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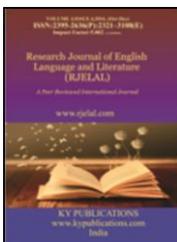
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TOWARDS THE DECOLONIZATION OF FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of criticisms against African female writers for dissociating themselves from feminism gains momentum with Omolara Ogundipe's popular observation over the female writers' hesitancy to ally with feminism. Questions and doubts arise, therefore, from a number of female critics, regarding the commitment of African female writers to the woman issue. However, the wealth of alternative theories and ideologies to feminism, emanating from the camp of African female critics, points, in part, to their desperate effort to avoid direct contact with feminism. Drawing attention to the points raised above with the purpose of striking an understanding between the African female writers and critics becomes the main focus of this paper. It is hoped that such a truce will bring about redirection of attention and energy to a common strategy for female manumission. Review of credible essays provides information for analyses which are discussed against the theoretical framework of feminism. Conclusively, it is affirmed that the reluctance to identify with feminism is not particular to the female writers. The female critics, themselves, are accomplices too. This lukewarm attitude towards feminism has its core in the peculiarities of African culture. It should, therefore, not distract attention from the vociferation against the cultural incarceration of women.

Key Words: Feminism, African, Female, writers, critics, woman

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INTRODUCTION

The African female writers' mending of the cracked wall of woman's worth, through an improved imaging of woman in their works, is commendable. These attempts are in accordance with the war against the discrimination of women championed by female activists under the aegis of feminism. However, the condemnation of these female writers for their supposed aversion to feminism is rife among the African female critics. Molara Ogundipe observes:

Committed to their art African female writers definitely are. But being committed to their womanhood is another matter and a problematic one... many of the African

female writers like to declare that they are not feminists as if it were a crime to be feminist. (*Re-Creating Ourselves* 63-64)

The culprits here are "unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Bâ" (*Recreating Ourselves* 64.) It has been noted that these writers whose "weltanschauung corresponds to basic ideas of feminism more or less distance themselves from it" (Susan Arndt 33). Akachi Ezeigbo does not agree less, she bemoans the African female writers' rejection of feminism irrespective of the fact that their "writings, life-styles and modes of comportment and behaviors strongly reveal their feminism" (*Gender Issues* 2). In her

book, *African Wo/Man Palava*, Chikwenye Ogunyemi notes that “Nwapa and Emecheta consistently deny a feminist ideological bent” (115). Ogunyemi blames this on “Male ridicule, aggression and backlash which have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term “feminist” a bad name” (64). Ogunyemi agrees that this attitude towards feminism accrues from “the fear of male reprisal if they (female writers) openly ally with feminists” (*Palava* 116).

But, the female critics fail to realize that this unfriendly attitude towards feminism is not specific to the female writers. The female critics, have at one time or the other, cleared different bush paths, for themselves, in order to avoid a tight embrace with feminism. This gives rise to varying terminologies and views about feminism that are meant to carve Western feminist ideologies to fit into the African mold.

The advent of feminism dates back to the Age of Enlightenment - a period of high intellectual activity - when political philosophers in Europe began to question why the rights of citizens should be based on private ownership of properties and social standing. The thinkers’ view that all men were born equal, and that the inequalities results from inadequate education system won popular opinion. Thus, there arose the 1775 American Revolution and the French Revolution of 1789 whereby men advocated equal rights with the bourgeoisie and property owners. However, the rights or political participation of women were not considered by the political philosophers. Women started, therefore, to agitate for their own rights.

Thus, the revolution and struggle for equal rights for men is the burning log in the hearth of the quest for the rights of women. Little wonder that Mary Wollstonecraft observes in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* that, “from the tyranny of man, the greater number of female follies proceed,” (De Leeuw 35) earning her the bad name, “Hyena in petticoats.” Subsequently, the quest for the emancipation of women receives support from more individuals. John Stuart Mill, is a strong and influential voice in the struggle for the rights of women. According to him, “No slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word as a

wife is” (qtd. in Moers 16). The agitation for female emancipation flourishes afterwards. Thus, feminism finds its footing “in the great feminist decade of the 1790s, when Mary Wollstonecraft blazed and died” (Moers xiii).

The translation into English in 1953 of Simone De Beauvoir’s book, *The Second Sex* (1949) and the publication of Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963), led to a new wave of protests, now more intense, causing a drastic change in the sociopolitical organization of America and other nations. Thus, female activists were so much in action again “and feminism which one might have supposed as dead as the polish question was again an issue” (Harrison, *On Account of Sex* x). Nan Albinsku notes that the new feminist writers demand radical change in social role of women so that women will share political power with men and become “economically independent and in control of their own sexual lives and reproductive systems” (830). This radical voice goes to the extent of seeing marriage and reproduction as vices that drive the oppression of women. Consequently, feminism is hit by strong criticism so that even women, who give their support to the feminist quest, criticize radical feminism.

In spite of the setback caused by radical feminism, the course for the liberation of women flourished. This is because, it is clear to a large extent that women, all over the world, are denied political, educational, social and economic rights as individuals because of the belief that they are inferior. However, the female activists are not able, especially at the early years of feminism, to have an all-encompassing definition of feminism. There have been varying definitions that it has, almost, become a child’s play. Nonetheless, most, if not all the definitions of feminism boil down to the fact that feminism is a course for the manumission of women. Therefore, feminism is “ideologically designed to liberate and emancipate women worldwide from oppression, ignorance, poverty and self-immolation” (Matlin, *The Psychology of Women* 5). The injustice meted out to women is widespread and agelong. This writer has observed, in another study, that the marginalization of women dates back to Biblical times. After feeding the multitude with

five loaves and two fishes, “only the men were considered human enough to be counted,”¹ as if women do not count. Still in the Bible is the case of Mary Magdalene who is caught in adultery. She is brought to Jesus to be stoned without even the mere mention of the man “with whom she committed the adultery who, most probably, initiated the act” (Onyeoziri V). But then, the writers and interpreters of the Bible are not to be, totally, blamed for their representation of women. It is in line with the Jewish tradition to relegate women to the background, “the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge” (1 Cor. 14: 34). And such a tradition is not only practiced by the Jew alone. Aristotle’s uninformed comment about women sets the tune for the chauvinist’s embarrassing conception and blatant misrepresentation of women. In his words, “The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness” (qtd. in Krepes 46). Thus, it is not out of place to say that most, if not all the traditional societies of the world have marginalized women at one time or the other. Most of the societies still discriminate against women. Hence, different branches and theories of feminism come to the fore. Alison Jaggar notes that:

Feminists are united by a belief that the unequal and inferior social status of women is unjust and needs to be changed. But they are deeply divided about what changes are required. The deepest divisions are not differences about strategy or the kinds of tactics that will best serve women’s interests, instead, they are differences about what are women’s interests, what constitutes women’s liberation. (5)

It is in this state of disagreement and confusion regarding what should constitute the basic tenets of feminism, that it is packaged down to Africa. African women are confused as regards how to receive feminism, their greatest problem being, perhaps, the African tradition which is blunt about the second place of women in the society and rather aggressively plain about the superiority of men.

Thus, to be on the safe side, African women embark on a mission to decolonize feminism.

African Female Critic and the Decolonization of Feminism

Female Activism in Africa is traceable to the early nineteenth century when women like Adelaide Casely-Hayford led protests and initiatives for women’s benefit. The Bantu Women’s League was established in 1918 by Charlotte Maxeke. In 1920, Nigerian women of Igbo descent organized a riot, The Aba Women Riot, in protest against heavy taxation. The Egyptian Feminist Union was founded in 1923 by Huda Sharaawi². Lilian Ngoyi, Margaret Ekpo and Fumilayo Anikulapo-Kuti are some of the unique African women who stood against subjugation, not only of women but of human race. However, with the radicalism in Western feminism, which terribly antagonizes the African culture, modern African women tend to deny affiliations with feminism. The undeniable need to expose injustice on the African woman as well as chart a course for her emancipation cannot be overlooked. Hence, there must be a way out. Chimalum Nwankwo quips, “Whenever transformation becomes necessary in human society, it must begin with some kind of alteration or fixing of an internal cartography...” (195). African female critics deemed it necessary to take a curve off the bend on the feminist highway. Hence, Chikwenye Ogunyemi proposes Womanism as an alternative to feminism. In her Womanist ideology, she calls for a healthy relationship between women and husbands, uncles, fathers and sons because she (the woman) is in one way and more connected to them since she “etymologically, is the wife of man, prefaced by her daughterhood, which prepares her for motherhood, a grand finale” (*Palaver* 106). The Womanist ideology, therefore, advocates unity among men and women, and does not support political struggle at women liberation. It advocates equality with men not against men. According to Ogunyemi, Womanism “wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men began to change from their sexist stand” (Arndt 40).

The belief that the plight of the African woman is worsened by colonialism is another

reason, besides the African tradition, which makes the African woman critic reluctant to fully embrace feminism. And feminism - a foreign theory - is supposed to right the wrongs of its *blood brother*? The few number of women in politics and rank of honor in other sectors of the African society has been blamed on colonialism. This is because the system of education as introduced through colonialism encouraged male education and limited women education to only domestic duties. Moreover, the political system as introduced by the colonialists, robbed the women groups of their power because most communal clashes that were handled by the women were then settled in courts or by the warrant chiefs who were, of course, men. Chioma Opara notes that, "Patriarchal in all its facets colonialism strove to tether female potentials and aspirations" ("Woman as Victim" 65). Carole Boyce Davies agrees that colonialism fostered the relegation of women to the background for it "imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance"³ thereby supporting the sex role distinction common in Africa.

It is believed that African women in the pre-colonial era had more freedom and performed more 'male roles' than their colonized counterparts. In *The Dynamics of African Feminism*, Susan Arndt notes that:

...due to their exalted position, the priestess of certain Igbo gods and goddesses enjoyed authority and respect which opened up opportunities for social influence as well. In the process of Christian conversion, they increasingly lost influence and power. The opportunity for women to achieve socially and politically recognized titles through hard work also fell victim to colonialism. (56)

Thus, there is this understanding that the plight of African woman is not as bad as that of her British counterpart who never exercised any power before the eighteenth century either as an individual or group. So, she decides to carve out for herself, a kind of feminism that suits her situation and culture. In her book, *Motherism: An Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, Catherine Acholonu warns against accepting the impression that African women are of

a 'common mould' with Western women. She notes that some African clans like the Kikuyu of Kenya practice matrilineal family system in which case, the women are the overlords in the family and the clan (5). The Ga clan of Ghana, Acholonu observes, is mostly made up of market women who are more skilled in buying and selling than their husbands. Their husbands depend on them for financial assistance. Also within some patrilineal societies in Africa, some matrilineal clans can be found like the Nnobi and Ohafia among the patrilineal Igbo. Thus, Acholonu posits that:

The presentation of the African woman as oppressed, suppressed by a male dominated culture in which she has no rights, no respect, and a status subordinate to that of the man, is a dangerous misrepresentation of the true state of affairs, a negation of the diversity and variety of issues surrounding her position and experience in the different cultures in which she finds herself. (3)

She further maintains that:

It is impracticable, almost suicidal, for the African women to adopt Western feminist ideologies without regard for the basic and fundamental historical, cultural and ideological differences in experiences, world view and *raison d'être* of both cultures... African feminism, unable to identify with the extremes of Western feminism must carve out its own identity, must search out its own poetics and find a name adequate to describe its own idiosyncrasies, its peculiar origin, its subject matter; its *raison d'être*, its *Weltanschauung*. (103-4)

Acholonu's alternative to feminism is, therefore, Motherism, which views motherhood as central and the pivot point of all existence. Motherism advocates for 'complementarity' as against equality. "The weapon of Motherism is love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation of the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation, as has been the case with radical feminism" (Acholonu III).

Also, the racist disposition of feminism makes African women reluctant to be associated with it.

Western feminism has been criticized for its indifference to the “sensitive issues involved in the African woman’s struggle for survival” (*Motherism* 103). Western feminism did not take into consideration inequalities in all the sectors of the human existence e.g. class inequality and the caste system as practiced in some parts of Africa. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and Obioma Nnaemeka come up, therefore, with different alternative ideologies to feminism. In her essay, “Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context,” Ogundipe tells us that ‘Stiwanism’ is from the acronym, STIWA - Social Transformation Including Women in Africa (“Stiwanism”550). She agrees that feminism in its original form is racist. And while condemning black men who discourage African women from reading white feminists, she asserts that:

African women must read white feminists, but with discrimination, and with a critical sensitivity to their relevance, to the complexity and differences in our history, sociology and experience as different peoples. In the final analysis though, African women, I think must theorize their own feminism. (*Recreating Ourselves* 208)

Stiwanism is, therefore, a feminist theory which condemns the African man’s subordination of the woman, and calls on the African women to “organize and confront the problems of gender in their own cultures despite the racism in the international movement” (*Recreating Ourselves* 208). It encourages African women to be dependent on themselves and not to keep their pay checks while expecting the man to cater for all their individual financial needs and those of the entire family. She, further, calls on women to wake up to their responsibilities, “particularly financial responsibility, if one is wholly committed to attaining equality with men” (*Recreating Ourselves* 210). Stiwanism recognizes that feminism is not ‘penis envy’ or ‘oppositional to men’. It is neither ‘dividing the genders’, nor agreeing to ‘Western women’s rhetoric’. It is not ‘antagonistic of African culture and heritage’ (*Recreating Ourselves* 221-222). Ogundipe concludes by imploring everyone to identify themselves with Stiwanism, “‘STIWA’ is about the inclusion of African women in the

contemporary social and political transformation of Africa. Be a “Stiwanist” (“Stiwanism”550).

Thus, Molaria Ogundipe, like most African female scholars, has not condemned feminism because of her conviction that there is the existence of discrimination against women in Africa. Yet, she has not completely embraced it because, besides its basic principles, it propagates ‘Western women’s rhetoric.’ She carves out what she feels is a befitting theory for African feminism – Stiwanism. Arndt notes that Ogundipe’s Stiwanism has much to do with “the vehement disapproval feminism encounters in Africa” (50). Ogundipe herself agrees that “White Euro-American feminisms are unfortunately, under siege by everyone” (qtd. in Arndt 50). African female writers are, therefore, not alone in their aversion to feminism.

Obioma Nnaemeka follows the footsteps of her anti-feminist sisters, she comes up with Negofeminism. In her foreword to Susan Arndt’s *The Dynamics of African Feminism*, Nnaemeka notes that:

Negofeminism stands for the “feminism of negotiation” as well as “no ego feminism” the former is embedded in Igbo culture, the latter critiques and cautions against the ego trip that engenders feminist arrogance, imperialism, and power struggles. (12)

Nnaemeka goes on to observe that feminists fail in their effort to define African feminism because they are looking at it from the context of Western feminism i.e. they take African feminism to be what Western feminism is not, instead of evaluating it on its own terms. Nnaemeka highlights the major areas where the African feminists have issues with Western feminism. The foremost is in the area of the radicalism that pervades Western feminism, then the Western feminists’ aversion to motherhood. Africa in its entity is a mother – the African woman, therefore, cannot support any ideology that demotes motherhood. Thus, Negofeminism is Nnaemeka’s alternative to the radicalism, racism and egoism that are at the core of White feminism. It calls for negotiation between men and women instead of antagonism. It recognizes the importance of motherhood to womanhood.

From the ongoing, it is clear that Acholonu, unlike the other theorists, is quite aggressive in her crusade against feminism. But they are all on the mission to carve out a movement for the liberation of the African woman which is different from White feminism. Due to the different theories on African feminism, scholars have not been able to give a definite definition of African feminism. At the risk of over simplification, African feminism is defined here as the movement that recognizes the existence of sex role distinction culminating in the discrimination against women in Africa. It seeks to correct such social order by advocating for social reforms that will see the emergence of a society where African men, women and children live in harmony and in regard and recognition of every individual's rights and worth.

African Female Writer and Feminism

From the above, it is obvious that African female critics eat with a long spoon when it comes to feminism, the same attitude for which the female writers have been criticized. Perhaps, the bone of contention here is the medium of expression. The female writer writes fiction and does not always have the opportunity to explain herself, exhaustively, with regard to her feminist stance. The feminist questions are thrown to her mostly in an interview or conversation. And this form forces her to give an off-the-cuff answer, and realizing herself, she gives a different answer in another interview. This is why Flora Nwapa will say in one instance, "I don't think I'm a radical feminist. I don't even accept that I'm a feminist. I accept that I'm an ordinary woman who is writing about what she knows!" Yet in another instance she accepts, 'I'm a feminist with a big 'f'. Shortly after that, she renounces it again, "I don't use that word (*feminist*) because I hate the word" (qtd. in Arndt 22) Nwapa explains further:

Years back, when I go on my tours to America and Europe I'm usually asked, 'Are you a feminist? I deny that I am a feminist. Please I am not a feminist, oh please.' But they say, 'all your works, everything is about feminism.' And I say, 'No, I am not a feminist. Buchi Emecheta is another one that said: 'I am a feminist with a small 'f' (whatever Buchi means)... (qtd.in Arndt 22)

Ama Ata Aidoo would say, "I shall not protest if you call me a feminist because I write about women... no writer, female or male, is a feminist just by writing about women" (qtd. in Arndt 79). Still in another occasion, she invites everyone to become a feminist like her, "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 ---" (qtd. in Arndt 21)

On her part, Ifeoma Okoye shows her aversion to being referred to as a feminist in denying the existence of major discrimination against women. In an interview she grants Akachi Ezeigbo, Ifeoma Okoye reiterates her anti-feminist stance:

... I believe men and women are complementary. There can be no talk about equality, for they are different. They simply complement each other like two sides of a coin. True, there may be some subtle discrimination against women ... But such imbalances cannot be corrected by women wanting to "become men" or "burn their bras." (*Gender Issues* 111)

Buchi Emecheta once said she is a feminist with a small 'f'.

I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I Chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small 'f'. (qtd in *Feminism* 553)

But, in another occasion, she vehemently refuses to be called a feminist, "I will not be called a feminist here, because it is European - It is as simple as that, I just resent that" (Arndt 66). But is it really as simple as that? Emecheta says in her essay "Feminism with a Small 'f': "...those who wish to control and influence the future by giving birth and nurturing the young should not be looked down upon. It is not a degrading job. If I had my way, it would be the highest paid job in the world" (556). Thus, her repugnance of feminism has something to do with, among other things, her soft spot for mothering. The

explanation she gives here highlights her major concerns:

I did not start as a feminist. I do not think I am one now. Most of my readers would take this to be the statement of a coward. But it is not. I thought before that I would like to be one but after my recent visit to the United States, when I talked to the real "feminists" with a capital "F," I feel that we women of African background still have a very very long way to go before we can really rub shoulders with such women...So, my sisters in America, I am not shunning your advanced help, in fact I still think women of Africa need your contribution, and at the same time we need our men. (qtd. in Ogunyemi 222)

Nwapa's acknowledgement of her intentions in *Efuru* and *Idu* makes for a better understanding of her disenchantment with feminism:

I was inspired by the women around me when I was growing up...They were solid and superior women who held their own in society. They were not only wives and mothers, but successful traders who took care of their children and their husbands as well. They were very much aware of their leadership roles in their families as well as in the churches and local governments...In these two novels, therefore, I tried to debunk the notion that the woman is dependent on her husband. The woman not only holds her own, she is astonishingly independent of her husband. ("Women and Creative Writing in Africa" 528)

Scholars have reacted differently to this attitude of the female writers and critics towards feminism. Regarding the female writers, Chikwenye Ogunyemi explains:

Their (African female writers) denial and affirmation of feminism stems from many reasons and a combination of motives: The fact that they are not consciously committed to a restricted female agenda, the fear of male reprisal if they openly ally with feminists, the need for independent thinking away from Western Feminism; the necessity for evolving a black female literary theory, and the desire to tackle pressing issues about the hazards of Nigerian life including gender. (116)

Regarding the female critics, Ogunyemi goes on to opine that their dissociation, in part, from feminism is a healthy development. For her, "the African woman's hesitation in accepting feminism wholly while trying to tackle gender issues is a sound strategy" (*Palaver* 122). But Olabisi Aina disagrees. In her essay, "African Women at the Grassroots," she regrets that "a full-fledged radical feminism has failed to emerge on the African continent till now despite the long history of female resistance to destructive socio-political systems" (72). She, therefore, calls for radical feminism in Africa, for according to her, that is the only way through which the oppression of women, which is now glaring, can be distinguished from other forms of oppression in Africa. In "Feminism, New Realism and Womanhood in the African Novel," Rose Acholonu notes that, "The path of feminism in the African literary scene has been a tortuous one studded and lined with thorns of opposition, cynicism, and sometimes outright condemnation" (56). Obioma Nnaemeka laments that:

The feminist spirit that pervades the African continent is so complex and diffused that it is intractable... It is the dynamism of the theater of action with its shifting patterns that makes the feminist spirit/engagement effervescent and exciting but also intractable and difficult to name. Attempts to mold "African feminism" into an easily digestible ball of pounded yam not only raise definitional questions but create difficulties for drawing organizational parameters and unpacking complex modes of engagement. (*Sisterhood* 5)

The male critics are not silent about this either. Charles Nnolim, for example, condemns this effort by African feminists to carve a niche for African feminism. His criticism is not centered on the effort at redefining feminism to fit into the African context, but in the disagreement in the house – each female critic trying to create her own term and defining African feminism in her own way. In his essay: "A House Divided: Feminism in African Literature," Nnolim in strong terms criticizes this trend:

The contours of the feminist literary landscape in Africa, in general, and Nigeria in particular, present a panorama of

undulating topography- It is a house divided against itself and at present looks discomfotingly like the leaning tower of Pisa. With a house so divided, there is little wonder the brood is scattered leaving the activists clucking like hens after a swoop from a menacing kite. (250)

M. J. C Echeruo expresses regret that African female critics are yet to formulate theories to enable them take decisions “between a radical dismantling of patriarchy and a zealous movement or reconciliation and compromises” (qtd. in Maduka 229). In “Feminism and The Nigerian Female Critic,” Chidi Maduka notes: “It seems to me more logical to argue that the women are asserting their identity as Africans by rejecting the unfavourable aspects of the European concepts of feminism” (231).

Conclusion

It goes without saying that African female critics dodge a direct brush with feminism, the same attitude for which the female writers have been criticized. The reason is not farfetched. The African culture is founded on some deep rooted beliefs aided by larger than life tales and myths explaining traditional laws and mapping out punishment for offenders. Over time, those beliefs are imbedded in the hearts and minds of Africans so much so that years of civilization and enlightenment do not completely erode them. Man’s superiority and control over woman, his meek and mute companion, is one of those beliefs that is beyond questioning, until recently. The African female writers and critics are, understandably, culture bound, at least, to some extent. This is reflected in their unconscious and or calculated attempts at distancing themselves from feminism.

Perhaps, the bone of contention here is the medium of expression. The female writer writes fiction and does not always have the opportunity to explain herself, exhaustively, with regard to her feminist dispositions. Questions regarding her feminist stance are thrown to her, mostly, in an interview or conversation. And this form forces her to give an off-the-cuff answer, and realizing herself, she gives a different answer in another interview. But, by virtue of her form of writing, the female critic can explain herself in long essays. She can

write, ‘Yes, I am a feminist, but (before you condemn me, hear me out) I’m not a radical feminist, I’m a Womanist – “I want meaningful union between black women and black men...”; ‘I’m a Stiwanist – I want women to be included in the “social transformation of Africa...”; ‘I’m a Negofeminist – I want to rid feminism of its egocentric disposition; ‘I’m a Motherist – I respect African tradition and advocate a mutual existence of the sexes.

Be that as it may, whether the female critic’s reluctance to completely embrace feminism be as a result of her antagonism for colonialism, the effect of her orientation as an African, the racist disposition of White feminism, or her fear of being branded the ‘bad egg’ in a culture that arrogantly upholds the superiority of man over woman, the point is that she has at one time or the other, distanced herself from feminism. Therefore, the condemnation of the female writer for doing the same thing is hypocritical. It is the case of, ‘We are both cutting grasses, so no one should call the other a grass cutter’ (Igbo adage). The energy should be directed instead towards clearing the menacing bush path to female manumission.

However, the aim here is neither to rescue the female writers nor to condemn the female critics, but to acknowledge that feminism is alien to our culture and instead of fighting one another for not accepting it whole heartedly, critics and writers should focus on using its basic ideologies to liberate the African woman who is still under the “encircling shackles imposed by men and tradition” (Charles Nnolim. “A House Divided” 260). And in the words of Akachi Ezeigbo, “the only way women can make progress in this country and carry their less fortunate “sisters” along with them is by encouraging and fostering genuine and positive “bonding” and by supporting one another” (60). The feminist debate should not be like the women’s church or village meetings where unnecessary arguments, accusations and counter accusations take the place of crucial matters.

NOTES

¹See Perpetua N. Onyeoziri, “The Image of Women in Wole Soyinka’s The Swamp Dwellers, and

Death and The king's Horseman." M. A. thesis U of Port Harcourt, 2005, p. v.

²See A Brief History of African Feminism. MSAFROPOLITAN. July 2013. <http://www.msafropolitan.com/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-african-feminism.html>

³Carole Boyce Davies, "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism" in *Ngambika: Studies of Women In African Literature*. Eds Carole B. Davies and Anne A Graves. (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 1986), p. 2.

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