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Dynamics of African Feminism, Womanism, Agency and Voice Using the Metaphor of Hovering Eagle and Implications on Gender Equity

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Abstract

Using the metaphor of a hovering eagle of the African continent, the article weaves through the rigours of the ideology of patriarchy, which it criticizes using the perspective of African feminism, African womanism and African women's voices and agency. It is clear that much as some authors wish to lump all forms of women resistance under the ambit of feminism, other mediums, such as womanism and women's agency, especially in Africa play an equally important role in empowering women to fight and repel oppression initiated within the ideology of patriarchy. The article distinguished African feminism, African womanism and African women's agency from the western paradigms based on the fact that the western paradigms were founded on exploitation of African women through slave trade and colonialism. The article uses the metaphor of the goats' and sheep's semen, which cannot fertilize the other, unless manipulated genetically. In so doing, the article, makes a clear case that African feminism, African womanism and African women's agency cannot be lumped together under the same heading, much as they are all perspectives intended to empower women to fight for their own rights. The possibility of the two systems working together is not discarded totally at the end of the discussion.

Key words: African feminism, agency, oppression, patriarchy, womanism

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Introduction

This article uses the eagle's bird analogy to discuss the relationship between feminism, womanism and women's agency in Africa. It uses the same analogy to ascertain whether or not African feminism is a different strand of perspective from the main brand of feminism. In simplistic terms, "feminism" is the women's vehicle through which they are able to resist male oppression—giving the ideology of patriarchy a negative treat, and a raw deal (Busingye, 2016b). Being initially a women's vehicle to negotiate for equality, feminism is sometimes mistaken to be one and the same thing as womanism. Feminism and womanism are, however, only intertwined, but not the same thing, although their objectives do not differ. In fact, some authors are convinced that "womanism" is "simply another shade of feminism" (Saxena, 2009; Lewis, 2019). They are right from their own perspective, and should not be criticized for their views. "Womanism" as a paradigm came up as a realization that "feminism" is not an all-encompassing term to describe all women liberation struggles (Saxena, 2009). Feminism and womanism are linked to each other through women's agency. According to Kabeer (1999), the term "agency" includes measurable processes of decision-making as well as the less measurable manifestations such as negotiation, deception and manipulation.

The eagle hovering over the African continent spotted traces of African feminism, womanism and agency as far back as the times before Africans had interactions with other continents. It was amazed about how people with varied customs and cultures, on the African continent, could have commonalities in the way they do business, yet they were not talking to each other. It, however, did not see a unified people who would qualify to be called an African tribe, with a common custom (Mamdan, 1996). Instead it saw a mosaic of communities occupying a mass of land, what is now known as the African continent. What surprised it most, was how within each of the various communities women were able to survive within what it thought was a strong ideological brand of patriarchy. That brand of ideology can as well be called African patriarchy, since Africa is now talked of retrospectively.

Most importantly, the eagle did not see women lying down waiting for things to happen to them or done for them (Busingye, 2016b). It witnessed in each and every community some level of women resistance to male oppression, even if in some cases they were married in polygamous relations. Some of them were even in the forced marriages, having been inherited by the relatives of their deceased husbands, in what is known as widow inheritance. Widow inheritance is a socio-culture vive in some communities in Africa. In the current days of HIV/AIDs pandemic, widows are still inherited even when the families are aware that their husbands died as a result of HIV/AIDs infection (Luginaah, *et; al*, 2005). Widow inheritance is a function of unbalanced power relations in society—a consequence of lack of empowerment, in most cases on the part of the widow. Those women were able to survive in the harsh conditions imposed upon them by the patriarchal institutions. In modern literature, the hovering eagle witnessed women's agency, a process that enabled African women in the aforementioned conditions to wriggle through to the desired end state (Kabeer,

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1999; 437). African women's agency, African feminism and womanism are intertwined paradigms, all intended to liberate African women from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy (Saxena, 2019). It is no mistake, therefore, to state here that the hovering eagle witnessed African women's agency, feminism and African womanism at play, and in unison.

In the later days of European colonization of the African, African women agency, African feminism and womanism were, however, adulterated and it has become difficult to succinctly identify what the hovering eagle had witnessed before. These paradigms have had to contend with the western women's agency, feminism, and womanism that have developed along totally different lines and experiences. When Westerners and western schooled Africans talk of feminism, they talk of the sexualized politics of the body and mind of the western world, not African paradigms at all (Katrak, 2006). Their sentiments can at best be described as anti-men, not feminism, which is a field of possibilities for women to negotiate their way out of the shackles of patriarchy. That, however, does not mean that there are several feminisms, there is only one feminism paradigm in the world, albeit with several strands (Arndt, 2002). The eagle is not complaining about whatever terminology is used to describe what it saw, as long as its message is not distorted or re-labelled what it is not. Its main interest is to see African women working hard to liberate themselves from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy.

In her work, Tripp (2002), identifies African women's resistance to male oppression and considers that it qualifies to be women's agency. Interestingly, it is women's agency even if women do not come together to demonstrate against male oppression in public rallies. It remains so, when from an eagle's bird's view, actions of women in various communities towards male oppression exhibit consistence and similar relentlessness against male oppression. Suffice to note that African women's agency is not static, in order to remain potent, it changes in line with the changes in the operational tactics of the ideology of patriarchy. More recently, "women's agency" was held to mean actions which women undertake to influence their situation and for their own benefit (Ssali, Ahikire and Madanda, 2007 at 32). This implies that the hovering eagle shall have to gather evidence of what women, in similar circumstances are doing to survive and also to devise means of moving beyond the survival paradigm to full realization of the right to exist as free human beings.

In any case, the various actions taken by women to resist male oppression need not be conventional and identifiable across the globe—they only need to exhibit sustained resistance to that oppression. African women acting in unison in the struggle against discrimination, need not be educated or schooled in the western education system, which is hailed as liberating education (Shunmuga, Sekar, and Alagarsamy, 2015). They only need to be aware of their mission and vision and work hard towards accomplishing the task they started without any foreign intervention. The slogan "educate a girl child, and you will have educated the whole nation" is true even for African women resisting male oppression, but is not an end by itself (Care, 2017). Education for the girl child, however, need not be formal, for all cases. It can be informal or non-formal, as long as it is positive education. They, in their individual right, must, however, be educated, and exposed to the working mechanisms of shackles of the ideology of patriarchy, in order to defeat it. Moreover, African women, in their resistance action against oppression are not bothered whether or not the hovering eagle terms their resistance "feminism" or "womanism", or "agency", they only wish to tell the eagle that they are not lying down watching things happen to them—there are active resisters (Busingye, 2016b). African women's style of doing things is real, and it works for them—it can be in form of deception, manipulation, negotiation, or even outright rejection of male

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oppression. African women's actions, especially before the dawn of colonialism in regard to resisting male oppression can rightly fall under the headings of African feminism, African womanism and African women's agency.

Statement of the Problem

The African continent and its peoples were in existence long before colonization. Those who colonized Africans were foreigners seeking fortune from far lands. They had their own ideologies including the domineering patriarchy. Women in the colonizing communities equally had issues with the ideology of patriarchy and were discontent with the state of affairs between women and men. They, however, wrote about what they perceived was the true story about Africa and its peoples. Alas, they got it wrong! They did not understand the languages or any other mediums of communication used by Africans. They simply wrote their stories, and for their own interests. Their stories were taken as the truths and nothing short of that about Africans, simply because there was no other literature to contradict their version of the story. Their stories were actually distortions of what was taking place on the African continent, in regard to women's struggles. Moreover, their interests were not to exonerate Africans from their darkness, as claimed. Much as Europeans had known quite a lot about Africa for at least 2,000 years (until the nineteenth Century, when they colonized the continent), they had, because of powerful imperial impulses, purposefully ignored earlier sources of information (Thompson, 2020). What they wrote about African women in the nineteenth century and afterwards, created the first problematic centres of misinformation about the African feminism, womanism and agency. For example, they did not understand why African women were in polygamous marriages, or widows would be inherited by their deceased husbands' kindred. The struggle to maintain their deceased husbands' estate and bring up their children amidst scarce resources, could be one of the reasons that compelled African women to behave so. It was certainly not an outright acceptance of the inequalities created for them by the ideology of patriarchy.

Due to misinformation and mind set, Europeans writers mistook African women resistance as to be "cult"—some spiritual form of power that survived on magical powers. They never wished to state its actual operational tactics, lest they lose out on the game. Moreover, the western enterprise is a business enterprise model working for the imperialistic capitalist elite, both women and men. Its essence survives on the dictates of the ideology of patriarchy, nothing short of that will be given space in the western narrative. Even the western feminism paradigm, cannot wholly be exonerated from being a project of the western imperialistic capitalist elite and propertied class (Hooks, 2009). This position is well supported by what motivated western powers to come to Africa—they were slave traders, geographical expeditionists (the so-called explorers), and missionaries, but all working for the political western capitalist elite—the patriarch (Wilkin, 2014).

The problem investigated in this article, therefore, is what prompted western authors about African feminism, African agency and African womanism to be biased, and hence deliberately distort the reality on the ground. In addition, having failed to paint the African paradigms in their actual pictures, western writers attempted to use blanket definitions, such as feminism, which inherently are incapable of telling the true story about how African women have struggled, unaided, to liberate themselves from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy.

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Objective

The objective of this article is to bring to the fore the dynamics of African feminism, womanism, agency and voice using the metaphor of hovering eagle and implications on gender equity so the truths about these variables become clear to the readers. By telling a correct story about African feminism, womanism, agency and voice, the article achieves the objective of laying bare the falsehood in western literature about the power of Africans to liberate themselves from the chains of the ideology of patriarchy. The article reminds contemporary African feminist scholars of their noble task to unpack, and repackage the problematic historical narrative about universality of human rights in order to create a smooth path for the present and future generations towards attainment of gender equality. Overall, readers will appreciate that Africans of all genders who are oppressed by the western ideologies, are in position to overturn the table and re-write their true life stories, especially those concerning resistance to ideological dominance. The article makes it clear that African women, who have specifically suffered oppression within the ambit of both the traditional African and western ideologies of patriarchy are not waiting for liberators from the ‘blue moon’ to set them free. Instead, African women are up in arms and striking hard on the strongholds of the oppressive ideology and breaking it to pieces for the benefit of all humanity.

Review of Related Literature

The African continent has a rich history in terms of women’s struggles for equality. Such struggles, have, historically, however, not been fought under the documented western world paradigms of feminism or gender. Nevertheless, an eagle’s bird’s view over each of the struggles cannot miss to identify differences between the African women’s liberation effort and western world effort in the same direction. These differences come from the fact that what has been known about the African continent, has largely been presented in a distorted form by western scholars (Turyahikayo-Rugyema, 1976; De La Hey, 2014).

In the early stages of European colonization of the African continent, some of the foreign powers met real military resistance from African women. African women resistance to domination did not however, end with colonialism. There are still more examples of such in the early and late post-colonial Africa. The concept of women resisters has been a puzzle to many, largely men. Unable to comprehend how African women could organize fellow women and men to fight the invading western colonial powers, the defeated western powers thought that such women were possessed by spirits. Early African women who resisted western colonialism include, Queen Anna Nzinga, also known as Ana de Sousa Nzinga Mbande, the Queen of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms (occupying what is today the country of Angola in the southern part of Africa) in the 16th and 17th centuries AD, who fought and defeated Portuguese invading forces to her territory (Lewis, 2019). Other African women who opposed colonialism include Julia Kibubura who was a Sub-County Chief of Ibanda, Western Uganda in 1905, when a British colonial Sub-Governor, George Galt was speared to death by natives (Nganwa, 1948; Ocen, 2019). Muhumuza in the Southern Uganda led military resistance movement under the theme of “Nyabingi” (of the many African traditional ways of worshipping God) against the invading western colonial powers (Murindwa-Rutanga, 1994; Uwechia, 2008; Busingye, 2016b). Lately, Alice Lakwena, a female military commander, led and sustained military resistance to the National Resistance Army (now the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces) in the North Eastern and Northern Uganda (Mutaizibwa, 2011). Many believed that she was a cult, not a military resister.

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Apart from organizing and repulsing political oppression, African women have never agreed with men to be lumped together as co-wives in polygamous African marriage relationships. They equally have never agreed to be inherited by the kindred of their late husbands, when they were widowed while still young. They intuitively went into such relationships only to survive the wraths of the ideology of African patriarchy, which would deny them access to their deceased husbands' estate. In the colonial and post-colonial era, the eagle is not resting. The eagle still hovers over Africa, and sees the western systems of feminisms, womanism, and women's agencies negatively impacting on the lives of African women, and without providing a clear solution to their foes. The hovering eagle is informed that what African women are struggling for, is to rid themselves of the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy. They are also now fighting to rid themselves of the western neo-colonialism, which makes their struggles multi-faceted. In the renewed struggles, African women want to be treated as equals with men in marriage relationships, ownership of property, work rights and even in the determination of the right to have or not to have children (Mutume, 2005). They also want to be treated equally in politics (Tamale, 1999). The eagle will not rest until the whole debate as to whether there is a paradigm known as African feminism, African womanism or African women's agency is concluded.

Theorizing African Feminism in Broad Terms

An inquiry into the question whether "African feminism" exists or not, therefore, raises other important questions. Atanga poses a question: "Can and does 'feminism' as such exist in Africa?" "If yes, in what form?" (Atanga, 2013)? Many theories may, indeed, be advanced in a bid to answer these and other questions that may be raised on similar lines. For purposes of this article, the starting point is to examine, what actual problem is the feminism revolution intended to address? More questions do arise from this inquiry though. Is the purpose of feminism to address gender or women's foes created within the conscripts of the ideology of patriarchy? In case it is to address foes inflicted on gender by the ideology of patriarchy, what then constitutes "gender"? In case it is intended to address those that befall women, what then is "womanism"? Indeed, African women critics have had to negotiate between 'feminism', and 'womanism' (Nkealah, 2006). Most important and central to the present discussion is to inquire and interrogate the role of African women in the struggles for equality.

African feminism seems to be an offspring of African womanism. African womanism lies in the uniqueness of African women being able to live within a male oppressing and subjectivating environment, where discrimination against them does not detract them from their fight for self-empowerment. Through their agency, they are able to negotiate their way towards total liberation (Busingye 2016b; Dove, 1998). Within the realm of African womanism, which is essentially a case of African women living within the oppressive African patriarchal culture, women fight a war of survival, taking on the existentialist approach. While not out rightly getting out of the structures constructed upon their lives by the African culture, they still wish their sons to be fearless, but respecting women (Busingye 2016; Dove, 1998). After laying a firm basis for understanding African womanism as a medium through which African women pass to resist African male oppression, and all its patriarchal ideals, it becomes clear that indeed, African feminism, which has a similar agenda with African womanism, exists alongside other perspectives struggling for women liberation from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy.

At its base, feminism is the belief that all people should be treated equally in legal, economic, and social arenas – regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and

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other similar predominant identifying traits (Busingye, 2009a; Marrie, 2020). That being the foundation of feminism, it becomes clear that African womanism, which through its agency seeks to liberate women from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy, is the indigenous form of feminism in Africa—it is African to struggle for equal rights of women and men, much as it is a medium, to resist male oppression derived from the shackles of the ideology of patriarchy. In any case, feminism is a perspective through which the ideology of patriarchy has been interrogated, unpacked and rendered impotent (Bay, 2008; Busingye, 2016b).

Within the current narrative, feminism appears to have overshadowed other perspectives such as “womanism” and “women’s agency”, which are still relevant in whatever feminists are doing. Broadly, feminism is a perspective of theorizing gender issues, largely those concerning women, and gender issues (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017). Within the broader feminism perspective, there are strands of feminisms, largely based on geographical location, such as Western World, the Eastern World and the African continent. Those strands are named according to their geographical locations, but bearing in mind that feminism is feminism full stop (Atanga, 2013). There is, accordingly African feminism, European feminism and Arab feminism, to mention, but a few examples. Each of these feminisms is influenced by the customs and cultures of the people of the particular geographical locations.

The core mission of feminism, whether, African, European, Arabian, is fighting for equal rights of women and men, irrespective of gender roles. It is possible that each strand of feminism (for example, African feminism) has its own vision, purpose, structure, function, nomenclature, theoretical foundation(s), and attendant methodologies (Blay, 2008). Each strand’s functionality largely depends on the oppressed persons’ specific experiences within the tentacles of the ideology of patriarchy. Other factors, such as the level of economic and political development of each society equally play a big role in shaping the functionality of any strand of feminism. African feminism, being intertwined with African womanism, and African women’s agency, is, therefore, a distinct strand of feminism from what broadly feminism is, especially within the globalized world.

The African feminism strand is conditioned by, and operates within the traditional African structures such as family, clan and the broader society as well as the current global trends, which found their way onto the continent via colonialism. The fight initiated by feminism against the blanket argument that biology is destiny, seems to cut across all strands of feminism, irrespective of geographic location. It is now certain that feminists are agreed that “sex” denotes human females and males depending on biological features (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features) while “gender” denotes women and men depending on social factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity) (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017). African feminism, has, in patternship with the broader feminism perspective, of fighting male oppression. It also has similar working ethics and methodological approach on how to deal with the general problem of centres of oppression created and inherent within the ideology of patriarchy. All these media (African feminism, African womanism and African women’s agency) are appropriate methodologies to counter operations of the ideology of the oppressive male figurative supremacy that subjects the female figurative to a subordinate echelon in the decision-making processes arenas concerning women and men.

African feminism, which works hand-in-gloves with African womanism and African women’s agency in the fight for African women’s equal rights with men, is not static, it is dynamic and concretely takes into account emerging needs of the discriminated against,

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especially in the globalized world order. Dynamism in the feminist perspective is justified by the shifting epochs in the feminist struggle, partly owing to gains made in the past and the dynamics of a world rapidly changing as a result of advances in science and technology, new ways of doing politics, economic and environmental changes (Oyekan, 2014). The current challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic regarding oppression of women and discriminating against them in resources allocation can only be handled with the feminism perspective. Increasing levels of domestic violence as a result of women staying at home with their husbands and other male acquaintances, must be challenged using the lenses of feminism. They cannot be addressed within the ambit of the ideology of patriarchy, which must be the one that created them.

Theorizing feminism, therefore, entails a critical stance (openness to varied perspectives and reflexivity are emphasized) that is decidedly political and directed towards social change (Radtke, 2017; 359). The socio-legal underpinnings of the feminist revolution are grounded on the women's victory story over the male domineering society. With a number of men subscribing to feminism perspective, the perception that feminism is a women's vehicle to defy oppression by men is, however, changing. Feminism in its present form is, therefore, a vehicle through which those who are opposed to the domineering perceived powerful ideology of patriarchy take a ride in order to successfully protect the rights of the weak, and discriminated against. True, feminism agenda started with the purpose of empowering and liberating women in the fields of politics, economics and social arenas (Atehwah, 2016). The dynamics in the field, have, however, broadened the scope of feminism to cover broader gender aspects of those discriminated against in society, irrespective of their sexes. Feminism has challenged and confronted social injustices; addressed the intersecting impacts of gender, race, class, culture, nation, religion, sexual orientation, and disability; and drawn attention to countless other compelling instances of inequity and oppression (Williams and Durham, 2015).

After successfully putting women at the level where they are no longer underlings, feminism is now able to deal with broad injustices meted out to all, including the disabled, the elderly and poor, both women and men. The new approach of feminism is justified on the ground that much as in the case of Africa, there are limited racial issues, the black man, though united in his racial plight with the black woman, becomes a foe on gender grounds (Oyekan, 2014). It, however, suffices to note that feminism in Africa has its own specificities due to the problems women and other disadvantaged categories of Africans face within the realm of the ideology of patriarchy. In terms of theoretical underpinnings of the feminist revolution, it is immaterial that the first recorded champions of feminism were whites, from the Western World. What is important for humanity is that all of them have a common 'enemy'—global capitalism (Atanga, 2013).

The argument advanced in this article, however, is that "Africans" are "Africans full stop", and their unique environment, social, political, environmental, and even economics, differ from the rest of the world, much as there is a close interaction between Africans and other parts of the world. Genuinely, therefore, there is African feminism, and it is highlighted in African gender studies, analyses and researches (Bay, 2008; Atanga, 2013; Oyekan; 2014). In its unique form, African feminism, works hand-in-gloves with African womanism and African women's agency to achieve a common goal—equality of women and men in the socio-legal, economic and political spheres.

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Discussion of Findings: Realities and Fallacies

The story of African feminism is as old as an African society. Oppression occasioned on African women by African ideology of Africans, however, does not appear in literature before African colonialism. Within the early days of African colonialism, however, it emerged that African women were living under the domineering rule of men. For example, polygamous marriages were not uncommon in a number of African societies. In the Eastern Africa Case of *R. v. Amkeyo (1917) 7 EALR 14*, Justice Hamilton, observed: “In my opinion, the use of the word “marriage” to describe the relationship entered into between an African native with a woman of his tribe according to tribal custom is a misnomer which has led in the past to a considerable confusion of ideas...The elements of a so-called marriage by native custom differ so materially from the ordinary accepted idea of what constitutes a civilized form of marriage that it is difficult to compare the two.”

The Judge in that case raised two issues. Firstly, he did not consider African marriages based on African custom as marriages, properly so called—in the eyes of the Western World, where he came from. Secondly, he espoused an idea that marriage between a man and a woman should be based on the equality principle—one man one wife, and one wife, one man. The Judge’s views were indeed informed by the Western feminist ideals—equality between women and men in marriage, which had earlier been espoused by Lord Penzance in *Hyde v. Hyde and Woodmansee, [L.R.] 1 P. & D. 130*. In that Case, Lord Penzance clearly stated:

Marriage as understood in Christendom is the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others. A marriage contracted in a country where polygamy is lawful, between a man and a woman who profess a faith which allows polygamy, is not a marriage as understood in Christendom; and although it is a valid marriage by the *lex loci*, and at the time when it was contracted both the man and the woman were single and competent to contract marriage, the English Matrimonial Court will not recognise it as a valid marriage in a suit instituted by one of the parties against the other for the purpose of enforcing matrimonial duties, or obtaining relief for a breach of matrimonial obligations.

The *ratio decidendi* in these two cases reveals in clear terms that Western World feminism is far ahead, at least in theory, than the African feminism revolution in terms of struggles for equal rights of women and men, using marriage as a yardstick. By being in polygamous African marriage relationships, however, African women do not signify their content with the state of affairs, rather, they are ideologically conscripted into the realm of patriarchy and oppressed therein as objects of the men. They are in captivity, from which they cannot escape, if not liberated by their own agency, which works within the realm of African feminism and womanism. One of the ways to escape from the shackles of polygamous marriages is to deceive men that they are contended, whereas not. Their main goal being survival so that they can save the succeeding women generations. From the working mechanisms of African feminism, it is clear that winning a war is not a single day event, it is progressive and like any other wars fought, liberation of Africans oppressed by the ideology of patriarchy shall take such time as it can take to win.

Being only presented as more recent event in the written western literature narratives, does not only misrepresent the actual struggles on the ground, but lumps African women

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struggles together with other strands of feminism, that are not *in tandem* with it in terms of development. Worst of all, written literature about Africa, is based on the misconstrued African reality by modern writers (McCune, 2006). Literature about African feminism and other liberation struggles against the discriminated against and oppressed Africans by the western world, is, unfortunately, also lumped together with the sexualized western strands of feminism that have little or no place in Africa (Nkealah, 2006). Moreover, the terminology “feminism”, cannot appropriately describe Africans’ struggles against oppression, first, to liberate themselves against the shackles of discrimination, oppression and subjectivation by the African patriarchal chains, and secondly to liberate all oppressed Africans, especially by the former colonial masters from without the continent.

In regard to African feminism, within the various African ethnicities, there are words and names, which point to the inimical inequalities between women and men, between men and men and even between women and women in the African societies. In the case of western Uganda, for example, the name “*Tibeingana*” literally translated means, they are not equal (men and men or women and women or women and men. The counter to that is “*Beingana*” literally meaning they are all equal. The name “*Tibeingana*” has its roots in the ideology of patriarchy, while “*Beingana*” is a counter name having ideals of African feminism. In addition, each of these names has gender connotations. Such names are given to signify a gender issue in the family. Girls and boys are not equal, or girls and boys are equal, respectively. Reciting these and other names with similar messages works as a reminder to the women resisters that the war is not yet over—and must be fought until all women and men are equal. That is the reality with African feminism. Fallacies about feminism broadly arise because of the forced interactions between the African continent and the western world—a born child of colonialism.

Within the Western world, women are part and parcel of the white middle class, which jointly oppresses Africans. For example, during the historical African colonial period, there were times when the titular head of England was a Queen. England was one of the most powerful African colonial powers. In that respect, the Queen was the oppressive power to all Africans, women and men. Moreover, within the African perspective, gender relations are always contemplated as framed within other oppressive mechanisms of political, economic or social nature such as racism, colonialism, imperialism, religious fundamentalism or corrupt political systems, among others (Garraalda, 2003). These mechanisms cannot be divorced from European colonialism of Africa, with the implication that they worked hand-in-glove with colonialism to oppress Africans.

At the same time, Western feminism is largely informed by the sexuality politics that aim at mainstreaming sexuality in all aspects of the western woman, making her prey of that kind of mainstreaming (Dixon, 2011). The written literature narratives, indeed, are more recent on the African continent and largely associated with the advent of the slave trade and colonial eras on the continent. Slave trade and colonial rule defiled the virgin African society and forced it to abort its historical values, including the nascent African feminism, womanism and women’s agency. Slave trade and other western imperialistic intrusions of the African continent instead, impregnated the continent with the western adulterated imperialistic semen.

The progeny of the African defiled virgin and the imperialistic semen was a bastard, in African, who would defy whatever would be identified as African in favour of the imperialistic values. The bastard child insists on written evidence of existence of any form of paradigm labelled African. The uniqueness of African feminism, womanism and women’s agency, however, does not reside in their being written, rather it resides in the capability of

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Africans to pass them on from generation to generation, through oral tradition. Oral tradition refers to a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas (Jansen, undated). It is typically contrasted with literacy, with which it can and does interact in myriad ways. Written literature, however, dwarfs oral tradition in size, diversity, and social function (Foley, undated). The oral tradition narrative, is however, gendered, and intended to transmit across generations, the norms of the ideology of patriarchy, which dwarfs those of feminism, in traditional African society. African oral tradition with its inscriptions of the ideology of patriarchy, portrays a woman as the object of a man's happiness, irrespective of what she feels or desires to be. It is possible that there are similarities between the African oral tradition history and the story of international human rights law. Under international (human rights) law, all human beings are regarded as being equals—but is that a correct proposition? Are the westerners and Africans equals, even in simple aspects like economic development?

The project of international (human rights) law is backed by the capitalist western models of production, which seek to level the ground and exploit the subjects of international (human rights) law with ease (Dutt and Rothstein (Eds.), 1957). Moreover, political economy “must first investigate the special laws of each separate stage in the evolution of production and exchange, and only when it has completed this investigation will it be able to establish the few quite general laws which hold good for production and exchange as a whole” (Dutt and Rothstein (Eds.), 1957). In view of the Marxist philosophy, there is no naturally ordained rules of international (human rights) law, and therefore, a blanket project of international (human rights) law, is misleading. There are, however, a few rules of law that can be classified as international in character, only if they have been aptly subjected to scrutiny. In regard to African feminism, the project of international (human rights) law, which champions the universality of human rights paradigm, must be understood and taken up with caution.

Seeking to equate Africans as equals to westerners is not correct by any imagination. It is a fallacy. In the first case, Africans never colonized the westerners, and even never desired to do so. On the contrary and on the negative side of the coin, the westerners, after hatching a human rights abuse scheme, invaded the African continent with a view of weakening the enviable economic, political and social stability on the continent. Brute characterized all the western invasions of the African continent, including the religious arm of the colonialist. The human rights of a slave, or even a former slave or descendant of a slave and a slave owner, a descendant of a slave owner cannot be the same. Even the so called religious notion of equality before God may not wholly be correct.

The project of universal application of international (human rights) law across the globe should not be accepted by African feminists because it is not based on a correct platform. Universal international law cannot start at the point of enslaving Africans on their continent, and when that has failed, colonialism sets in to occupy the space. Slave trade and its successor colonialism had nothing to do with universality of human rights. By analogy, western philosophy of universal international law can be likened to the co-existence of a sheep and a goat in the same environment. Unless the semen of either is genetically manipulated, none can fertilize the other, and none views its neighbour as either female or male. They instead view each other as animals domesticated by the same person, who determines their fate. Based on this analogy, therefore, the African perspective of feminism, remains African and the western feminism remains western. African concept of human rights remains distinct from that of the western world, which to date, through the tentershooks of neo-colonialism still subject Africans to a lower level of humanity—the Third World concept

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or worse off, the least developed continent. In that problematic relationship, African feminism seeks to liberate both women and men from the domineering ideology of western capitalist-patriarchy patternship.

The foregoing analysis, therefore, makes it clear that African feminism is totally different from western feminism, much as there could be some unifying traits in each of them. African feminism remains a distinct and different strand of perspective committed to do justice for the marginalized, not only by the fellow African oppressors, but also by the invaders who came largely from the western world. The value of international (human rights) law in regard to the cause of African feminists, therefore, should be viewed from the perspective of African feminists capability to negotiate for equality with their counterparts, especially, in the United Nations brokered Women's platforms. In the present global dispensation, the United Nations, which is civilizing world power, especially to the non-core members, has the obligation to ensure that the notion of equal human rights is not abused. Sadly, however, the United Nations, as an International Organization, has inherent weaknesses expressed in its internal mechanisms, which may not permit it to do the right thing in favour of the discriminated against, largely the women of the so-called Third World, and in particular, Africa.

Conclusion

The discussion of dynamics of African feminism, womanism, agency and voice using the metaphor of hovering eagle over the African continent has revealed several interesting aspects about feminism broadly, and African feminism in particular. It has clarified that apart from African feminism, there are other very strong mediums which help African women achieve their purpose against the oppressive ideology of patriarchy. African womanism, and women's agency, are equally important mediums with similar objectives as African feminism. Their operative ethics are similar to those of African feminism.

The eagle's story equally makes it clear that much as western feminism and African feminism have more or less the same agenda, their founded on totally different platforms, and their intended goals are equally totally different. Whereas African feminism is founded on the principle of liberating the African woman from the shackles of African patriarchy, western feminism is founded on the politics of the woman's sexual body. Moreover, to an African woman, all westerners are oppressive to all Africans, women and men.

The slave trade and colonial projects that saw African history distorted were not only superintended upon by men. At one time, the Queen of England was at the helm of African colonization! Lastly, any attempts to universalize human rights, especially within the United Nations framework, must be viewed by African women with suspicion. This is largely because western conceptualization of human rights is tainted with the historical oppressive ideals of slave trade and colonization of innocent Africans, all of which were dehumanizing projects against Africans.

Recommendations

Contemporary African feminist scholars should not blink an eye while telling the present and future African generations about the historical western oppressive projects ideologies that are now disguised and sugar coated as universal human rights. By reading this article, African feminist scholars are reminded of their noble task to unpack the historical problematic and oppressive ideology of patriarchy and to enable present and future African generations walk on a path of gender equality. The current underdevelopment of Africans in a resource rich

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environment should particularly be blamed on those who plundered African variable resources, including the continent's fore fathers and mothers who were taken as slaves under the most inhuman and degrading circumstances. Western feminist scholars should join hands with their counterpart African feminist scholars to demand for accountability and reparations from those who are responsible for the untold suffering African women and men go through because of the historical injustices meted to them by the western colonizers, whose policies were implemented through the oppressive capitalist economic exploitative models constructed within the ambit of the ideology of patriarchy. Contemporary African leaders should be the vanguards of promoting gender equity on the African continent. Their talk should be backed by pragmatic actions in favour of gender equity.

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