

Chapter Ten

WOMANBEINGNESS AND AFROCENTRIC FEMINISM

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Abstract

Africa and by extension, the global society is in need of change in the way women are perceived in terms of equity, justice and dignity. They see women as the weaker sex, as chattel property and as individuals that are not relevant in the political and economic space of Africa. These perceptions have brought about the dehumanization of women and their categorization as second-class citizens. It is against this background of female subjugation that activist, especially women rise to fight for the rights of women under the guise of feminist movement. Therefore, feminism is a form that projects women's dissatisfaction with patriarchally-inflicted conditions and their struggle for emancipation and self-actualization. As part of the global changes, Mildred Bob-Manuel declared: "let the men say what they like, women's liberation is a part of the features of the fast changing world. This work captioned explores the reason for the rise of feminism, the meaning of feminism, the historical perspectives, philosophy of feminism among other.

Introduction

Against the naturalistic and materialistic theories of origins, the biblical view starts with the Genesis account of creation of the first man and woman. The Bible tells us that God created humans in his image (imago dei), both male and female (Genesis 1:26-28). They both reflect God's power and majesty on earth, and they are both commanded to have children and practice responsible control over the earth without inferiority, but submissiveness to one another. Thus, God who created some of us male and some of us female is wiser than all of us. We are to complement each other and respect each other's heights, positions and rights. Therefore, thousands of years ago mankind's thoughts revolved around "she who gives life," around the mother, the woman.

Womanhood throughout history has been an interesting topic for discourse like other things in life they have their upside and downside, merit and

demerit, strengheness and weaknesses, sweetness and bitterness, to morality, spirituality, humanity even to womanity. On another note, woman has been a controversial human being since the beginning of this world. A school of thought sees woman as a builder and a helpmate. Another school of thought sees woman as devil incarnate whose main task is to exploit men and make them have endless vicissitudes. This shows that down the ages, men had double characteristic view about women as both angels, who could be loving companion to their husbands, devoted mothers to their children, guardians of household and family on the other hand, and as devils, who too could destroy our domestic and societal as well as organizational framework. Characterizing the whole to motherhood Asomonye observed that, one of the most priced sweet possessions of our (women) life is a good mother. She is the milk of infancy, the joy of our youth, the pride of your manhood and the companion of your old age. In short, she is 'the gold that never fades.' Above all, if this be the case of a woman this must be the time when her ability and capability were very much underrated. A woman's role was not only domestic but also domesticated. She was simply "*oriaku*," she needed not bother herself with "*ikpataku*".¹⁰

Some decades ago, a baffled Sigmund Freud, the eminent Viennese Psychoanalyst (1856 - 1936) wrote: "the great question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to answer, despite my 30years of research into the famine soul, is what does a woman want? Sarah Grimke, a pioneer feminist says: "Ask no favours for my sex. I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from our necks, and permits us to stand upright which God has designed for us to occupy." Whether it is Sigmund Freud or others baring their minds on feminism, or the words of late Gen. Shehu Musa Yar'Adua that: "Everybody who aspires to elective office cannot hope to achieve result without the support of women," each is simply expressing an honest opinion and should be accommodated. One important submission is that, Nigeria needs to reduce inequalities and disparities across the different social strata," Nigeria has been replete with instances of fearless women organizing principled protests for development and against injustice, to drive home their demands so many seminars, workshops, lectures, etc had been organized. Such programmes had brought together women, including party leaders, female politicians, market women, civil society organizations, gender activists and advocates. The reseachers point of departure is that women deserves equity, equality, dignity, justice and fairness in the world. The holistic and broad view will be summarized from the feminist angle. The work will be divided into eight sub-topics – starting from the rise of feminism; an overview of feminism; patriarchy dominance as point of departure of feminism; meaning of feminism; historical perspective of feminist movements; feminist philosophy; womanbeingness Afrocentric feminism: recreating womanbeing in contemporary African society and conclusion.

The Rise of Feminism: A Drive for Equality

Charles Fourier, a Utopian Socialist and French philosopher, is credited with having coined the word "feminism" in 1837. The words "feminism" and "feminist" first appeared in France and the Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in the 1890s, and the United States in 1910, (Cott 2) and the Oxford English Dictionary lists 1894 as the year of the first appearance of "feminist" and 1895 for "feminism". Depending on historical moment, culture and continent, feminists around the world have had different causes and goals.

In the late 1840s and early 1850s when women's rights organizations began to form in Europe and America, women's condition was that of a legally inferior caste. The 'Declaration of Sentiments' and 'Resolutions' adopted by the first American women's suffrage convention in 1848 summarized the outlines of women's position in many countries of the world at that time, though slightly so today. It stated the feminist grievance in no uncertain terms: "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having indirect objective the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. He has taken from her all right to property, even to the wages she earns He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in cases of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women – the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distraction which he considers most honourable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known. He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her He has endeavoured, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life" (Oakley 20).

Feminist activists campaign for women's rights – such as in contract law, property, and voting – while also promoting bodily integrity, autonomy, and reproductive rights for women. Feminist campaigns have changed societies, particularly in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault (Cornell 50). They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave, and against forms of discrimination against women. Feminism is mainly focused on women's

issues, but because feminism seeks gender equality, bell hooks, and other feminists have argued that men's liberation is a necessary part of feminism, and that men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles (Bell hooks 18).

Feminism: An Overview

The recharged and activated spirit of the feminist have hit the globe with its call cards on the third world countries and a glaring positive and negative tendency in Africa. While articulate writers expressed issues in relation to supporting feminism in the 18th century there was no organized movement to project the rights of women. Until recently, Mary Wollstonecraft's book, which was described as that impassioned, incoherent and rambling manifesto "A Vindication of the Rights of Women", which appeared in 1792 has remained the sacred book of feminism. She was the pioneer of what we call feminism today. And despite her book's obvious inadequacies, many otherwise brilliant women have continued to hold it aloft, choosing unabashedly to close their eyes to its blurred visions and quixotic tendencies (Ejinkonyi 15). Another powerful feminist voice to emerge on this our womanistic world is England's Virginia Woolf, the famous author of *A Room of One's Own* (1929). But in 1941 this great novelist committed suicide by drowning herself. These early, pioneering efforts in the 18th century by some women to speak out individually in support of women's rights, though notable and historic, fulfilled a role only assigns of things to come. An organized feminist movement was not begun until the 19th century when Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony came to rescue their fellow women from all the forms of subjection and deprivation which were their lot. Since then, female resurgence gradually gathered momentum with particular interest in asserting female suffrage.

For Ware even as the movement expands into the mainstream of progressive reform in the early 20th century, its success was never a foregone conclusion. Quoting Abigail Scoth Duniway who was pioneering National American Women Suffrage in the West, in her speech entitled; "How to win the Ballot" and given in 1899 to the (NAWSA) National Convention in Michigan USA says; "... not only is our not instigated in a spirit of warfare between the sexes, but it is engendered, altogether, in the spirit of harmony, and inter-dependence between men and women such as was the evident design of the great creator when he placed fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the same home and family No good equal suffragist will any longer permit you to monopolize all the pretty speeches about the other sex. In order to gain the votes of men, so we can win the ballot, we must show them that we are inspired by the same patriotic motives that induce them to prize it.¹⁸

Patriarchy Dominance: Point of Feminist Departure in Africa

Patriarchy is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. In this system fathers have authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and is

dependent on female subordination. Most forms of feminism characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. Carole Pateman argues that the patriarchal distinction "between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection".

In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. The theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Tickner 2). Feminist theory has explored the social construction of masculinity and its implications for the goal of gender equality. The social construct of masculinity is seen by feminism as problematic because it associates males with aggression and competition, and reinforces patriarchal and unequal gender relations (Faludi 80). The patriarchal concept of masculinity is also seen as harmful to men by narrowing their life choices, limiting their sexuality, and blocking full emotional connections with women and other men (Gardiner 40). Some feminists are engaged with men's issues activism, such as bringing attention to male rape and spousal battery and addressing negative social expectations for men.

Africa is a patriarchal society characterized by acute discrimination, exclusion, inequality and impunity. These features are also reflected in its politics, especially as they relate to the issue of gender imbalance. Therefore, recreating the contemporary African society entails as Ohazuruike and Okoroafor recognized equal political rights for women as about dismantling of male undue institutionalized privilege not only through laws but also through social practices and norms (22). This asymmetrical relationship between the sexes in the process of authoritative allocation of public resources has stunted the process of sustainable human development in the continent. The political milieu was relatively stagnant, weighed down by primordial conservatism and outdated cultural traits. However, there was a breakthrough in 1958 when women in Southern Nigeria were granted the right to vote and to stand for election. These political rights were extended to women in Northern Nigeria in 1978. Just as every human being irrespective of age, sex, race, language, status and educational background has need for so many things in life. The women have migrated from voting, to political appointment or representation and today occupying the post as local government chairmen, state Governor and some country's president.

Meaning of Feminism

Feminism, whether as a struggle, ideology or movement, is an unstructured and blatantly ambiguous phenomenon. It has no clear boundary between female assertiveness and female extremism. Its definition depends on the whims and moods of the individual woman defining it: The lesbians are

feminist. The prostitute is “making some kind of protest.” The single mother is “driving home some-point.” The ever-wild nympho-maniac is “advancing the struggle.” But among this cacophony of voices, how can we know who is sane? (Ejinkeonyi 20). For him, the fact that a drastic redefinition of focus and style in the feminist struggle can no longer be wished away. Subjugation, after all, has not really been the exclusive menu of the female gender. Indeed, cases of oppression and savagery which are unleashed on one gender by the other daily abound in our land. The basis of feminist ideology is that rights, privileges, status and obligations should not be determined by gender (Chukwudi-Ofoedu 129).

However, the term, feminism, is derived from the Latin word “femina” meaning “women”. It is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women. Goodman states that feminism is: “A politics, recognition of the historical and cultural subordination of women as a minority and a resolve to do something about it. Feminism has all ways incorporated a concern for ideas and consciousness-raising while also acting in the public sphere to improve the situation of women’s lives (x). A feminist advocates or supports the rights and equality of women. Feminist theory, which emerged from these feminist movements, aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women’s social roles and lived experience; it has developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender. As a social theory, feminism seeks to understand the nature of inequality and biases on gender politics, power relations and sexuality as well as issues on reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination and stereotyping. Issues commonly associated with notions of women’s rights include the following: the right to autonomy, the right to vote (universal suffrage), the right to hold public office, the right to own property, the right to education, the right to serve in the military, the right to enter into legal contracts, and also marital, parental, and religious rights (Chukwudi-Ofoedu 129).

A feminist is someone whether male or female who believes that women suffer specific oppression in society as women, that this oppression is largely structural and that action is required by women and men who empathize with them to change these structures. For our collective self-clarification: feminism, quoting Peggy Antrobus, a founding member of DAWN, a well-known feminist in his book, “The Global Women’s Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies,” said “is grounded in an analysis of the structured relationships of power between men and women; just as Marxism is grounded in an analysis of structured power relationships between labour and capital and indeed, “between rich and poor, black and white – and even between countries. Elsewhere, she adds: “the consciousness of sexism and sexist oppression is the essence of feminist politics, and it is this politics that energizes women’s

movements, whether or not the word 'feminist' is used." The expansion of women's concern from "women's issues" to "women's perspectives on all issues" has placed women's movement at par with the great social movements in history.

Feminist Movements: The Historical Perspectives

In researching this topic, the researchers were struck by the fact that for any reference to women's work in the society, by far the most important sector, it is necessary to go round the cosmological make ups on the issue. However, looking at history, one notices that there is hardly any ancient society where women were not subordinated to men. Beginning in the 1830s, states passed laws and statutes that gradually gave married women greater control over property. New York State passed the Married Women's Property Act in 1848, allowing women to acquire and retain assets independently of their husbands. This was the first law that clearly established the idea that a married woman had an independent legal identity. The New York law inspired nearly all other states to eventually pass similar legislation. In July 1848 American social reformer Elizabeth Cady Stanton and American abolitionist and feminist Lucretia Coffin Mott issued a call to "discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman". In the late 1960s women began to work for equal rights. The women participated in the Women's Strike for Equality held in August 1970 in New York City. The 1972 Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) reads, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex." **International Women's Day (IWD)**, originally called *International Working Women's Day*, was declared to mark on **March 8** every year to promote women's right.

However, the history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three "waves". Each wave dealt with different aspects of the same feminist issues. The First Wave comprised women's suffrage movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, promoting women's right to vote. The Second Wave was associated with the ideas and actions of the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s. The second wave campaigned for legal and social equality for women. The Third Wave is a continuation of, and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s. These waves are paraphrased as originally written in the feminist literatures.

19th and Early 20th Centuries (First-Wave Feminism)

The term *first wave* was coined retroactively to categorize these western movements after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities (Wheeler 100). It was a period of activity during the 19th century and early 20th century. Equally, since the late 19th century some feminists have allied with socialism, whereas others have criticized socialist ideology for being insufficiently concerned about women's

rights. August Bebel, an early activist of the German Social Democratic Party, published his work *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, juxtaposing the struggle for equal rights between sexes with social equality in general. In 1907 there was an International Conference of Socialist Women in Stuttgart where suffrage was described as a tool of class struggle. Clara Zetkin of the Social Democratic Party of Germany called for women's suffrage to build a "*socialist order, the only one that allows for a radical solution to the women's question*" (Duby, Perrot & Pantel 65).

In the UK and US, it focused on the promotion of equal contract, marriage, parenting, and property rights for women. By the end of the 19th century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage, though some feminists were active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights as well. African-American author Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, born free in the slave state of Maryland in 1825, a devout Christian who becomes involved in radical politics, in her speech, given at the Columbian Exposition of the 1893 World's Fair, asserted that women should have the right to vote. Women had recently gained some property rights and the right to work, and Harper called for the vote as a way to add political power to the growing influence that women exerted in the United States. Women's suffrage began in Britain's Australasian colonies at the close of the 19th century, with the self-governing colonies of New Zealand granting women the right to vote in 1893 and South Australia granting female suffrage (the right to vote and stand for parliamentary office) in 1895. This was followed by Australia granting female suffrage in 1902.

In Britain the Suffragettes and the Suffragists campaigned for the women's vote, and in 1918 the Representation of the People Act was passed granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses. In Britain, the women's movement was allied with the Labour Party. In 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one. In the U.S., Betty Friedan emerged from a radical background to take leadership. Radical Women is the oldest socialist feminist organization in the U.S. and is still active. Radical feminism is one of the currents in feminism that focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organizes the society into a complex relationship, based on the assumption of male supremacy used to oppress women. It states that the defining features of women oppression is the society's sexist and capitalist hierarchy and therefore call for the radical reordering of the modus operandi in the society (Ukaulor 134). In the U.S., notable leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who each campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote. These women were influenced by the Quaker theology of spiritual equality, which asserts that men and women are equal under God. In the United States, first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the

passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states.

During the late Qing period and reform movements such as the Hundred Days' Reforms, Chinese feminists called for women's liberation from traditional roles and Neo-Confucian gender segregation (Ko, Haboush & Piggott 10). Later, the Chinese Communist Party created projects aimed at integrating women into the workforce, and claimed that the revolution had successfully achieved women's liberation. Arab feminism was closely connected with Arab nationalism. In 1899, Qasim Amin, considered the "father" of Arab feminism, wrote *The Liberation of Women*, which argued for legal and social reforms for women. He drew links between women's position in Egyptian society and nationalism, leading to the development of Cairo University and the National Movement. In 1923 Hoda Shaarawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union, became its president and a symbol of the Arab women's rights movement (Flexner 101). The Iranian Constitutional Revolution in 1905 triggered the Iranian women's movement, which aimed to achieve women's equality in education, marriage, careers, and legal rights. However, during the Iranian revolution of 1979, many of the rights that women had gained from the women's movement were systematically abolished, such as the Family Protection Law.

In France, women obtained the right to vote only with the Provisional Government of the French Republic of 21 April 1944. The Consultative Assembly of Algiers of 1944 proposed on 24 March 1944 to grant eligibility to women but following an amendment by Fernand Grenier, they were given full citizenship, including the right to vote. In May 1947, following the November 1946 elections, the sociologist Robert Verdier minimized the "gender gap," stating in *Le Populaire* that women had not voted in a consistent way, dividing themselves, as men, according to social classes. Wars (both World War I and World War II) had seen the provisional emancipation of some, individual, women, but post-war periods signaled the return to conservative roles. During the Spain Civil War, Dolores Ibarruri (*La Pasionaria*) led the Communist Party of Spain. Although she supported equal rights for women, she opposed women fighting on the front and clashed with the anarcha-feminist *Mujeres Libres* (MacKinnon 321).

In Italy and Germany, Fascism has been prescribed dubious stances on feminism by its practitioners and by women's groups. Amongst other demands concerning social reform presented in the Fascist Manifesto in 1919 was expanding the suffrage to all Italian citizens of age 18 and above, including women (accomplished only in 1946, after the defeat of fascism) and eligibility for all to stand for office from age 25. This demand was particularly championed by special Fascist women's auxiliary groups such as the *fasci*

femminilli and only partly realized in 1925, under pressure from Prime Minister Benito Mussolini's more conservative coalition partners.

Cyprian Blamires states that although feminists were among those who opposed the rise of Adolf Hitler, feminism has a complicated relationship with the Nazi movement as well, which saw several vocal female supporters as well as women's groups. While Nazis glorified traditional notions of patriarchal society and its role for women, they claimed to recognize women's equality in employment. However, Hitler and Benito Mussolini declared themselves as opposed to feminism, and after the rise of Nazism in Germany in 1933, there was a rapid dissolution of the political rights and economic opportunities that feminists had fought for during the pre-war period and to some extent during the 1920s. (Duby et al 202).

Mid-20th Century (Second Wave Feminism)

Second-wave feminism is a feminist movement beginning in the early 1960s (Whelehan 3) and continuing to the present; as such, it coexists with third-wave feminism. Second wave feminism is largely concerned with issues of equality other than suffrage, such as ending discrimination. Second-wave feminists see women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encourage women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures. The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan "The Personal is Political", which became synonymous with the second wave. French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir provided a Marxist solution and an existentialist view on many of the questions of feminism with the publication of "*Le Deuxième Sexe*" (The Second Sex) in 1949. The book expressed feminists' sense of injustice.

Second and third-wave feminism in China has been characterized by a re-examination of women's roles during the communist revolution and other reform movements, and new discussions about whether women's equality has actually been fully achieved (Dooling, 210). In Latin America, revolutions brought changes in women's status in countries such as Nicaragua, where feminist ideology during the Sandinista Revolution aided women's quality of life but fell short of achieving a social and ideological change.

In Africa the wind does not refuse to blow along the Sub-Saharan. Mary Benson of South Africa, a woman politician who fought and won fiercely not only for women liberation but for the human rights of South Africa and Africans in general. The bomb blast of today's women in Nigeria started in 1929 in what was called the "Women War" in Eastern Nigeria which spread to the Owerri province, Ahoada Division, Opobo, Abak and Ikot Ekpene areas of the then Calabar province. Apparently, the agitation was directed against colonial administration policies and actions which had threatened the interest of woman. When the colonial government attempted in 1929 to extend taxation

to the women of Eastern Nigeria the Camel's back was broken with Aba women riot at the front banner. Mrs. Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti of Abeokuta and a member of the then Western House of Chiefs in the early 1950s, led Egba women in a demonstration which forced the Alake Ademola, to abdicate his throne in July 1948. This was to stall the insistence of the Alake of Egbaland that women should pay tax.

In 1956, President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt initiated "state feminism", which outlawed discrimination based on gender and granted women's suffrage, but also blocked political activism by feminist leaders (Badran 96). During Sadat's presidency, his wife, Jehan Sadat, publicly advocated further women's rights, though Egyptian policy and society began to move away from women's equality with the new Islamist movement and growing conservatism. However, some activists proposed a new feminist movement, Islamic feminism, which argues for women's equality within an Islamic framework. In Zambia, "the women of Zambia had fought the Zambian independence alongside the menfolk in the 1960s, through their pressure group known as the "National Women Lobby Group of Zambia" have voted out a system they did not like in their country. The Angolan women strongly objects to being identified as either the spare rib of the male or a mere cog in the revolutionary machine that wrested freedom from the clutches of Portugal and the home – spawn agents of western capitalism (Agbabiaka 70).

Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries (Third-Wave Feminism)

According to Naomi Wolf the youngest literary celebrity of the women's movement in the early and mid-1990s, who worked to make feminism relevant to a new generation, "the task facing the women in the last decade of the 20th century was to capitalize on the political power that they possessed but had not yet learned to wield effectively. The status of women's rights today varies dramatically in different countries and, in some cases, among groups within the same country, such as ethnic groups or economic classes. In the early 1990s in the USA, third-wave feminism began as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which, they argue, over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women. Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for women, and tend to use a post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality (Freedman 32). Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave, such as Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other black feminists, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities.

Since the 1980s standpoint feminists have argued that the feminist movement should address global issues (such as rape, incest, and prostitution) and culturally specific issues (such as female genital mutilation in some parts of Africa and the Middle East and glass ceiling practices that impede women's advancement in developed economies) in order to understand how gender inequality interacts with racism, homophobia, classism and colonization in a "matrix of domination" (Leslie & Drake, 1997). Third-wave feminism also contains internal debates between difference feminists, who believe that there are important differences between the sexes, and those who believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning.

The term post-feminism is used to describe a range of viewpoints reacting to feminism since the 1980s. While not being "anti-feminist", post-feminists believe that women have achieved second wave goals while being critical of third wave feminist goals. The term was first used to describe a backlash against second-wave feminism, but it is now a label for a wide range of theories that take critical approaches to previous feminist discourses and includes challenges to the second wave's ideas. Other post-feminists say that feminism is no longer relevant to today's society (Modleski 52). Amelia Jones has written that the post-feminist texts which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s portrayed second-wave feminism as a monolithic entity.

Inquiry into Feminist Philosophy

The struggle for women's rights began in the 18th century during a period of intense intellectual activity known as the Age of Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, political philosophers in Europe began to question traditional ideas that based the rights of citizens on their wealth and social status. Instead, leaders of the Enlightenment argued that all individuals were born with natural rights that made them free and equal. They maintained that all inequalities that existed among citizens were the result of an inadequate education system and an imperfect social environment. Enlightenment philosophers argued that improved education and more egalitarian social structures could correct these inequalities.

Such radical ideas about equality and the rights of citizens helped inspire both the American Revolution in 1775 and the French Revolution in 1789. However, the ideas of the Enlightenment initially had little impact on the legal and political status of women. Most Enlightenment thinkers had little to say about the position women held in society, and many of their followers assumed that the concepts of liberty, equality, and political representation applied only to men. For example, one of the most influential writers from this period, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, claimed that women were sentimental and frivolous. Rousseau argued that women were naturally suited to be subordinate companions of men.

Feminist philosophers also challenge basic principles of traditional Western philosophy, investigating how philosophical inquiry would change if women conducted it and if it incorporated women's experiences as well as their viewpoints. In interpreting the history of Western philosophy, feminists study texts by male philosophers for their depiction of women, masculine values, and biases toward men. Feminist philosophers also write about women's experiences of subjectivity, their relationship to their bodies, and feminist concepts of language, knowledge, and nature. They explore connections between feminism in philosophy and other emerging feminist disciplines, such as feminist legal theory, feminist theology, and ecological feminism. Central to feminist philosophy is the concept of the oppression of women who live in *patriarchal* (male-controlled) societies; much of the work of feminist philosophers has gone into understanding patriarchy and developing alternatives to it. Therefore, patriarchy theory has created attitudinal problem in men against women the dominance of men is in respective roles of women in different cultures (Opara 167). Prominent feminist philosophers include French postmodern philosophers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous and American philosopher of law Catharine MacKinnon. These groups of feminists see motherhood, familyhood, patriarchy and religion as barbaric tradition that relegates women to the level of beasts of burden (Ukaulor 30). They believe that the emancipation of women consists in the freedom of women from their reproductive rights and biology by any means possible (Ukaulor 31). This revolt against injustice and inequality against women is termed as feminism (Chukwudi-Ofoedu 128).

Early philosophers such as John Locke had espoused theories that all men were created equal. Theories of equality and democracy easily take root in the heart of the oppressed classes all over the world. Equality maybe defined at least two ways, first is what we call formal equality and secondly substantial equality. The formal calls for identical treatment and does not allow for existing differences. Substantial equality requires individualized treatment (Ipaye 180). British philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill, though a leading proponent of utilitarianism during the 19th century, came to understand that utilitarian thought was flawed because it failed to take account of people's emotions. He became outspoken on the subject of equality for women, an unpopular cause at the time. His essay "The Subjection of Women (1869)" sought to shift the law and public perceptions in order to free women from what was effectively slavery, and to allow them to live as individuals.

According to (Mill 112) the object of this Essay is to explain as clearly as I am able, the grounds of an opinion which I have held from the very earliest period when I had formed any opinions at all on social or political matters, and which, instead of being weakened or modified, has been constantly growing stronger by the progress of reflection and the experience of life: That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal

subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other....However, the process of confining women to the domestic sphere was applauded by many 'progressive' social thinkers of the industrial revolution period. Auguste Comte, the apostle of progress and rationality, justified the process of domestication of women by the supposed need for men 'to assure (woman's) emotional destiny' by making her life 'more and more domestic' and 'above all detach her from all outside work,' wherein we have no justice. The description by Regina Morantz of 19th century American gender roles which could quite easily be adopted to the 21st century illustrates: "women's image was riddled with contradictions, guardians of the race, but wholly subject to male authority; preserve of civilization, religion and culture, yet considered the intellectual inferior of men; the primary socialize of her children, but given no more real responsibility and dignity than a child herself" (Rogers 89).

The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural. There can be little doubt that Spartan experience suggested to Plato, among many other of his doctrines, that of the social and political equality of the two sexes. All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. The preceding considerations are amply sufficient to show that custom, however universal it may be, affords in this case no presumption, and ought not to create any prejudice in favour of the arrangements which place women in social and political subjection to men.

In response to Rousseau and others who belittled the role of women in society, English writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791). In this book, Wollstonecraft argued that, like men, women were naturally rational but their inferior education often taught them to be silly and emotional. Education, she believed, should cultivate the natural reasoning capacity in girls. She also claimed that the best marriages were marriages of equals, in which husband and wife were friends as well as legal partners. Wollstonecraft argued that equality in marriage would only come about with equality of education.

Feminist Political Ideologies

According to (Brophy, & Smart 90) feminists believe that gaining the vote would provide the solution to all the disadvantages of oppression suffered by women, there were nevertheless wide differences of opinion on which political goals should be pursued. And feminist political organizations have always, by their very existence, challenged the idea that women's interests are best served

by participation in the conventional politics of party organization, election procedures and government by elected representatives of the people.

Some branches of feminism closely track the political leanings of the larger society, such as liberalism and conservatism, or focus on the environment. Liberal feminism seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform without altering the structure of society. Socialist feminism distinguishes itself from Marxist feminism by arguing that women's liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. Radical feminism considers the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy as the defining feature of women's oppression and the total uprooting and reconstruction of society as necessary (Echols 71). Conservative feminism is conservative relative to the society in which it resides. Libertarian feminism conceives of people as self-owners and therefore as entitled to freedom from coercive interference. Separatist feminism does not support heterosexual relationships. Lesbian feminism is thus closely related. Other feminists criticize separatist feminism as sexist. Ecofeminists see men's control of land as responsible for the oppression of women and destruction of the natural environment. Although, they have been criticised for focusing too much on a mystical connection between women and nature.

Contrarily, feminism has become a term of discourse to the modern young women. The pioneer feminists were hard-hitting individuals, and the modern young woman admires them for their courage even while they judge them for their zealotry and their inartistic methods. What actually can we say is the focal intent of feminist; women liberation no doubt seems to be their hot seeking zone. The major thing we want to drive home here is that equality before the law entails all things being equal, not for negativity, but for the development of the entire nation.

Women Liberation

The subject matter of women is one that easily elicits the passion about human resource development, gender issues and concerns and societal development in general. The years 1960s to the year 1970s, were the era of women's liberation. This era was followed by the period of advocacy for women's development and advancement. Then came the emergence of affirmative action for the realization of the women's human rights. During each of these periods, there is no doubt that there have been paradigm shifts in the challenges and prospects which have been posed for society to address. The challenges indeed have ranged from the conscientization of society (especially in developing countries, Africa inclusive) about the value and relevance of womanhood to the concern for sustainable mainstream of women into national development efforts, on one hand, and on the other hand, the realization plausibility of initiatives and sustainable pursuit of appropriate proactive agenda for positioning women.

In oversimplification, women liberation is a move towards attaining women freedom. While the wave of women's liberation movement, hereby defined as the rejection of dominance and submissiveness, which started in the west a few decades ago, has by and large reached all the nooks and corners of the world. The contemporary female activist has extended the theatre to the living rooms, offices, the professions and such other places where male supremacy is said to be a threat. It has also taken on the mood and orientation of militancy. In Nigeria, and indeed, Africa, emphasis is gradually but steadily shifting from the traditional roles of women as mostly wives and mothers to modern roles of managers, administrators, and entrepreneurs.

Although, women's liberation movement has always been a disruptive element and a major target of its disruptive behaviour has been the dominant culture, the contemporary women's liberation movement, Brunt, R. and Rowan, C. has, by and large, rejected the possibility that our oppression is caused by either naturally given sex differences or economic factor alone (68).

Gender Equality of Rights

The Holy Father in his 1988 Apostolic Letter on Women, Pope John Paul II "Mulieris Dignitatem," writes that "both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God's image" [No. 6]; and the catechism of the catholic church, also states that "man and woman are both with one and the same dignity in the image of God." [No. 369]. Prior to this respect, women are entitled to the respect due to the dignity of human persons and must therefore be granted equality with men to participate in educational, cultural, economic, social and political life of the state. However, an acceptance of the ideal of equality between the sexes propels the nation and its apparatus to accept the corollary of non-discrimination.

Until the 19th century, the denial of equal rights to women met with only occasional protest and drew little attention from most people. After winning the right to vote in 1920, many women believed the struggle for women's rights was over and returned to their normal lives. By 1960, social and economic conditions had helped to expand the role of women out of the home to the factory and office. This along with other social changes convinced women to demand equality. Women such as Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, and Kate Millet quickly filled the need for leaders in the movement. Steinem, previously a writer, founded Ms. Magazine and helped to found the National Women's Political Caucus and Women's Action Alliance.

In the late 18th century, in an attempt to remedy these inequalities among men, political theorists and philosophers asserted that all men were created equal and therefore were entitled to equal treatment under the law. In the 19th century, as governments in Europe and North America began to draft

new laws guaranteeing equality among men, significant numbers of women—and some men—began to demand that women be accorded equal rights as well. Women's Rights are rights that establish the same social, economic, and political status for women as for men. Women's rights guarantee that women will not face discrimination on the basis of their sex. In the early 19th century, the vast majority of married women throughout Europe and the United States still had no legal identity apart from their husbands. Until the second half of the 20th century, women in most societies were denied some of the legal and political rights accorded to men. The earliest campaigns to improve women's legal status in the United States centered on gaining property rights for women. Women also led legislative efforts in the 19th and 20th centuries to ensure their voting, employment, and reproductive rights. Some of the most influential female abolitionists were Sarah and Angelina Grimké, daughters of wealthy slave-owners and converts to Quakerism. In 1836 they held a series of lectures at women's abolition societies in which they described their personal experiences of the horrors of slavery. Sarah Grimké maintained that men and women were created equal and that "whatever is right for a man to do, is right for a woman to do."

Womanbeingness and Afrocentric Feminism: Recreating Womanbeing In Contemporary African Society

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 under the chairmanship of Von Bismarck of Germany recognized and legalized the scramble for Africa and the partition thereof. Africa thus became unfortunate victim of imperialistic political lines of demarcations and balkanization. Since then, feminists and anti-feminists, liberals and conservatives, public officials and private citizens form part of the balkanization – for all directions, challenges emerged regarding the value and property of governmental commissions on women's status. They believe that, ultimately success for the contemporary African women's movement will turn on the capacity of feminists to mould political institutions toward movement ends (Stewart 49).

According to Cukwudi-Ofoedu, changing images and perceptions of women in Africa is an important process in the search for an appropriate and dynamic social space for the women of this continent. As gender and development theories continue to unfold with social changes, the socio-cultural attitude that impacts women's contributions remain on the front-burner of African gender and development studies (128). Sometime in the past, UN report listed African woman as the epitome of womanhood: beautiful, feminine, strong, elegant, and dignified; full of deep unknown secrets, like her mother continent – which make her a mystery. Also, the synod for Africa held in Rome in 1994 stressed that the "women always play as an essential role in her life. She is the victim of new forms of abuse and oppression which are not in traditional society, such as prostitution, concubinage, desertion, etc." It is in view of the later that

Afrocentric feminism is aimed at enhancing womanbeingness in Africanized womanism.

African writers especially women have used their works to probe the root of the socio-cultural beliefs that subjugate women and equally avenue that will transcend these dehumanizing traditional beliefs and practice against women. These writers have targeted retrogressive traditional practices with the concerted efforts that will facilitate development and the role of the girl-child and women in particular (Chukwudi-Ofoedu 128). Hence, scholars have identified biological, cultural, psychological and sociological view points as theoretical perceptions of non-women participation in Africa (P.409 Obiah, Duru, Akalonu, Okonya-Chukwu & Onyeagoro 409). Contemporary discourses have clearly shown the widely-felt need for the repositioning of women, be it in the social, economic, political and cultural status across societies because the participation and representation of both men and women are fundamental to national development (Ugorji 515).

However, there has been greater upsurge in world awareness of the injustice of the discriminatory practices against women. There has been much greater determination by governments and organizations to work for the elimination of the inequalities of the status of women. In 1975, the United Nations set up UN Decade for Women, for the period 1975 – 1985. The theme was Equality, Development and Peace. The 10year project to improve the status of women all over the world accentuated the importance of the needs of women and the wide range of opportunities for women in all facets of social, economic and political life. In 1979 the United Nations universally recognized the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 1980, African countries in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) took a landmark decision. In the document: "The Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa," African governments affirmed their awareness of the need to give special attention to the place of women in their economies. The Lagos plan also recognized the importance of including women at higher administrative and policy-making levels. In the Conference on Women held in Beijing China in 1995, twelve critical areas of concern to women were identified. In implementing the Beijing declarations, African and Nigeria women in particular, tailored the twelve points to their national needs, with instances of fearless women organizing principled protest for development and against injustice. To drive home their demands, so many seminars, workshops, lectures, etc were organized. Such programmes brought together women, including party leaders, female politicians, market women, civil society, organizations, gender activists and advocates. The Beijing Conferences as commonly called, has given a lot of impetus to the campaign and struggle for political and economic empowerment of women.

African leaders have reaffirmed their commitments to gender equality, women's rights and empowerment in both economic and political spheres following the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004). This culminated in the adoption of the African Union (AU) Gender Policy in 2009 and the launch of African women's decade in 2010. African governments have also made commitments through a number of international agreements. A series of commitments emphasizing gender concerns in social and economic spheres have also been made through AU and regional level sectoral declarations, including Commitment 7(d) of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to "Promote women's equal access to and full participation in, on the basis of equality with men, decision-making at all levels, mainstreaming gender perspectives in all policies and strategies, eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and improving the status, health and economic welfare of women and girls through full and equal access to economic opportunity, land, credit, education and healthcare services" (UNDESA, 2004). Many countries have integrated non-discriminatory clauses into their respective constitutions and other legislative instruments and have undertaken reforms in marriage, family and property relations. Strategic responses to violence against women have been strengthened by the UN Secretary General's Africa Unite Campaign to end violence against Women and Girls, African First Lady's Peace Mission and other related initiatives. Therefore, Afrocentric feminism of the contemporary Africa are based on culture, women liberation and gender equality.

Feminism in Culture

Afrocentric feminist writers and critics have not passively accepted the patriarchal cultural imposition on women and the marginalization or non-canonization of women in the society. While Western feminism/activism takes women's rights as their starting point, Afrocentric feminists start out from culturally linked forms of participation (Chukwudi-Ofoedu, 129). According to Okoronkwo, perhaps the most contentious and complex obstacle to women participation in decision-making process in Africa is indigenous cultural and traditional practices. Within this paradigm, we find a set of conflicting dichotomies, civil laws Vs customary laws, individual Vs collective property rights, and indigenous Vs women's rights. Traditional patterns based on customary law and practices; discriminate against women(94). Therefore, gender is a cultural construct and is society defined (Ugwu 185). This implies that African feminism is culture bound; hence, authentic African feminism would appreciate culture, equality (rather than domination) not institutionalized by chauvinists but accepted as the essence of community and necessary for its survival (Ukaolor 36). Which means African feminism also places more emphasis on the community than on the individual. Some cultural

practices in Africa have contributed to low participation of women in politics (Oboko & Morah 104).

There is no doubt that, there is a traditional bias against the position of women in Africa like the belief that the male child is far superior to the female child. Thus, the boy child is from childhood the 'Lord' and the girl seen as 'Serf'. Nwagbara stated that from childhood, a female child is made to realize that there are differences between her and her male siblings in most homes. The male child has the inalienable right to education, unlike his female counterpart... (78) Therefore, every academically successful female student is dismissed as "bottom power." No woman behind the wheel is considered a good driver (Igbokwe 42). In other words, in Africa, a woman's worth and respect is based on the number of births she made. In the observation of Acholonu within the African framework, "motherhood and childbearing are central to the life of the African people." (9) The choice and the tendency to marry, bear and rear children and fulfill socially prescribe family roles, according to Robert Staple (1986), is "the basis of a stable family."

Women in some cultures are therefore seen as mere chattels of their husbands. This again is buttressed under some of our customary laws, a woman is a chattel to be sold by her parents to her husband, to whom she becomes enslaved after the payment of the purchase price; called dowry, and this belief is very much alive with us to date. Traditional values give men proprietary rights over women. These values regard women as inferior to men. A woman was regarded as a mere sexual and domestic functionary whose worth was directly proportional to the number of children she was able to bear for her husband; or to how efficient and assiduous she was at ministering to the other need of her husband such as cooking for him, taking care of his children, etc. A woman that deviates from this position and ventures into politics is perceived as an outcast, wayward and promiscuous. Under the custom, politics was considered too dangerous for women. In such a situation, we agree with TeneNatsa who posits that the participation of women in politics has been reduced to mobilizing, praise singing, fundraising, party supporting, husband supporting and contemporary lots who will be rewarded at the end of the elections. (92) This belief is strengthened by the major religions which are opposed to women's ambition for public life. In fact, the most current thrust of male domination now is the kolanut ritual. Men now shield themselves under kolanut ritual and pull the rights of women from them. Also, women are denied the right of inheriting their husband's or parents property. Thus, a childless woman or one with only female children contemplates her future in the family with horror. For in the event of the demise of her husband, she and her female children would have no claims to his property. Another area where women in our society suffer indignity humiliation is during the period of widowhood (Ugorji 16). Stem from widowhood is widow's inability to inherit her late husband's estate and the

fact that she could become part of the estate to be inherited by his heirs. Consequently, the extent to which women's rights are protected under the law depends on the constitutional provisions and various other laws pertaining to women, as well as the factors that affect access to justice through the courts and the enforcement of the law in practice in Africa. According to Acholonu, it would be wrong to hold tradition and religion culpable for the inhibitions and no progressive laws and practices in society because nations throughout the world take the aspects of tradition that are conducive to progress.(39)

Another area that is receiving great attention and making headlines in recent time is women's right of expressing their opinion or issues. The attention offered to this fundamental human right is a welcome development, given the fact that in many Africa cultures the voice of women is suppressed. For instance, women have no voice in decision making in their kindred nor are their voices heard in discussions on lands, notwithstanding the fact that their rights or interests might be seen but are not to be heard.

Conclusion

We have examined Womanbeingness and Afrocentric feminism and discovered that feminism is typically associated with particular historical moments when a coalition of women succeeds in bringing issues of gender equality, sexual oppression, and sex discrimination into public arena (Abdulwasiu, Bodinga & Tijjani 258). The believe is that not only are women denied equality with the balance of the world's population, they are often denied liberty and dignity and in many situations suffer direct violations of their physical and mental autonomy (Obasi 1). As such, they demand gender equality. Adeyeye said that gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefitting from economic, social, cultural and political development.(244) Even contemporary political theorist has argued the need for gender equality in the modern democratic and political process. Such equality and human rights have been acknowledged nationally and internationally and guaranteed in domestic laws and constitutions and in international agreement and instruments (Obasi 1).

Therefore, there is certainly need to equate women dignity and rights to ensure justice and fairness in all aspects of human life. According to the former United Nations Secretary Kofi Annan 2003 study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women are fully involved that the benefits cannot be seen immediately. What is true of families is also true of communities in development and also true of all the countries of the world.(5) Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana added to Africans that "the progress of any people can be measured through the status and role of its women." Also, redefining the feminist struggle would imply having the humility and sincerity of purpose to let feminism shed its extreme and gratuitous angles and find more credibility, relevance and sympathy under the more definable umbrella

of human rights concerns. Dr. Boutrous-Ghali, former United Nations scribe told the 1995 Beijing International Women Convention that “women’s rights are human rights.”

Afrocentrically, the gender sensitization should lay the foundation for appropriate legislative changes and judicial pronouncements that will gradually push the rights of women to the fore. But, in the words of the late jurist and Socrates of the bench, Justice Chukwudifu Oputa, “It will amount to shallow utopianism to think that even the legislature can do away, overnight with popular mentality and prevailing social, mental, moral and even religious prejudices against the female in a male dominated society.” Even the much publicized and hold fast rule of law (Laka, & Ozurumba 77). Experience has shown that ensuring equity, justice and dignity of women in Africa and addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment, which is the feminist quest, requires strategic interventions at all levels of programming and policy making. If we can erase these inequalities and put women on equal footing with men in Africa, we know that we can unlock and recreate human potential on a transformational scale in the contemporary African society. Sustainable development will only be possible when women and men enjoy equal justice and opportunity to rise to their potential.

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