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Feminism, African Woman, and Femininity: A Postcolonial Reflection

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Abstract
Feminism has gained the status of a buzzword with every lover of freedom willing to identify as feminist of some sort. However, uncritical subscription to feminism has the potential to limit and derail genuine liberation, especially where it is not grounded in its own cosmos – this is already evident in the traction between 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' discourse in developing societies. Deploying postcolonial theory, this paper argues that the struggle for women liberation is invaluable, yet the struggles of women of different parts of the world are different and unique even as affirmation of femininity is the case of the African woman. I demonstrate this claim through two critical postulations: that feminism in its varied form (in Africa, and indeed, developing world) is imperialism, and that, the struggle of the African woman is different from, encompasses within it, and by far surpasses that of her Western counterpart. It is further argued that variation in African women's struggle, aided by the logic of divide-and-rule, is retarding the quest to build a virile and formidable front for the rejuvenation of a renascent Africa.
Keywords: Language, Resistance, Feminism, Femininity, Renaissance, Africa, Postcolonialism.

1. Introduction

> In the holistic tradition of Africology, the one is seen and represented in the other; the male in the female, the man in the woman, the god in the goddess, the priest in the priestess, and none without the other. In this sense creation becomes both intelligibly comprehensible and meaningful: it enunciates how the one is given forth from the other and how both co-function to create and recreate the universe of meaning. Outside this it unintelligible to comprehend how creation took place (and continuing) with everything in their double except the guardian of creation itself - human. Western-doctored accounts would have us believe that woman – the supposed pair of man – is a product of afterthought, whereas all other animals created before human were created in pairs. Also, we understand from this cosmos arises the tradition where no one becomes king/queen without a queen/king, no god without a goddess; an evidence of a balance formation albeit its peculiarities.

I stumbled upon this anonymous but trendy quote on social media: "You Can't be annoyed at feminism being called feminism when the entire history of the human race is called mankind" (My favourite F word is Feminism). Though this is not difficult to comprehend, what is however troubling is its presupposition about history. The history of the world has been misconstrued for Europe's patriarchal history (Amadiume 1987; Diop 1989). The story of the world as we've come to know it is the story of Europe told to the world; no one else's account other than itself, of itself, told to others as though it is the world's story. Thus the 'history of human race' is not the history of humankind but Europe's patriarchal history (Sakue-C. 2017; Grovogui 2013). It is a commonplace that 'his-stories' are the handmaiden of conquerors. It is also on record Europe had once sought to, and indeed, conquered and colonised substantial part of the world, and still doing so albeit new forms. What is, however, uncommon is that everywhere and wherever it conquered it submerged and rewrites the realities of those societies to accommodate what it wants known and reflects the interest of imperial control and expansion.

However, like the excerpt above, this (mis)reading of history has led many oppressed people to allow the oppressors choose their battles for them and, even, put on the oppressor's amour in some cases. A foremost African writer, Aidoo Ata Aidoo, once averred:

> When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of our feminism (Aidoo 1998: 47 in Opara 2013: 62).

While it is true that the independence of Africa is contingent on the independence of the African woman, it is, indeed, not possible to achieve any of these, especially the independence of the African woman, while uncritically relying on Eurocentric ideas and pathways (Ake 2012; Martins 2012; Sankara 2014; Sakue-C. 2017). Feminism, as we shall see, is part of the larger logic of imperialism and a continuing process of dividing,

silencing and subjugating liberation voices of African women to European canons. The platitude of feminism, like democracy and good governance, is fast saturating the globe with nothing more or less to show for it. This is not unconnected to the fact that, far from being a liberation struggle for oppressed people, feminism is merely an expression of dissatisfaction of a section of Europe about the distribution of the spoils of Empire's expropriation; call it quest for equal distribution of the gains of imperialism, if you will.

This paper has two aims: first, is to highlight the insufficiencies of current wave of women's liberation struggle in developing countries oft-erroneously subsumed under feminism; and second, is to examines the imperative to undo the legacies of European imperialism (where the postcolonial acts out and fulfils colonial script of divide and rule, and when the postcolonial in resistance, uncritically hinges onto the diction of the colony as given). The paper is divided into four parts following this section. The first situates the paper within the framework of postcolonialism; the second examines several efforts by African women to upturn the tide of subjugation; the third examines the matriarchal foundation of Africa as a unifying basis for the rejuvenation of Africa; and, the paper concludes with a call for a praxeology of femininity.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts postcolonial theory as a "broad commentary on present models of politics, economy, and ethics" to interrogate the constraint of self-determination uncritical subscription to feminism poses for the postcolony (Grovogui 2013: 264). The major concepts of the theory include language, representation and resistance, hybridity, mimicry, race, nation and nationalism, exclusion, distortion, knowledge and power (Ashcroft *et al.* 1995; Grovogui 2013). The key assumption of the theory is that a significant portion of what we have come to know as history and the reality of the world is not what it *is*; rather it is the West's account of history following European conquest, suppression and colonisation, and this has had varying and continuing effects on postcolonial societies. Thus postcolonialism offers new ways of thinking about the techniques of power in its many clothed and subtle forms (Said 1978; Bhabha 1994; Mbembe 2001; Nabudere 2011; Grovogui 2013). In Ashcroft *et al.*'s contention:

> All postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination and independence has not solve this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies often buttresses by neo-colonial institutions, the development of internal division's base, on racial, linguistic or religious dominations, the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous people in settler/invader societies – all these testify to the fact that postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. This does not imply that postcolonial practices are seamless and homogenous but indicates the impossibility of dealing with any part of the colonial process without considering its antecedents and consequences (2006: 1-2).

Language is the basic medium in the creation of hierarchies and unequal structures of relationship through which "power is perpetuated and through which conceptions of truth and reality become established" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 106; cf. Grovogui 2013: 248). In order words, the relationship that exists between language and power is for the sake of control. Thus language is a fundamental site for the struggle of resistance in postcolonial discourse (Ashcroft et al. 1995). It espouses adequate grounding in language as a means for the postcolony to forge a new future since its past cannot be undone, by highlighting the resilience of culture and potency of agency in the face of oppression and determination of political outcome (Bhabha 1988; Ashcroft et al. 1998). It however frowns at continuing disarticulation of the postcolony owing to postcolonial elite's lactation.

Against this background, this study applies postcolonial theory to argue that:

1. Feminism, beginning with its aetiology, functions somewhat like ideology simultaneously misrepresenting reality, altering understanding and reordering social relations between the colonist and the postcolony (coloniser and colonised), since the conditions of its emergence speaks to the specifics of Western imperialist contradiction whereas its diction is presented as if its cause is universal;
2. Feminism, in as much as it is a struggle for liberation, is not the struggle for the liberation of all oppressed people; rather it is the struggle for the liberation of the Western woman from its oppressive system, and to share in the privileges of the system regardless of how it's obtained or the impact of such privilege on those outside the West;
3. The increasing chasm among progressive forces, and inability of the postcolony to chart meaningful pathways out of the labyrinth of imperialist orchestrated underdevelopment is not unconnected to its compliance with the imperial logic of divide and rule aptly embodied in feminist (mis)representation.

In view of the foregoing submissions, this study argues that genuine liberation in Africa cannot be achieved without unity of the sexes, and the struggle of the Black woman, predominantly subsumed under feminism, rightly assumes its position as the "other half" of the revolution which, however, cannot be actualised in the face of in-fighting between the Black man and Black woman whereas both are victims of imperialist scorn, emasculation and disorientation (Sankara 2014).

3. Resisting Oppression – the Illusion of Inclusion

Most (African) feminists are quick to trace as their intellectual 'foundation' the works of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1982), and Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1989) and The Voyage Out (1915), however a cursory glance at such trajectory reveals it is the history of exclusion. In A Room of One's Own Woolf advanced a theory which seeks to obliterate the binary of feminine/masculine and replace it with something bereft of biological essentialism and sexual connotation, and to that effect, she advocated for androgyny. However, Elaine Showalter, a staunch critic of Woolf's A Room of One's Own as lacking the substance of a feminist text even though Woolf abjured the label of a feminist (Opara 2013: 61), delineates the writings of women into three phases in her classic, A Literature of Their Own. The three phases are: the feminine phase 1840-1880; the feminist phase 1880-1920; and the female phase 1920- the present. She later developed a typology of feminist critics – "feminist critique" and "gynocritics" – which, however, becomes her greatest contribution to feminism. The former "dwells on women as a reader" while the latter "concerns itself with woman as writer" (Opara 2013: 59).

Nevertheless, in interrogating feminist wave and the resulting typology around the 'world', Showalter observes:

> English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytical, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however, have become gynocentric. All are struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical association with inferiority (1981: 186).

Chioma Opara would later add:

'African feminism' is not only "historic-cultural and stresses the body"; it is "essentially eclectic and stresses suppression" (2013: 61).

Showalter's work, *Feminist Criticism*, is one of the major canons of feminism, and one that is lauded and oft-quoted generously to give substance to its cause. However, there are complex arguments here which fall outside the purview of this paper. But imagine, if you will, writing about feminist struggle, oppression, subjugation, and liberation in an era when colonialism was a reality and decolonisation process was at its peak. Imagine living in a period when more than half of the world's population were just emerging from and struggling to get the chains of oppression, dictatorship, authoritarianism, and imperialism off their back, with actual events of women demanding for freedom from these Europe-imposed subjugations in Africa, Asia and South America. Now, imagine also, if, you would omit these actual accounts of women fighting for their survival from imperial cum (neo)colonial forces and emphasise 'struggles for stereotype and inferiority'?

I do not intend here to indict or question the rationale of Showalter's choice of 'comparison', I merely wish to remark upon the paradox of omitting such impressive oppressive institution as colonialism and its subjugation of women outside the West while advancing a corpus of literature whose thrust is subjection/liberation. The irony of writing about women's liberation while ignoring the actual suppression of women in various forms in Africa by white and pseudo-white regimes is, indeed, remarkable! Not only did it subsume a large proportion of American 'feminist' criticism, Black Americans, it conveniently leaves out the entire Black woman and her varied variations of 'feminism' in Africa. Also important, she stresses how the (recognisable) 'corpus' of feminist literature are all striving towards a vocabulary that eschews stereotypes and excuse them from inferiority of any sort. However, as we progress it shall become apparent how 'African feminism', even though it was swept to the margins of non-existence, has fared so far in the voyage to free itself from the choking lexis of patriarchy cum imperialism.

Nevertheless, Western feminism, in its varied form expresses aspects of a system which, when lumped together, poses a (common) front dissatisfied with unequal distribution – the equalitarian basis – of wealth, privileges, and opportunities expropriated by the West. Conversely, to undo the expropriated legacies of the West is the basis of women's struggle in the South. Thus, we can begin to understand why feminism in Africa is entertained with suspicion. The plights of the Black woman and the struggles resulting from it is rarely considered struggle qua struggle regardless of its avowed affinity.

3.1 Africanising the Resistance

The foregoing notwithstanding, African women have been relentless against suppression as Opara (2013) stresses, even though it has varied in interpretation and scope. Moreover, history is replete with resistance to foreign incursion and internal suppression by African women predating Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792): the feats of Warrior Queens such as Makeda of Sheba, Ethiopia (960 BC), Nefertiti of Egypt (1292 BC), Ana Mbande Nzinga of Ndongo and Matamba, Angola (1622), Amina of Zaria, Nigeria (1533-11610), Ranavanola of Madagascar (1828), Yaa Asantewaa of Ashanti, Ghana (1900), Pharaoh Hatshepsut of Egypt (XVIII dynasty) and Empress Candace of Ethiopia (332 BC) among others. However, contemporary times draw inspiration from the actions of the famous Aba Women Riot of 1929, the Mau Mau Revolt, and others across the continent were women played active role against colonial imposition of warrant chiefs and taxes. Also, the agitations of women such as Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and Hajiya

Gambo Sawaba to mention a few, were expressive of determination against colonial domination and subjection. In West Africa, literary writing of resistance found vivid expression in works such as Flora Nwakpa's Efuru (1966).

Subsequently, there have been several ingenuous efforts such as Femalism, Gynism, Motherism, Stiwanism, Womanism, and Nego-feminism, among others to shed the vestiges of imperial predilections. For instance, in *Negofeminism: Theorising, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way* (2005), Obioma Nnaemeka advocates a variant of feminism which she termed 'Nego-feminism'. In her contention the core of women's struggle is negotiation and compromise and this, she argues, is rooted in Africa's value system. For her, negotiation is not synonymous with pacifism as the woman is equipped to know "when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines. In other words, she knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts" (2005: 377-8 in Opara 2013: 65). On a similar note, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996: 123) espouses *Womanism* which seeks to blur the boundary between men and women as well as ethnic, class, religious, geographical, and educational differences amongst people in order to foster unity and towards building a cohesive nation. Womanism, however, emphasises woman, man, community, and the nation with less attention to its external dynamics (Opara 2013).

In fact, while Ogunyemi's womanism is nationalistic in outlook, it however shows limited concern for the ritualised and deterministic environment within which the nation functions and from where it takes on its anomic character which reduces its citizens to the status of beast of burden or wretched of the earth, to speak in Fanonian sense. That notwithstanding, Chidi Maduka (2009: 14) sees it as embracing the essential points raised by the advocates of women's struggle on the continent. Though the extent of such 'inclusion' is subject to contestation, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) however, drawing heavily from Marxism, expanded the scope of women's resistance by noting that the struggle:

> [T]herefore must include issues around woman's body, her person, her immediate family, her society, her nation, her continent and their location within the international economic order to determine African politics and impact on women. There is no way we can discuss the situation of the African woman today without considering what the IMF policies and the World Bank are doing to her status and her conditions (1994: 228).

Indeed, this captures the dynamic environment from which the African woman have to eke out a living albeit male domination. Her position reflects the 'six mountains' resting on African woman's back. This transcends Chairman Mao's view when he states: "Chinese man has carried on his back three mountains: of feudalism, capitalism and superstition; but Chinese women carried four mountains, the fourth one being man himself" (Khoshoo and Moolakattu 2009: 33), and captures the unique condition the African woman faces. The 'Six mountains' before the African woman are foreign intrusion; the heritage of tradition; the backwardness of the African woman; men; race; and the woman herself (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 28-35). To add, the seventh one being her exclusion from the divine character of God – this, it appears, was the beginning of her descent into subjugation. This exclusion and, indeed, the rendering of this sphere as the exclusive preserve of the male is the sociopolitical cum religious engineering of the West. We will return to this as we progress.

Nonetheless, to eschew imperialist label and capture the scope of issues she has to deal with, Ogundipe-Leslie advance the acronym STIWA. STIWA means Social transformation including Women in Africa. Stiwanism, that is the belief in and practice of STIWA, in recognising the mountainous burden of the African woman advocates for her inclusion in the transformational drive to build a vibrant society. The goal is to involve her in the heart of policy-making on all issues (in)directly touching on her existence. However, like Ogundipe-Leslie, Marie-Pauline Eboh took it steps further. She advance "gynism", a concept she argues is bereft of masculine affix or root. She, however, suggests that the "gynist", devoid of masculinity, is primarily feminine and refers to an African woman-activist rooted on the African continent and grounded in (the) gynist philosophy. The gynist philosophy, beginning with creation, explicates that:

> God has no favourites [female or male]. Male and female were made equal and at the same time by God. None of the two genders is an afterthought. As God created other animals in pairs male and female – so did *he* in the creation of humans (Eboh 1999: 20, emphasis added by me).

This represents a radical departure from dominant account of creation which presupposes the female as an afterthought of creation, popularised by Christian theology, and replicated in varied and subtle forms in others and espoused in dominant discourses. However, the 'gynist' philosophy appears problematic and capable of reinforcing patriarchy. Like Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's (2012) snail-sense feminism which espouses an unholy alliance of Africa's communal lifestyle (or communalism, if you like) and Europe's individualism to articulate an incongruous version of feminism; Eboh's gynism, in emphasising 'divine' masculinity, explicates an incongruous philosophy reinforcing patriarchy. It also reveals an internal inconsistency – demonstrating postcolonial reality to treat/take certain things, especially of Western origin, as given regardless of contrary evidence - and in so doing, contradicts the parity it advocates.

Though Marie-Pauline Eboh contends the aetiology of all women liberation movements is the countering of

the subjugation of women, she, however, leaves out the contention of the root of that subjugation, that is, the sole ascription of masculine character to the divine. The exclusion of the creative capacity to the male, at once reduces the female to a second-fiddle, and resonates in other spheres of life. Biologically, this idea/notion of 'activity' and 'passivity' corresponding to the male and the female respectively, is deeply rooted in Eurocentric ontology and inspired by Aristotelian misconception of woman as being 'inactive and inert' in the procreative process of copulation. Thus while the aetiology of women liberation is the countering of the subjugation of women, the aetiology of that subjugation is the exclusion of the feminine principle from the divine personage of God.

In consequence therefore, it is an oxymoron to argue that "God has no favourites" and submits that "so did *he* in the creation of humans"; for it reproduces/reinforces the same hierarchies it seeks to expunge. Thus we can begin to understand how the woman was left out of the 'Holy Trinity' of God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit where the Mother would have stood in; a triad consisting of two male without a female, the Mother, the feminine? Nonetheless, nature itself abounds as the corporeal manifestation of the feminine as seen in Chinyere Okafor's (2012) conception of "Omumu", nature as womb, the 'substance' within which creation is formed and the 'source' from which the creative agent is given forth. Conversely, Achille Mbembe (2001) presents 'Phallus' as the essentialism in patriarchy - the undeniable property which underscores Western claim to superiority in all things. Omumu, according to Okafor:

> Omumu is the principle of fecundity, begetting, and creativity. It is a life-giving essence that is also associated with the earth goddess concept. The ideology derives from gynaecology and connects with diverse ideas evoked by the presence, being, sexuality, performance and function of the female person and mother being. It permeates social psychology and inspires human action. It is the most important principle because of its function in continuity, nurturing, birth and death rites as well as connection with the supreme mother earth (quoted in Opara 2013: 68).

In stark contrast to the "fecundity, begetting, and creativity" of *Omumu*, Mbembe presents the *Phallus* as the embodiment of Eurocentricism, and the fulcrum from which all its domineering tendencies spring forth. Among other things, five important characteristics, according to Mbembe, stands out that emphasise the representation of the phallus as the basis of monotheistic maximalist tradition which is replicated in everything of European origin, including feminism. These are: Primacy – the quality of being law and necessity – the necessary cause of all things outside which nothing else exist.; Totalisation – the quality of condensation and shrinking of everything into the exclusive preserve of the phallus as (the) sovereign; Monopoly – the quality of uniqueness, laying claim to distinctive ('divine') attribute writing its way into divinity and setting it apart from the 'other' humanity; Omnipotence – the quality that "allows him to produce the world out of nothing". In other words, the phallus is the source of all things and outside which none else can become or could ever be; and Ultimate – the quality of being "the first and last principle of things". In other words, it is another way of saying, it is the truth, and that anything incongruent with it is, to the extent of its incongruity, false (Mbembe 2001: 214-5). This echoes Claude Ake's (2012) explication on the logos of imperialism.

4. Patriarchy, Feminism or Imperialism

One of the missing pages of world history is the role of the African woman in the cultivation and nurture of the greatest ancient civilisation the world has ever known (Diop 1989; Clarke 1994; Levi 2012). The reclamation of this noble past reveals a unique unity that calls for the reassertion of the harmony of the feminine and masculine principles and, this is the onerous task in the rejuvenation of Africa, and indeed the whole world in this period of unparallel inequality (Nabudere 2011), even as it has been consistently under attack by Western epistemology (Amediume 1987; Diop 1989; Clarke 1994).

In his painstakingly researched work, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (1963 [1989]), Cheikh Anta Diop demonstrates "the existence of profound cultural unity that is still alive 'beneath the deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity' of the African continent" (quoted in Nabudere 2011: 61). For him, the central guiding principle of Africa's rich civilisation in classical antiquity is the cultural unity expressed in matriarchy as opposed to patriarchy (Amadiume 1987; Appiah 1992; Nabudere 2011). Diop's work is a critique on western scholarship; especially the works of J. J. Bachofen, F. Engels, and F. Morgan, which presupposes the existence of a universal organic system – matriarchy – which, for them, had evolved into patriarchy. And, "[f]rom these assumptions these scholars had drawn the biased conclusion to the effect that matriarchy was a lower level of civilisation, which they dubbed as 'barbaric' societies from which patriarchy had evolved" (Nabudere 2011: 61).

Diop countered this teleological theory and its falsity that matriarchy 'evolved' into patriarchy. Through archaeological evidence, Diop identified two dominant ontologies in human social formations. He designated these as 'cradles': the 'Southern Zone' and the 'Northern Zone', corresponding to matriarchy and patriarchy, and a 'Zone of Confluence' in between them. He responded to Western scholarship:

> [B]y demonstrating instead that, far from the [claims of] universal transition from matriarchy to

> patriarchy, humanity has from the beginning been divided into two geographically distinct 'cradles', one of which was favourable to the flourishing of matriarchy and the other cultured towards patriarchy. He further argued that these two systems had encountered one another and even disputed with each other about the significance of these differences in human cultures. He noted that in certain places one was superimposed on the other, while in other they existed side by side (Nabudere 2011: 62).

This fact of matricentricity is littered everywhere on the continent and well represented in African folklore. For an impressive account on this see Kwame Anthony Appiah's important work, In My Father's House (1992). Thus understood, patriarchy is not only original to the West; it is its historical materialism, specifically, the suppression of white women that gave rise to feminism as a means of addressing its internal contradictions. In other words, feminism is the dialectics (materialism) of the West. Nevertheless, capitalism – the manifest form of imperialism - always has a way of (re)solving its problem, even if it means preying on others, in order to stay afloat, and this Karl Marx vividly captured in his analysis of the contradiction and dynamism of capitalism (Ake 2012; cf. Sakue-C. 2017). According to Marx, in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (TRPF), if conflict unrestrained is allowed to fester in the capitalist core, especially in the competition for profit, the collapse of the capitalist system becomes inevitable. Therefore, in order to forestall this, the system has to rely on new and foreign lands not yet mired in its ilk to absorb its contradictions. Europe's most potent instrument here is to prey on other societies outside Europe (Williams 1987; Clarke 1994; Ake 2012).

Accordingly, feminism emerged as an internal corrective measure on the lopsided distribution of expropriated wealth while at the same time maintaining the structures producing such wealth. Thus, like the TRPF, feminism is part of the internal logic of imperialism to maintain a healthy system within while suppressing growth outside. Therefore to adopt this philosophy uncritically outside European context is to exude an attitude that is ahistorical; to address material conditions that never was, and whose emasculated appearance are but reflections of the West's obscured past. However, feminism, eschewing its dialectical foundations, is presented as the ultimate pathway to social transformation, hence its imperialism (Ake 2012).

To make this clear, five simple arguments will suffice. First, Western episteme, feminism inclusive, follows a teleological account, a continuum of some sort. At the extremes of this continuum are binaries representing stagnation and progress: barbaric and civilised; primitive and advanced; evil and good, in one word, the South and the West (or North). The proclivity is to demonstrate that, in each case, the former progresses towards the latter. Second, there is the 'universalisation' of human condition solely as the oppression of female by male. The tendency is to (re)present patriarchy as a universal history and in so doing abstract the underdeveloped conditions of the South as well as the subjugation and commoditisation of women from the international economic vagaries (i.e., the continuing effects of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and unequal trade) occasioned by the West and of which it is the sole beneficiary. Third, there is a 'historic' (or teleological) progression from (matriarchy to) 'patriarchal era' to 'feminist era', with the former characteristic of the underdeveloped South while the latter corresponds to the developed North (or West), noting that the South has been made akin to a progression from matriarchy to patriarchy. The tendency is to present patriarchy as lower or base form of existence – call it 'undesirable', if you will – and the 'feminist era' as a higher form of existence – call it 'desirable', if you like. Fourth, in this transition from lower to higher forms of consciousness, feminism becomes the instrument of social transformation, i.e., from the 'undesirable' to 'desirable'. Fifth, in furthering this ahistoricity, feminism obscures the real problems of underdevelopment and diverts the attention of the South toward 'becoming' like the West – a major criticism of development theory. In other words, it shields the West from the South and directs the latter attention to 'fighting' between the sexes as though her conditions of underdevelopment are to be sort in such fuss. To be sure, feminism reinforces a major plank of imperialism, that is, divide and rule.

5. Conclusion: Towards a Praxis of African Womanhood

Concepts like feminism will do Africa no good, especially when the messenger and the receiver are disoriented towards their past, the aetiology of the concept, and their relationship to it. The point is, the struggle is one big struggle yet it manifests in different forms across different climes, and of course, geared towards different ends. Feminism is just one manifestation and like all other hegemonic concepts, it is laden with eurocentricities and as such, does not speak to the core of the issue to which 'non-Western feminists' has emerged in response to – that is - the subjugation of humanity by a section of it and its attendant effects. Emphasizing feminism subsumes the real struggle and placates Europe's problem as universal problem – itself an intrinsic part of Western episteme.

The Black woman's struggle is the affirmation and reclamation of femininity not the struggle for 'equal right' with men. The former embodies the latter; with the restoration of the former, the latter need not arise. The latter is the feminist struggle, patterned after Europe's own chauvinistic growth in decline, a struggle against the de-equalisation of women. The former is a struggle for the reassertion of femininity; its neglect being the basis of the degradation of woman in all spheres of life, and the hollowness in her dispossessed male counterpart.

Therefore, Sankara aptly asserts:

> Since the basis of their [women's] domination by men lies in the system through which society's political and economic life is organised. By changing the social order that oppresses women, the revolution creates conditions for their genuine emancipation… The revolution and women's liberation go together. We do not talk of women's liberation as an act of charity or out of surge of human compassion. It is a basic necessity for the revolution to triumph. Women hold up the other half of the sky (Sankara 2012: 49).

This understanding is critical in building synergy between sexes and launching a formidable assault on the oppressive state system rather than relying on piecemeal measures emanating from a 'divided house', aimed at changing the attitudes of men. Far from window-dressing, dismantling the system predisposing the man to ineptitude will leave fundamental transformation in his being as well as alter the predisposing factors of his lackluster attitude towards (Black) woman. Nonetheless, it is not out of place to emphasise at this juncture that, resulting from a 'battered psyche', the man has had issues with both himself and his female counterpart. Consequently, what is required is not fetishism of any kind; rather a critical synergy respecting both principles:

> What is important to us today is not the legacy of warrior queens, but a thorough analysis of the primary system of social organisation around an economically self-sufficient or self-supporting matricentric cultural unit and a gender free or flexile gender linguistic system, which is the legacy of African matriarchy. We need to understand its goddess-focused religion and cultures which helped women organise effectively to fight subordinating and controlling forces of patriarchy, thereby achieving a kind of system of checks and balances. This is basically what the so-called monotheistic and abstract religions of Islam and Christianity ruling Africa today subverted and continue to attack. The fundamental question to those proposing these religions [and the patricentric philosophies springing from them] as a possible means of achieving a pan-African unity or federation is this: are these religions able to accept and accommodate our goddess and matriarchy [tradition] - that is, African women's true primordial cultures and in their present politics of primordialism, manipulated by nationalists and fundamentalists? (Amadiume 1987: 108; cf. Diop 1966: xvi-xvii).

Matriarchy in Africa, Amediume argues, was not an absolute system. Neither is it some sort of cynical triumph of women over men, nor is it an expression of opposing relationship of binaries. Rather, it is a 'harmonious dualism', an association of unity of dual consciousness. The key word here is unity of purpose, and the coming together of the oppressed.

Nonetheless, as Chioma Opara rightly noted elsewhere, "the controversy should, therefore, be as constructive as it is regenerative" (2013: 73), in fact, it has to be as transactive as it is critical. Drawing on Opara's analogy of the Igbo's (proverb) house metaphor: "If the house falls do you still ask if the ceiling fell with it? Helen Chukwuma (2012: xiii) responded succinctly that the house will not fall because "the woman turn out to be the foundation on which the house rests". Concurring with Chukwuma, Opara (2013) submits that the perpetuity of a well-constructed house rests on the exceptionality of its foundation, and that an "integrated house constructed on a foundation, consisting of the myriad of African feminist thoughts, is expected to weather the raging storms and robustly play out amidst a panoply of concepts and dialectics" (2013: 73; cf. Maduka 2013). However, while it is true the house will not fall because the woman is the foundation; it is important to note that, indeed, the house might not stand if the woman and man who, holding each halves of the foundation, engage in fuzz owing to colonial disorientation.

Nevertheless, while through historical cum archaeological evidence we hold these submissions of harmonious duality to be true and self-evident, we cannot afford to lose sight of what might have gone wrong in African societies, especially, making it possible for 'easy' subjugation. In other words, we must be adept and self-reflexive not to pass on and submit to the temptation of culture-worship or fetishism to the extent that we cannot subject our cultural past to interrogation in the light of contradictory indigenous developments. To draw inspiration from the past does not necessarily mean to stay stuck there, especially when the need for reform beckons. Falola contends as follows:

> What we want to avoid is the totalitarianism of the past and its cultures; so we have to be weary of those who present us with totalising narratives of the past. Astute readings of the structures of privilege and power indicate that we must also be wary of extreme cultural nationalism which overlooks old caste systems and feudalism, the gendered violence, and ethno-racialism that under-girded many pre-colonial societies. Advertised discoveries of our happy past and unitary essentialist notions of Africaness must be rechecked and rewritten so that we can also talk about indigenous forms of domination and exploitation, hierarchies of class, hierarchies of ethnicities, and gender ideologies of the past (2012: 37-8).

Thus through careful rereading and understanding of the past we can begin to formulate critical questions to understand the present and safeguard the future. For instance, as Falola queried: "Is the gene of the old king who ruled for life inherited by the modern president who likewise wants to rule for life"? (2012: 38). In the same vein,

we can enquire: Does the Black male who gave in so easily to the domination of the Black woman acting on the basis of Western disorientation or merely articulating or expressing bottled-up aggression towards the Black woman? How do we address the wo/man that, hearkening on to 'culture' or 'tradition', makes life unbearable for a daughter-in-law for lack of issue or preference of a son over a daughter? The goal of such critical interrogation and reflection is the restoration of confidence in ourselves; to build a balanced, just and prosperous society, with respect and dignity for all.

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