy. In the city, Yemoja is joined by Sherifat; Daisy's mother-in-law. To their own dismay, both rural women are ill-treated. They realize that the progressive ideas which the urban women preached in the village with so much reverence, the issues of ideal matrimony, respect for culture and tradition and motherhood were all false. The two rural women discover that the urban women's obsession and preaching about feminism and emancipation are all without substance as they themselves do not have normal domestic lives. For example, Daisy is having a lesbian relationship with Ruth, which according to the rural woman's perception is an abuse to womanity at large. Again, Daisy also refuses to take proper care of her daughter, Bose (also seen as anti-motherism). She behaves unruly to Okei, who is her husband. The rural woman sees no honour in unruly behaviour as being a characteristic of emancipation. Consequently, the Better life programme becomes threatened as the rural women come to realize that their urban counterparts do not really have their interests at heart. They demand for a life of their own since their experiences with the urban folk in the city made them understand what true empowerment is. The result is that the rural women insist on negotiating their own development themselves, believing in themselves as capable beings who will bring change to their region.

Traditionalism and Modernism

Conflict between tradition and modernity is often times argue from the favorite premise of male supremacist ideology. Most people mistake emancipation programmes for rebellious activities. To them a woman who struggles to free herself from the claws of slavery is actually initiating a rebellion. They believe the woman intends to

sabotage the government of the male ruling class. It is possible to affirm that such impressions created on their minds is actually created by some so-called feminists like the characters of Ruth and Daisy in Tess Onwueme's *Go Tell It To Women*, who seek earnestly to replace the African values with European structures and tradition. This hurried endorsement of foreign values adapted by these two modernised women seriously conflicts with African tradition and culture. The play dramatizes the preparation for the launching of the Better Life for Rural Women programme initiated by a group of urban (elite) women who see themselves as 'torch-bearers of global sisterhood' (feminism). The primary aim is to: break boundaries of confinement and compartmentalization of our potentiality in the oppressive, despotic and tyrannical hegemony of patriarchy imposed on women these many years (27).

Represented conspicuously by Daisy, Director of Women Affairs in government and Ruth, an unmarried feminist scholar whose promotion to the rank of full professor of feminist studies is solely dependent on the success of the launching, the preparations begin to have cracks from the outset of Yemoja's sojourn with the elite women in the capital city. As the one meant to be the 'eye' of the rural women of Idu, Yemoja soon discovers that the plaque given to her in the village is only meant to lure her to the city to serve their (Daisy and Ruth) selfish purposes. This becomes clearer when Daisy maps out her boundaries of operation in the house. Both Daisy and Ruth treat Yemoja as a slave, making her realize the social hiatus between them.

Besides, the lesbian relationship between Daisy and Ruth, practised in the very home where Daisy's precocious daughter of ten years is growing up, also draws curious attention to the new modern concept of sisterhood and 'queendom' dominated only by 'sheroes' where tradition such as marriage is seen as 'an unforgivable insult' to

women. Thus, mentored by Ruth, Daisy's marriage to Okei begins to crumble as they both now despise family life, a borrowed doctrine to which the playwright's persona, Adaku, appropriately responds:

That is our new disease: Oyibo! And now the family head must be turned upside down and men must hand over power to women. Wives must lie on top of their husbands for women to show power and live a better life? I do not... I cannot understand the whole message! I even hear that in Oyibo land now, men marry men and women marry women... (38).

Interestingly, the certificated women meet their waterloo during the aborted launching where, to their chagrin, the rural women led by Adaku and Yemoja, and even joined by Daisy's precocious daughter, openly denounce this 'new modernism disease' in a grand celebrative dance of womanhood and motherhood, depicting the traditional core value of African woman.

In African tradition, members of the same sex are not even envisaged or imagined to have asexual relationship with each other. The two women's mode of operation in the feminist movement is actually called to question. The two characters in the fictional world of *Go Tell It to Women* are the main impediments to their development project. Another point which can be observed is the fact that feminist writers in Africa are yet to come to terms and agree that the woman is truly oppressed and therefore needs empowerment and liberation. This lack of belief is made manifest in the portrayal of the city women who display unacceptable attitudes towards their husbands to their rural counterpart's horror. The rural women also condemn the attitude of the urban women claiming that they too, without the city women and their foreign ideas, can be agents of change in their own regions. Here, Tess is addressing the conflict between traditionalism and modernism on

African soil. The African feminist activists and scholars can salvage the situation through are fined intra-cultural projection of the woman question, not necessarily assimilating the western idea of these concepts on African soil like Ajie in the play said:

...Our women have always had freedom...freedom to do anything within the norms and values of our world; I do to see anything in this inventing modern ways to run the family in a world they have already set adrift (381).

The 'norms and values' referred to in Ajie's speech have been the greatest undoing of the African woman as they are all embedded in the tradition. Thus, the story enlightens the audience about the dichotomy of traditionalism versus modernism and the ways in which different cultures interact. It ends by revealing the true meaning of culture; the real quality in a society that arises from a passion for what is excellent in arts, manners, and customs.

KOKO: (Turning to Ruth and Daisy) You women will be our ruin! You home wreckers! You ruin the women that you convert to your ways. You uproot them. Women you ruin everything of value to us! You travel to all these strange lands, import new diseases, infect our women and wreck our homes in the name of what? Transformation?...Your grandmothers were great mothers. They held the foundation of our world. But you women of today are nothing but the chaff of mothers! You fake motherhood! You mock motherhood...(63-64).

Overall, the play discusses the role of women within this Nigerian village and largely examines the conflict of whether it is better to advance with the rest of the world, or to hold on to the traditions that truly make a society independent and beautiful. On the other hand, *Tell It To Women*, is a statement on how the women of

the village are always being told to do or be something. Whether it is by Daisy and Ruth or by their husbands, the women never really find their own voice until the very end. Throughout much of the story, we see the women being treated like servants and as subhuman to Daisy and Ruth, the village men, and western civilization as a whole.

Conclusion

Feminism in Africa is contradicted by writers and activists who are yet to ascertain the reality of the standard for judging the disempowerment of the African woman. Until the question is unanimously answered the African feminism issue will remain multifocal. For example, in identifying with these different standards of judgment Mabel quoting Philomena C. steady says: The most important factors with regard to the woman traditional society is her role as mother and the centrality of this role as a whole ... the importance of motherhood and the evaluation of the child bearing capacity by African women is probably the most fundamental difference between the African women and the her western counterpart in their common struggle to end discrimination against women.

The idea that African feminism has not been vibrant is a problem that really has to be looked into. Nevertheless the need for a unifocal struggle for the emancipation of women cannot be overemphasized. The motherist however argues that the greatest power of the woman is her reproductive power and that any attempt to reduce from it would indeed amount to disempowerment. This is a position that is clearly against one of the theories of feminism in the developed world. The African feminists therefore should fashion out programmes and direct their theories toward lifting up the woman from her already pitiable position. The opposite can however be encouraged if they truly believe that theories of motherism and womanism can best achieve it.

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