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Deconstructing African Feminisms: A Philosophical Assessment

by

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Introduction

In order to put into practice a philosophically satisfying African feminism, one that is responsive to the project of decolonisation, and sensitive to the fact that what we understand by Africa and African was “invented” (Okome 2003: 67), it is necessary, in my view, to interrogate and deconstruct existing attempts at developing an African Feminism(s). My approach towards the existing African feminist literature will be an interrogative approach and this approach, for the purpose of this research, is presented as an act of decolonisation. This minor dissertation enacts a decolonisation by means of interrogating existing streams of African feminism. I do this by means of exposing the weaknesses and highlighting the strengths of what I identify as the main streams of African feminism.

Inspired by Tsenay Serequeberhan’s (1998) ‘Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African philosophy’, this minor dissertation interrogates existing contemporary African feminisms. Serequeberhan (1998: 64) argues that the critique of Eurocentrism, (the critical-negative aspect of the discourse of African philosophy) should be aimed at exposing and de-structuring the basic speculative core in the texts of philosophy. In his view (ibid., 64), the responsibility of African philosophers to the future of African philosophy is to reveal, hermeneutically, that which has been hidden¹. I take his injunction seriously, and so this minor dissertation provides a detailed examination of the representatives of what I identify as the main currents in African Feminism. I do so in order to highlight their strengths and provide an analysis of their limitations in the face of the project of decolonisation.

The most important area of domination for colonialism², according to Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986: 16), “was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world”. Furthermore, for Ngugi wa Thiong’o (ibid.), having the power to control one’s culture

¹ In history, literature, institutions and every other societal domain.
² Cambridge Dictionary defines colonization as “the act of sending people to live in and govern another country”. However, in this minor dissertation I will not be looking at or discussing colonial history but I am rather interested in the effects of colonization on African people, cultures and traditions and deolonisation as a response to those effects.
simply means having the power to control their tools for self-definition in relationship to others. He argues that:

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized (ibid.).

In my view, underlying the process of decolonisation is, with reference to Chimalum Nwanko’s argument (in Nzegwu 2001:48), that the West has had a “standard approach to avoid confronting its responsibility of owning up to what it has done in Africa”. This approach has been in the form of explaining away Africa’s history by “continuously finding ways of implicating Africans themselves in the catalogue of tragedies of the epoch” (ibid.). Consequently, the impact of this approach has been the “conflagration of African value systems lit by all forms of invidious and deracinating stances” (ibid., 49).

On this note, decolonisation arises as a response to the effects and on-going consequences of colonialism. According to Chris Saunders (2017:99), decolonisation has its original and prime usage related to the process leading to the ending of colonial rule. However, throughout time, it has been used and applied differently. As such, in this minor dissertation, I consider decolonisation from a Fanonian position as encapsulated in Achille Mbembe’s (2015) ‘Decolonizing knowledge and the Question of the Archive’. He outlines decolonisation as:

[1] An event that could radically redefine native being and open it up to the possibility of becoming a human form rather than a thing;
[2] An historical event in the sense that it could radically redefine native time as the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not yet (ibid.).

Furthermore, Mbembe (2015) maintains that:
Decolonization is the elimination of the gap between image and essence. It is about the "restitution" of the essence to the image so that that which exists can exist in itself and not in something other than itself, something distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy.

Specifically, this minor dissertation aims at deconstructing some contemporary attempts at African feminism(s) and revealing how Western gender categories lie nascent in these African feminisms. I attempt to unearth that which has been tainted and buried by colonialism with regards to African cultures and, in particular, with regards to African notions of gender. The project then is a decolonisation of African feminism(s).

It is important to note that the effects of colonialism did not cease with the end of colonialism. The structures and effects of colonialism still exist, and so decolonisation also needs to be an ongoing process. Given the brutal history of colonialism and having presented the nature of its brutality through Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s words, it is important to note that colonialism affected African cultures and epistemologies to the point that the suffering still continues even post colonialism. Hence, we find ourselves, in a post-colonial world, still trying to fix some of the colonial injustices.

**Significance of the Study**

What is, in my view, fundamentally crucial to this research is the cognizance of the extent to which Western ideas have been imposed on African social categories, as well as the degree to which these ideas inform social developments in contemporary African societies. What is present, as well as what is absent, in the texts I examine, is of significance. Equally important is to note that, in order for decolonisation to take place, there needs to be space for the exploration of the possibility of other ideas that are neither Western nor African that may be useful in developing what could be a decolonised feminism.

It is imperative to note and admit that the reading of the literature that I use, to some extent, may be read through Western lenses and also influenced by the Western
prejudices that inform my perspective, as well as our society today\textsuperscript{3}. As highlighted by Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (1997: 18), the West is often used as the norm against which Africans continue to be measured by others and often by themselves too\textsuperscript{4}. I am of the position that, given the considerable effects of colonialism, including psychological effects, the act of measuring Africans against the West is also often unintended and occurs subconsciously. This is, unfortunately, an on-going trend of Western hegemony in African studies. This view is expressed by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 1) when he argues that “what exists today as conventional ‘philosophy of history’ and academic discourse of history produced within modern universities is still normatively Eurocentric”. In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe (2015: 9), in his description of higher institutions of learning and their curricula in South Africa, highlights an important dilemma within the education system. He states that:

> We all agree that there is something anachronistic, something fundamentally wrong with a number of institutions of higher learning in South Africa. There is something fundamentally cynical when institutions whose character is profoundly ethno-provincial keep masquerading as replicas of Oxford and Cambridge without demonstrating the same productivity as the original places they are mimicking. There is something profoundly wrong when, for instance, syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and Apartheid continue well into the post-Apartheid era. We also agree that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are “Westernised” (ibid., 9).

He further explains the Westernisation of these institutions by stating that:

> They are indeed “Westernized” if all that they aspire to is to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon… a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic

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\textsuperscript{3} Whether, at the end of this minor dissertation, I succeed in stepping outside of the Western lenses is arguable. My aim is to carefully and critically engage the literature in a way that brings me close to objective representation of African concepts, cultures and traditions as possible.

\textsuperscript{4} This exists in academic institutions, in research and the everydayness of Africans.
Mbembe brings to our attention the problem with Western epistemic traditions. He argues: “The problem – because there is a problem indeed – with this tradition is that it has become hegemonic” (ibid., 10). This hegemony also extends to feminism, and African feminism in particular.

Pinkie Mekgwe (2006: 12) notes this when she explores the issue of borders within feminism’s border debate. She contends that “there is a general tendency amongst theorists to speak of feminism and western feminism in particular, as though it were monolithic” (ibid.). This points out clearly, the extension of eurocentrism into feminism. Regardless of this, I strive to expose as far as is possible (in my own situatedness within a context) the prejudices and preconceptions that overtly and covertly appear in the texts I draw upon.

Western feminism has divided its history into three movements: the so-called first, second and third waves of feminism. Some theorists relegate non-Western feminisms to the third wave of feminism. Amanda Lotz (2003: 4), for example, contends that “A more truly feminist branch of third-wave thinking focuses on including the intersection of various oppressions in feminist thought and activism”. She identifies “women-of-colour feminists” as “third-wave feminists” and states that these women have actually used the third-wave identifier longer than any other groups. I separate African feminism from the broader movement of Western feminism, since I contend that the two do not belong in the same category of feminism. The rationale behind this is grounded on the fact that placing African feminism in the third wave of feminism suggests an implicit acceptance of the goals and failures of the former movements of Western feminisms.

Adeolu Oyekan (2014: 2) states that the third wave of feminism began due to the perceived failures of the second wave. Although I am aware that the third wave of feminism is concerned with issues of intersectionality, sexual identities, diversity of women with regards to issues of gender, race, and class, it seems to me that the seemingly “innocent” act of placing African feminisms within the history of western feminism is in fact one that entrenches the colonial frame of mind discussed previously
in this introduction, and so is an act that should be questioned.

**Objective and Motivation**

The purpose of this minor dissertation converges with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s call for epistemic freedom. He attaches urgency to this need for epistemic freedom and autonomy\(^5\). Epistemic freedom for Africans, simply put, is decolonisation. It is “fundamentally about the right to think, theorise, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018: 3). Epistemic freedom, for Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 2), “restores to African people a central position within human history as independent actors”. He argues:

This epistemological concern is fundamentally decolonial. As a people, Africans were always there in human history. They were never creatures of ‘discovery’. Africans were always present (‘presence Africaine’). Africans were never absent. Africa was never a tabula rasa (Dark Continent). Africans always had their own valid, legitimate and useful knowledge systems and education systems (ibid., 2).

Similarly, I endeavour to continue in the struggle of restoring to Africans their place and dignity in the epistemic world.

**Research Outline**

In my analysis of existing forms of African feminism, I draw from a number of African feminist streams of thought. For the purpose of this research, I focus on three streams that I identify as representatives of the development of African feminisms. These are: pre-colonial African feminism\(^6\), womanism or black feminism\(^7\), and critical feminism.

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\(^5\) A counter to epistemic injustice which is as a result of colonialism and apartheid.

\(^6\) A term borrowed from Minna Salami’s blog of MsAfropolitan: [https://www.msafropolitan.com/2017/12/what-is-african-feminism-actually.html](https://www.msafropolitan.com/2017/12/what-is-african-feminism-actually.html)

\(^7\) Within the scope of this research I place womanism and black feminism under the same feminist category mainly because they are both rooted in the exposure of the lived experience of black women (for black
I maintain that the first and second streams suffer from a number of deficiencies, and then I strongly develop and draw upon the third stream of feminism - critical feminism - in order to demonstrate that this stream can be developed in a way that is responsive to the project of decolonization.

The first stream is, in my reading, represented by theorists like Chimamanda Adichie (2014) Simidele Dosekun (2007) and Amina Warsame (2004). These theorists, I show, concentrate their enquiry on the existence of gender oppression in pre-colonial Africa and the resistance and response of this gender oppression as feminism. They attempt to prove the existence of both feminism and feminists in pre-colonial African societies. As a result, they argue that feminism is not un-African, suggesting the existence of gender oppression in pre-colonial Africa. Unlike some African feminists who argue and describe feminism as “a weed that has infiltrated Africa” (Dosekun, 2007: 41), theorists who I call pre-colonial African feminists argue that feminism was not imposed on Africa or on Africans and that feminism can be traced back into indigenous Africa. This claim of the existence of African feminism in precolonial Africa also assumes the existence of gender oppression in pro-colonial Africa. As a result, I classify this group of feminism as ‘Pre-colonial African feminism’.

The second stream that I identify is represented by theorists who point out that sexism, gender identity, class oppression, and racism are closely bound together. Patricia Hill Collins (2000), bell hooks (2000) and Alice Walker (1983) are examples of theorists whom I use to engage black feminism and womanism as feminist categories. This second stream of feminism focuses on issues of race, gender, class and intersectionality (Hill Collins, 2000: 4). Their aim is to differentiate their position from mainstream Western feminism, as well as to resist anti-blackness within feminism (Hill Collins, 2000: 4). I show that this stream’s focus is tracing the intersection of sexism, racism, gender identity, and class oppression from colonial times into the post-colonial era in Africa and the diaspora. Similar to the first stream of African feminism, what I show in this minor dissertation is problematic with this stream is that it engages patriarchy as an assumed characteristic of African societies.
Despite this problem, I show that it does, however, acknowledge the interdependence of women and men, as well as that both men and women of colour suffered from colonialism. I am also interested in knowing to what extent has sexism been imposed on black men. If it is indeed imposed, I am interested in knowing whether the imposition of patriarchy manifests itself in the same way it is presented in the case of Western men. My view is that claims of patriarchal African men and the existence of patriarchy in indigenous Africa are questionable. I do not question these claims from a position of whether sexist practices existed in pre-colonial Africa. Rather, I am interested in such claims from a position of enquiring whether these “sexist” practices are indeed sexist or whether the lens through which they are analysed with is one that has been imposed on Africans. Without completely disregarding this stream of feminism, I suggest that, if we take the project of decolonisation seriously, we need to be cautious of the extent to which Western feminism has and still continues to influence the framework with which African feminisms is constructed. Many African scholars still struggle to distinguish between universals and Western particulars (Oyéwùmi, 1997: 22). Something that suggests a failure to identify that which is Western.

The third stream that I identify takes on the “archeological” work of investigating pre-colonial African gender categories and questioning whether these categories existed as we seem to know them today. I dub this stream ‘critical feminism’, a term which I created in relation to Oyèrónké Oyéwùmi’s ‘historical feminism’. “Historical feminism” - a critical feminist account that is not based on a Western ahistorical construction of gender (Oyéwùmi, 2011: 30) - was coined by Oyéwùmi due to her emphasis of a need for an African feminism that is not based on Western constructions of gender; and also, one that attempts to put aside Western lenses when analyzing African societies (ibid.).

Pre-colonial African feminism is represented by theorists such as Oyèrónké Oyéwùmi (1997, 2002), Nkiru Nzegwu (1994), Femi Nzegwu (2001) and Mojúbàolú Okome (1999). I show that the limitation of the work that has already been done in this stream is that most of the research is focused on the Yorùbá society in Nigeria, and so it could be questioned in terms of its applicability to other African societies. To counter this, I briefly highlight, in the process of investigating the Western categories of
gender in the Yórúbá society, some similarities that Yórúbá culture has to cultures in South Africa. I show that this stream of feminism has significant strengths and could serve as a first step in attempting to construct a robust African feminism - a feminism that speaks to the history, situatedness and lived experiences of African people. I use critical feminism to describe scholars that attempt to critically engage feminism from a standpoint that aims to be independent from Western gender influences. This is a stream of feminism that is currently gaining recognition and as a result, it has not been officially identified in a way that separates it from mainstream African feminism.

I argue that the first category of African feminism, pre-colonial African feminism, assumes the existence of African feminism in pre-colonial Africa without providing a thorough critical analysis of the possibility of an imposed Western gender framework in Africa. With the second category, black feminism, I point out two deficiencies which I refer to as “place weakness” and “time weakness”. I argue that these weaknesses preclude us from including Africans in the black feminist category. As a result, African feminism should not be categorised as black feminism. The last category of feminism will be approached differently from the first two. This is the category that I am most inclined to accept as I think it is a lot more critical and considerate of the history of African people. Also, it is, I show, more careful of avoiding the wholesale acceptance of Western feminist prejudices, as well as the imposed Western gender frameworks, when analysing African cultures and societies. Unlike the first two chapters where I dedicate a section to address my concerns with the feminist categories, in the last chapter I focus on developing the strengths of critical African feminism. I think critical African feminism provides a good foundation of what could be an African feminism that is responsive to the project of decolonisation.

For the sake of the formulation of a decolonised African feminism, I accept Oyéwùmi’s (2011: 30) proposal of the need for a historical Feminism. I argue that African feminism (or Oyéwùmi’s proposed historical feminism) and Western feminism should be separated because they arise from a different point of reference. The most important reason for African feminism to distinguish itself from Western feminism is

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8 This is particularly because I am a South African myself, who is in a good position to share my knowledge of South African cultures and traditions with reference Yorubá culture.
its crucial commitment to the project of decolonisation. In my view, the situatedness of African feminism in the decolonisation project does not allow for African feminism and Western feminism to address patriarchal oppression in the same way. Moreover, I think the difference lies in how these feminisms use and understand of the concept of gender, as well as how gender has developed throughout history. I will show how African feminism and Western feminism understand, use and apply ‘gender’ differently.

In this context, I also contend that Western feminism, African feminism and the contemporary theories of Womanism are essentially different. It is the difference between these feminisms that will assist in setting up the significance of the study of African feminism, its relation to colonialism as well as its effects in Africa. Particularly, the difference between these feminisms will outline how colonialism has and still continues to inform our understanding of gender. I do accept Chandra Mohanty’s (2007: 334) point that Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogenous in its goals, interests and analyses. At the same time, I also accept her claim that “it is possible to trace a coherence of effects that result from the implicit assumption of the West as the primary referent in theory and praxis” (ibid.). There is no denying the fact that the effects of colonialism persist and still affect post-colonial African societies.

Research question

The problems underlying this research are: a) the epistemological injustice committed by the West and its epistemologies on other forms of knowledge, and for the scope of this research, on Africa and its epistemologies; and, b) the appropriation and abuse of the African gender discourse by Western feminist thinkers. The big question really relates to how Africans have found themselves in a position of having accepted patriarchy as part of African culture without realizing and understanding its origins. Also, how is it that patriarchy has become so embedded in African social structures without any critical analysis of pre-colonial African cultures and histories? My simple answer to this question is: colonialism. As a result, I am highly cognizant of the significance of the literature I appeal to, as well as the implications on Africa and its people. I work through this minor dissertation
open to a view similar to Oyèrónké Oyèwùmi’s (2011: 30) - that patriarchy has not always existed in Africa, and neither is it universal. I suggest that a thorough understanding of one’s place and role in the African community will assist Africans to not fall into the vicious cycle of defining and understanding themselves according to Western standards.

**Conceptual Analysis**

In this section, I provide a definitional analysis some of the core concepts of this research: ‘African feminism’, ‘gender and sex’ as well as patriarchy. The reason for this is to build an understanding of and provide an African grounding for these concepts. Also, I want to situate the concepts within an African specific gender framework and also provide a background of how these concepts have been used in the literature and how I will be applying them in this minor dissertation.

**African Feminism**

Feminism is a concept that arose in Europe and America in the late eighteenth century, when women became aware of their oppression (Ebunoluwa, 2009:227). It originates from the Latin word ‘femina’ which describes women’s issues (Ebunoluwa, 2009: 228). According to Oyèwùmi (2003: 1), a distinction must be made between the noun feminism and the adjective feminist. She argues that “feminism usually refers to a historically recent Europe and American social movements founded to struggle for female equality” (ibid.). She maintains that the adjective “feminist” should not be confined to history, as it describes a range of behavior indicating female agency and self-determination (ibid.). As such, the fundamental idea of feminist ideology is that it has its origins in the struggle for women’s rights. This explains why or how is it that the existing theories of feminism revolve around women and their experiences. As such, Dosekun (2007:41) broadly defines feminism as a resistance to patriarchy. According to Sotuns a Ebunoluwa (2009: 227), feminism is concerned with females as both a biological and social category, and it is fundamentally of the idea that the oppression of females is tied to their sexuality. This is often because sexual differences are prevalent in the organization of society and feminists have argued that the way in which these differences are assigned is in such a way that women are treated as
inferior. Thus, generally considered, feminism seeks to highlight the oppression that women face because of their gender (ibid., 227).

Feminism has been understood and referred to differently in many parts of the world and this has made it difficult to have a universal definition that everyone agrees to. For instance, Robin Barrow and Geoffrey Milburn refer to feminism as “a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women”, while J.A. Cuddon defines it as “an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women’s experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature” (in Ebuoluwa, 2009: 227). This suggests that feminism can mean different things to different people. But even without a universally accepted definition of feminism, what feminism means to different people often depends on their historical and socio-political contexts, as well as how the society they belong to use and understand the word ‘woman’. Moreover, what feminism means also varies based on the use and construction of the terms “sex” and “gender” in various societies.

In the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* (2007) it is highlighted that African feminism arises out of the hardcore lived experiences of African women. These experiences also include the lived experiences of African women in the era of Western domination. In the South African context, this would include colonialism and Apartheid alike. The *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* (2007) further states that African feminism also recognizes the struggles for African men to remove structures of dominations. Moreover, it draws the attention of African men to take note of the oppression of women which is essentially different to other generalized form of oppressions (*ibid*).

Glory Gatwiri and Helen McLaren (2016: 267) define African feminism as “a school of thought and a mode of discourse that attempts to understand the multiple complexities and challenges presented by sexism – a derivative of patriarchy, poverty and at time colonialization – faced by the African woman”.

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9 This was a period of segregation in South African that started in 1948 until 1990. According to William Beinart and Saul Dubow (2003: 2) during this period, “many facilities and services—from education and health, to transport and recreation—were progressively restricted and divided on a racial basis” and a series of legislative acts which removed and restricted the rights of ‘non-whites’ in every possible sphere were put in place.
According to the *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* (2007), certain limitations that exist or existed in traditional African societies were reinforced by colonialism, while some were introduced by it. With reference to this, it is my view that the latter is of great significance when it comes to issues of gender in Africa. Specifically, it is my contention that limitations specific to gender in Africa were introduced by colonialism. Contrary to the popular idea (which I can easily be mistaken to be appealing to) that feminism is un-African, I propose open mindedness when dealing with issues of gender and in particular African feminism. Moreover, because of the history of colonialism which has left Africans displaced and with, among many other problems, the problem of patriarchy, Africans find themselves in a position where they need feminism in order to address gender related problems that they face in their societies today. Thus, I propose a kind of an approach to an African feminism that carefully takes into account both the history and situatedness of Africans.

I use the term ‘Western feminism’ in this research in contrast to African feminism to describe a group of feminist scholars that appeal to the ideas of the West. This term is not only used to classify scholars in terms of their geographical situatedness, but also “describes a mindset that has come to be shared worldwide because of the hegemony of the West in scholarship and in the production of knowledge” (Okome, 1999: 5). This means that some African feminists can and will be categorized as Western feminists in their “consciousness, approaches and recommendations” (ibid., 5). Simply put, African feminists are those that are conscious of the effects of colonialism in the African continent and also cautious of the impositions of Western systems of thought on Africans. African feminists should not be quick to infer any African traditional or cultural practice as patriarchal on the basis that it is not reflective of Western ideas nor does it conform to Western gender structures.

**Gender and Sex**

Gender as a feminist concept has been disputed in the literature. The distinction between gender and sex is one that has not been concordant amongst feminists or scholars of gender. As a result, there has been contrasting views about what gender
is and its implications for feminism. According to Judith Butler (1990: 8) the unity of ‘women’ is often invoked in feminism to construct a solidarity of identity, but there has been a split in the feminist subject (woman) by the distinction between sex and gender. The distinction between sex and gender was originally set up to dispute the “biology-is-destiny formulation” and the dispute served the argument that whatever “biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed” (ibid., 8). The simple understanding was that sex is a biological concept while gender was a social constructed of. Oyèwùmi (1997: 8) states that the idea that gender is socially constructed – “that differences between males and females are to be located in social practices, not in biological fact” – is an idea that emerged very early on in the second wave of feminism. This idea became the foundation of much feminism. Oyèwùmi (ibid.) thinks that this idea became attractive in feminist literature because it was interpreted to mean that gender differences were not fixed by nature but rather, were mutually changeable.

In this minor dissertation, my understanding of the concept of gender is similar to Oyèwùmi’s (1997) in her chapter ‘Visualising the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects’. She denounces the sex-gender distinction given and argues that that this distinction rests on a Western idea that privileges the sense of sight over other senses (Oyèwùmi, 1997: 2). According to Oyèwùmi (1997: 2), relative to Yorùbá society (and I think, some other African societies) “the body has an exaggerated presence in the Western conceptualisation of society’. As a result, she argues that it is Eurocentric to use the same view to describe cultures that may privilege other senses (ibid., 3). This then is where the gender problem began in Western societies. The understanding, in the Western context, was that society is inhabited by bodies. However, despite this fact, in European thought, only women were perceived to embodies, whereas men had no bodies – “they were walking minds” (ibid., 6). For Oyèwùmi (1997: 6) this is where the emanation of two social categories: “man of reason” and “woman of the body” were constructed. Even with this construction, Oyèwùmi (1997: 9) argues, sex also has elements of construction and this is because feminist literature that followed thereafter presented sex as the base and gender as the superstructure. The difficulty then, in Western conceptualisation, is that gender cannot exist without sex because the body sits squarely at the base of both these categories (ibid.). If gender is accepted as a social construct, it should follow that other cultural alternatives of what it means
to be a man or woman should also be accepted. However, as Oyéwùmi (1997: 10) points out, “paradoxically, a fundamental assumption of feminist theory is that women’s subordination is universal”. I begin from the position of rejecting this sex-gender distinction as I, similar to Oyéwùmi (1997: 10), accept the view that if indeed gender is a social construct, then it cannot behave the same way across time and space. Oyéwùmi (1997: 10) argues that:

If gender is a social construction, then we must examine the various cultural/architectural sites where it was constructed, and we must acknowledge that variously located actors (aggregates, groups, interested parties) were part of the construction. We must further that if gender is a social construction, then there was a specific time (in different cultural/architectural sites) when it was “constructed” and therefore a time before which it was not. Thus, gender, being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, it is logical to assume that in some societies, gender construction need not have existed at all.

With the objective of this minor dissertation being that of decolonisation, I think it is significant for me to point out the uncritical approach and acceptance of the use of Western lenses in reading indigenous cultures. This view of gender is unconventional but also necessary for a decolonial project.

**Patriarchy**

According to Abeda Sultana (2011: 3) simply refers to the institutionalised system of male dominance. Sultana (2011: 3) defines patriarchy as “a set of social relations between men and women, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women”. She claims that the ideology of patriarchy exaggerates the biological differences between men and women with the aim of making maintaining this dominance of men over women and always making women subordinated to men (*ibid*.). “Patriarchy literally means the rule of the father or the patriarch” (*ibid.*, 2). With regards to the origin of the word, Sultana (2011: 3) claims that traditionalists have
always believed that men were born to dominate while women were born to be subordinate. Other people have challenged this belief by contending that patriarchy is unnatural and that it is man-made and can therefore be changed (ibid.). According to Sultana (2001: 4) it has also been proven that there is no historical or scientific evidence that patriarchy is natural. One of the biggest contenders of the belief that patriarchy is natural has been feminists.
Chapter 1 – Pre-colonial African Feminism

In this chapter, I present a category of feminism which I refer to as pre-colonial African feminism. I show that theorists in this category advocate for the existence of an African feminism in pre-colonial African as well as the existence of patriarchy. I will address two concerns with this particular stream of feminism. The first concern is the lack of a criticalness when reading and analysing feminist literature about Africa. The second concern is drawn from the first and will be highlighting an issue with assuming that the mobilisation of women in pre-colonial Africa was the mobilisation against patriarchy.

The debate of whether feminism is African or not has been going on for some time in the feminist literature. Lilian Lem Atanga (2013: 301) points out that some of the questions that feminist researchers have been trying to answer include questions such as ‘Can and does ‘feminism’ as such exist in Africa?’ and ‘If yes, in what form?’. In demarcating ‘pre-colonial African feminism’ as a feminist category, I am interested in whether an African feminism existed in pre-colonial Africa. As I read it, the literature that focuses on the question of the existence of feminism in pre-colonial Africa is concerned with two things. On the one hand, it is concerned with whether patriarchy existed in indigenous Africa. For instance, the work of Solomon Ademiluka (2018: 349) where he proves “African culture as a patriarchy”. On the other hand, it is concerned with the existence of feminism as a direct response or resistance to patriarchy. For instance, Pontsho Pilane’s (2016) reading of prominent female characters as feminists resisting patriarchy. I call this category of feminism ‘Pre-colonial African feminism’ because it is represented by theorists who argue that feminism is not anti-African and that because of the existence of patriarchy in Africa, feminism existed as a response to gender inequality.

It is particularly difficult to identify pre-colonial African feminists, given that most feminists belonging to this category do not outright claim that feminism existed in indigenous Africa. The way in which they go about this is by highlighting gender inequality in pre-colonial African societies (or in African cultures and traditions) and then identify prominent female characters in indigenous Africa and classify them as examples of feminists fighting against patriarchy. This stream of feminism is
represented by theorists such as Amina Warsame, Simidele Dosekun, Chimamanda Adichie and other authors who maintain that a kind of resistance to patriarchy existed in indigenous Africa. I admit that given the difficulty of identifying pre-colonial African feminists, my classification of some writers as pre-colonial African feminists may be disputable, but, their interpretation of the events that occurred during colonialism suggest that they hold the view that feminism is not anti-African.

Simidele Dosekun (2007) in her paper titled: ‘Defending Feminism in Africa’ argues against the view that feminism or feminists are un-African. She does, however, argue for why feminism has a “necessary role to play on the African continent today” (Dosekun, 2007: 41). Dosekun (2007: 41) refers to the argument that “something or someone is or is not African” as “the discourse of African authenticity”. She argues that this argument is based on an essentialist or a socio-historical10 claim about Africa and finds this kind of argument problematic (ibid.). She argues that:

The notion that something is or is not ‘African’ is essentialist if it rests on the premise that there is an inherently unique place called Africa. It is essentialist if it implies some sort of intrinsic and therefore unchanging African nature or spirit which characterises or indeed defines all things African (ibid.).

Anti-essentialist critiques have dismissed essentialism on the basis that:

Africa is above all a geographical location or space, and even then it is contestable where its boundaries lie; second, the place we only happen to call Africa is very large and culturally diverse, made up of very different peoples, cultures and practices; third, the concept of a singular ‘African People’ or ‘African ‘Culture’ was first invented in the western imagination and through the colonial enterprise (ibid., 42).

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10 Between these two claims, I am most interested in the socio-historical claim. I critically engage this claim in the section dedicated to my reservations with regards to pre-colonial African feminism as a feminist category.
Dosekun (2007: 42) argues that we cannot meaningfully speak of African things, in which case, feminism cannot be dismissed as un-African.

The second claim, that Dosekun brings to our attention, of the argument that feminism is un-African is the socio-historical claim. This is a claim that takes into account African culture, history and tradition. Dosekun (2007: 42) reckons that the argument that feminism in un-African also refers to tradition and culture and she understands this to be the most common meaning that is intended when the argument that feminism is un-African is pronounced. Simply put, Dosekun thinks that when one says that ‘feminism is un-African’ what they actually mean is that ‘feminism is not part of African cultures and traditions’. She contends that this argument actually ignores the fact that all cultures and traditions come from somewhere and that they are always a product of history and as a result, always a product of, and subject to change and contestation (Dosekun, 2007: 42). Dosekun argues that:

If most African cultures have traditionally or historically been patriarchal, and even if most remain so today, this is by no means proof that there have been no indigenous feminisms to match— feminism defined broadly for now as women's resistance to patriarchy. If our societies are predominantly patriarchal, this is evidence only that patriarchy, and not resistance to it, has been hegemonic [...] To really prove that feminism is not African culturally or traditionally speaking, detailed historical and anthropological evidence must be marshalled as proof that it has had no precedents or place in our diverse cultures. And to do so, we must look specifically for feminism and not just at patriarchy, all the more so as the two arguably tend to co-exist, if unevenly, in contestation and in different spaces (ibid., 42).

The above argument suggests an implicit and subtle affirmation of the idea that there is a likelihood that feminism existed in pre-colonial Africa given that cultures and traditions change.
Pontsho Pilane, a columnist in the *Mail and Guardian*\(^{11}\), wrote a column on the 6\(^{th}\) of May 2016 titled ‘Feminism has always been African’. In this column, Pilane (2016) argues that feminism is not un-African and that it existed long before the word even arrived in Africa. Her contention is that feminism in pre-colonial Africa did not manifest itself in the same way we know of it today, but rather, was upheld differently. The point she makes here is that indigenous African feminists had an idea of what patriarchy was and resisted it. Pre-colonial African feminists may have lacked the vocabulary to explain gender oppression, but they knew what it was, in her view.

In a similar vein, Chimamanda Adichie (2014: n.p.) argues that her great-grandmother was a feminist based on the fact that “she ran away from the house of the man she did not want to marry and married the man of her choice, and also, because she spoke up when she felt she was being deprived of land and access because she was female”. Significantly, Adichie (2014) contends that her grandmother did not know the word ‘feminism’ but it does not mean that she was not one.

The same sentiment is shared by Dosekun (2007: 43) when she argues that feminism is a relatively modern term that was coined in Europe in the late 19\(^{th}\) century. She maintains that it is anachronistic to speak of feminism, only if we are referring to the recent history in Africa (*ibid.*). Consequently, she argues that it is then futile to argue over whether African ancestors were feminist or not if feminism is used as a reference to what a few other women in other parts of the world did at a certain moment in their history. Pilane (2016) claims that there were women in pre-colonial Africa who possessed physical, political, spiritual and economic power and for this reason, we cannot dismiss the existence of feminists or feminism in pre-colonial Africa. In the same manner, Dosekun (2007: 44) points out that scholars that are studying the colonial period in Africa have traced the presence of indigenous feminist consciousness in different women’s movements across the African continent. Pilane (2016) makes reference to women such as Nzinga of Angola, Mkabayi of Zululand, Makeda of Ethiopia. Dosekun (2007:44) through the work of Nina Mba and Amina Mama refers to the women’s uprising in Eastern Nigeria in 1929, as well as the radical engagement of a group of women in Egypt in the 1920’s. She further argues that the

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\(^{11}\) A South African weekly newspaper publication.
scarcity of female figures that are politically and radically active could be taken as proof that these were the exception rather than the rule (ibid.). They were an exception because women were accepting of their subordinate position and these few, radical ones, rebelled against the patriarchal system. Furthermore, Dosekun (2007: 43) argues that studies often focus on and mythologise great women in pre-colonial Africa - women who were queens, warriors and traders. She maintains that it could be argued that these women were noteworthy or remembered in the literature because “they were the exception to the general rule of women as subordinates” (ibid. p.43) Such claims are used to suggest that these women mobilised against gender oppression or the unfair treatment of women in African communities. Thus, it can be argued that feminism, as a response to patriarchy, existed in pre-colonial Africa.

Chimamanda Adichie put together a book, a modified version of a talk she delivered in 2012 at TEDxEuston, titled ‘We should all be feminists’. Adichie (2014), in this book, relates some of the stories of when she was growing up in Nigeria. She paints a picture of a patriarchal Nigerian society where boys or men were more valued than girls or women. Similarly, Solomon Ademiluka (2018: 349) argues that in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa in particular, “the male is lord over the female; it is the males will and cultural norms which dominate and legislate”. He further argues that the status of the African woman is not higher at the public level, in the same way that it is not higher in the private level. According to Ademiluka (2018: 351), in traditional community governance, women still play an insignificant role. He argues that women do not make laws which govern the society and they have no say in settling disputes too (ibid., 351). Ademiluka (2018:351) maintains that the gender gap in economic, social and political spheres between men and women already existed prior to colonialism. He contends that colonisation only widened the gap between men and women and did not necessarily create it (ibid., 351). This suggests that gender inequality existed in indigenous Africa even before colonialism. This may also be taken to suggest that resistance (feminism) to gender inequality also existed before colonialism.

Dosekun (2007: 43) argues that it is futile to ask whether the exact same feminist practices existed in the past, but “if, how and why African women historically resisted the conditions that oppressed them as women”. She claims that “if we ask this more question, it seems clear that women—some, if not all—must have resisted oppressive,
patriarchal institutions and customs as and when necessary” (ibid.). Dosekun (ibid.) refers to Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi’s argument that:

Because Africa has some of the oldest civilisations in the world, it has the oldest patriarchies, and therefore the oldest traditions of resistance to patriarchy. To believe otherwise is, to falsely imply that for centuries African women have crossed their arms and accepted being battered and depersonalised by patriarchy.

She uses the above argument to emphasise her claim that feminism is not un-African, and nor did feminism arrive in Africa with colonialism.

Both Adichie (2014) and Ademiluka (2018) blame African cultures for patriarchy in Africa. Adichie (2014) contends that if people blame African cultures for the subordination of women, they need to also understand that culture evolves; and as a result, people may change African cultures in such a way that it values the humanity of women. Similarly, Ademiluka (2018: 349) argues that “patriarchy is very much a part of African life, and is deeply entrenched in the norms, values and customs.” He identifies a process of contracting marriage, in which a man pays the bride price to his wife’s family, as a process whereby the husband pays for the wife to become his property (ibid., 349). For Ademiluka (2018: 349) the act of paying a bride price is perceived as a transfer of the woman’s rights into the family of her husband. Both Adichie and Ademiluka (although Adichie to a lesser extent) put forward a very strong claim for the complete disregard of women in Africa as a result of culture and traditions.

Similarly, the above argument is captured in Amina Warsame’s (2004) book titled: Queens without Crowns: Somaliland Women’s Changing Roles and Peace Building. In this book, Warsame indicates the oppressive patriarchal situations that Somaliland women live in daily. In depicting the changing roles of women in Somaliland, Warsame (2004) uses the case of women in pastoralist Somaliland communities. She indicates the roles of women in pastoralist communities as being generally undermined. According to Warsame (2004: 21), before the dominance of Islam in pastoral Somaliland communities, every member of a family had clear roles and responsibilities within their immediate family. However, the roles were not upheld equally and as a
result, the status that a person had in society depended upon how society perceived their role. Furthermore, Warsame (2004: 24) states that, on the one hand, women in the Somali communities got married very young and single women above the age of twenty were usually stigmatized. On the other hand, men had the freedom to marry whenever they wanted to - some even got married when they much older and that was never seen as a problem. However, it is important to note that for the Somalis there was no gender differentiation, as well as segregation when it came to the home (ibid., 27). This means that every member of the family contributed their share (even though it might have not been equally) towards the family's bread and butter.

The people of Somaliland were dependant, primarily, on livestock and milk for food, and as long as a woman was still married to her husband, they had full rights over animal products such as milk (ibid., 22). However, in the case of divorce, a woman had to return back to her family, leave her children behind and was not entitled to any of the livestock even if she helped take care of them (ibid., 22). One of the Somali sayings indicates just how unacceptable it was for a woman to own anything: “If a woman brings anything, even a pot, break it” (Warsame, 2004: 24). This referred directly to a situation where a woman was not allowed to bring anything with her into her new household. The understanding was that the man must buy everything for his new bride. Also, when it came to decision making, women could, also to a limited extent, only have a say in their households and not in matters concerning society. Regardless of how much work they could contribute even in that limited space, their social status would never reach that of men. However, Warsame (2004: 28) asserts that men would often consult with their wives about societal issues and the women would often give their husbands advice, but this was never publicly acknowledged. The same way that men who were seen doing domestic work in their households never publicly admitted they were and were usually despised by other men (ibid. 28). While women were waiting upon their husbands to return from community gatherings, men as young as sixteen were welcomed in societal decision making. This implies the possibility that a grown woman would have a ‘man’, young enough to be her son, take decisions concerning her society on her behalf.

The importance and respect granted to women in Somaliland emerged as they grew older and bore children, especially male children (Warsame, 2004:29). The Somali
people, similar to many other African cultures, rapidly moved to a point where they value males over females. Ademiluka (2018: 350) points out that “discrimination against girl children is a crucial aspect of African patriarchy”. He argues that:

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a male child is often preferred to a female, the major reason being that girls are perceived as expendable commodities who will eventually be married out to other families to procreate and ensure the survival of the spouse’s lineage by bearing sons (ibid., 350).

According to Warsame (2004: 31) this overvaluing of male children over female children is made evident by celebrations of animal slaughter that are held by families upon hearing that a woman has given birth to a son and not a daughter. This on its own is an act that creates gender differentiation and discrimination from a very early age. Young girls perceive such acts and start internalizing the idea that they are not good enough. As for married women, their only wish is to give birth to a baby boy, so that they can probably be thanked and appreciated by their in-laws. Warsame (2004: 32) quotes one of the poems by a frustrated Somali woman who had regrettably given birth to a daughter:

Why were you born?
Why did you arrive at dusk?
In your place a boy
Would have been welcomed
Sweet dates would have
Been my reward.
The clan would be rejoicing
A lamb would have been slaughtered
For the occasion,
And I would have
Been glorified

Unfortunately, for Somali women, this is the furthest that their womanhood can take them in terms of being glorified and respected. Their womanhood was important to a
point where they could bear sons for the family they were married into, as well to their community.

Adichie (2014) contends that culture is and has always functioned as a preservation of the continuity of a people. She is of the notion that more people should reclaim the word feminism, as her book suggests: ‘We should all be Feminists’, in order to change the African cultural narrative that does not recognise the full humanity of African women (Adichie, 2014).

My reservations

At this point in the minor dissertation, in response to the arguments of the pre-colonial African feminism category that I have set out, I raise two primary concerns. It is important to note that additional reservations will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Chapter 3 is a careful consideration of the theories discussed in both chapter 1 and 2. As such, it is there that I address in depth, some points that are raised in this chapter.

Firstly, I do not think that the pre-colonial feminists succeeded in proving the existence of patriarchy and feminism as a response to patriarchy in indigenous Africa or any of the indigenous African societies. Dosekun (2007) refers to the radical engagement of women in Egypt in the 1920’s, as well as the uprising of Nigerian women in 1929. Both these events occurred during colonialism. As a result, we cannot really use these events as events occurring during or as incidents that are representations of some pre-colonial African societies.

Ademiluka (2018) on the other hand does not provide us with a time period in which the claims of instances of patriarchy existed in Africa. He makes the claim that patriarchy in Africa was not created by colonialism (ibid. p.351), but he does not successfully explain or give particular instances of a patriarchal indigenous Africa. As I stated in the introduction, the analysis of African cultures and traditions requires one to be very critical of the lenses one implicitly or explicitly uses, as well as the prejudices that one may have and eventually impose on one’s analysis of African cultures. As the decolonial scholarship points out “what exists today as conventional ‘philosophy of
history’ and academic discourse of history produced within modern universities is still normatively Eurocentric” (Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018: 1). As a result, as decolonial scholars, we need to be very careful of impositions on and interpretations of African cultures. I share in Nkiru Nzegwu’s problem (noted in Oyéwùmi, 1997: 20) of the rushed characterisation, by African feminists, of indigenous societies as patriarchal without raising the question of the “legitimacy of patriarchy as a valid transcultural category of analysis”. Similarly, the biggest problem of evaluating indigenous cultures on the basis of their cultural other, which is in this case the West, is the misrepresentation of African cultures without presenting their positions (ibid.)

Ademiluka is quite adamant (taken from his diction) that patriarchy is a part of African culture. He argues that “patriarchy is very much a part of African life, and is deeply entrenched in the norms, values and customs” (Ademiluka, 2018: 349) without properly engaging African cultures. Furthermore, Ademiluka reifies African cultures without acknowledging that cultures evolve and that African cultures may not be what we know and think of them to be. I argue that pre-colonial African feminism uncritically accept a Western imposed notion of patriarchy in pre-colonial Africa.

The implication, by pre-colonial African feminists, of the existence of patriarchy in pre-colonial Africa is often imposed from a direct analysis of the African cultures from a Western standpoint. Often, in the literature, African cultures are analysed through Western lenses and that poses a serious problem because African cultures are not analysed for what they are. Moreover, the analyses of African cultures, traditions and histories is often conducted against Western perspectives as well as epistemological frameworks.

The second reservation I have with the pre-colonial African feminism category is the problem of carelessly assuming that women’s mobilisation would have to be mobilisation against patriarchy. Pre-colonial African feminists are, in my reading, too quick to conclude that any female organisation or mobilisation in Africa would have been mobilisation against patriarchy. It seems to me that it may be argued that women who mobilised in African societies were in fact, mobilising against injustices that might not have necessarily been related to patriarchy. I accept Susan Arendt’s (1982:25) argument against Mary Module Kolawole’ view that African languages do not have a synonym for ‘feminism’, but the concept of feminism is captured in the concept of group
action by women. Group action, according to Kolawole (in Arendt, 1982:25) is a concept that is both indigenous and familiar to most indigenous women and is “based on common welfare in social, cultural, economic, religious and political matters”. Arendt (1982:25) claims that she hesitates to argue that “any traditional association of African women was feminist in nature. She argues that:

A feminist organization is more than a mere assembly of women, a feminist organization questions and challenges gender inequalities that oppress and discriminate against women. Not all women’s organizations in Africa pursued and defended women’s rights. Moreover, these organizations did not have the program of transforming gender relationships (ibid. p.25).

I am open to the possibility that these prominent characters of African women were merely just being members of their communities. For instance, some feminist scholars read the character of princess Mkabayi kaJama as a feminist, when in fact, I think, she was not resisting patriarchy but was doing everything in her power to protect and preserve the Kingdom of Zulu people. Mkabayi was the daughter of King Jama kaNdaba of Zulu land. According to Maxwell Shamase (2014:16), oral history portrayed Mkabayi as a callous woman. She was born a twin to princess Mmama in 1750 and their father refused to have them killed following the Zulu tradition that advocated for the killing of twins as it was believed that they brought along bad luck (ibid. p.16). The actions of princess Mkabayi are actions that illustrated the protection of the Zulu monarchy. Amongst other things, Mkabayi courted a woman named Mthaniya for her father who later bore him a son, Senzangakhona (ibid. p.16). She declared herself a regent for her brother after their father passed away and her brother was not yet ready to take over the throne (ibid. p.16). When Senzangakhona became of age to become King, she stepped down from the throne. Unfortunately, Senzangakhona did not live long and his son Shaka succeeded him. When Shaka was accused of abusing power, Mkabayi conspired against him and planned his assassination together with her nephews Dingane and Mhlanga (ibid. p.7). Mkabayi had a preference of Dingane over Mhlanga and because of her desire for Dingane to succeed Shaka, she killed Mhlanga (ibid. p.7). I do not perceive the character of Mkabayi as a character that is upholding feminist values. Neither do I comprehend Mkabayi’s character as one that is responding to patriarchal gendered society.
Mkabayi was a woman that was born into the Zulu royal family and in her actions, one can recognise a woman or princess that was doing everything in her power to protect the Zulu monarchy. She understood the value that comes with being a princess and she sometimes made very difficult decisions in order to protect her father’s kingdom. This is the kind of assumed and imposed patriarchy without any critical analyses that I am concerned about when it comes to the approach and standpoint of pre-colonial African feminists.

It is evident already from the title of Warsame’s (2004) book: Queens without Crowns: Somaliland Women’s Changing Roles and Peace Building that a point is made regarding the direction in which the value of women in Somaliland communities is headed. It is clear from Warsame’s study of Somaliland communities that women are now at a point where they are almost not valued at all. However, the question arises as to whether the role of women in these communities has always been undervalued even in pre-colonial Africa, and whether Warsame is correct in titling her book ‘changing roles’. Interestingly, Warsame alludes to the idea of the insufficiency of African history. She acknowledges that, even with the current state of the roles of women in Somaliland, many folk stories of the Somaliland people portray women as intelligent and wise (Warsame, 2004: 30). Moreover, she draws upon Ahmed Hange in positing that most of the Somali folk stories have females as their principal characters, and this suggests that women enjoyed stronger roles and position in society than they do today (Warsame, 2004: 30). Hange (in Warsame, 2004:30) argues that the predominance of female characters in folk stories could be based on the theory that in the earlier centuries, “the matrilineal lineage was the base upon which the Somali family life rested in earlier periods of the nation’s history”. I find it interesting that scholars who impose feminism on indigenous Africa would rather have prominent female characters in pre-colonial Africa as exceptions and dismiss or choose not to entertain the idea that those women were probably the rule.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the proponents of pre-colonial African feminism advocate for the existence of feminism in pre-colonial Africa through the following approaches: firstly, they maintain that the mobilisation of pre-colonial African women
suggests an existence of patriarchy that these women were resisting. Secondly, they claim that the existence of prominent female characters in pre-colonial Africa should be an indication that feminists existed in pre-colonial Africa. As a result, the claim is that feminism is not anti-African. However, I have argued, in my reservation section, that pre-colonial African feminism is not decolonial in its approach given that it is not critical of Western hegemony on African literature, history and cultures.
Chapter 2 – Black Feminism

In this chapter I place both black feminism and womanism in the same category because of the similarities in their approach to feminism and gender related issues. As such, I proceed by using the terms as synonymous. I admit that there may be substantial differences between the two. However, at face value, to me, the two streams of thought share a lot of similarities, specifically, their history, objectives and struggles.

Black feminism and womanism were both founded by black African American women as a response to the struggles that were faced by black African American women at the time. Alice Walker, the founder of womanism, is often quoted on her metaphorical definition of womanism saying: “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (Walker, 1983: xii). The point that Walker makes is one that suggests a close relationship between womanism and black feminism as feminist categories and it makes sense to treat these two categories as exceptionally similar. Walker highlights the similarity between two feminist categories in her definition of womanism. Walker defines a womanist as

a “black feminist or feminist of colour” who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or nonsexually, appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength and is committed to “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (Izgarjan and Markov, 2017: 305).

Aleksandra Izgarjan and Slobodanka Markov (2017:305) maintain that Walker uses purple to set up womanism apart from feminism as it is a stronger shade of purple, a shade that is often described as the royal colour. Furthermore, the colour lavender is “also associated with the notion that feminism is related more to white women than coloured” (Izgarjan and Markov, 2017:305). This already helps us to establish the distinctness of Womanism from contemporary feminism which is thought of as white or Western in its origin. According to Izgarjan and Markov (2017:305) feminism (read as Western feminism) “pales in comparison by being associated to weaker lavender”.
The point here is that feminism is no longer appealing, hence its association with a faded colour of purple. This perhaps explains why some African American women took it upon themselves to develop a kind of feminism that they could relate to.

Womanism or Black feminism as a feminist category is often associated with theorists like Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and Toni Morrison. This feminist category has been understood as a social critical theory which developed from African American women’s experience with oppression, and in particular, their experience with racism. Race is one of the crucial categories that black African American women used to set themselves apart from mainstream feminism (Hill Collins, 2000:4). The theory was particularly derived from and through the experiences of black African American women with slavery. The majority of black African Americans were brought to the United States (U.S.) as slaves. Also, throughout history, the burden of slavery, which as a result of their race, has been used to define them.

The categorisation of people in America during slavery was dependant on factors such as race, gender, sex, nation, age and ethnicity (Hill Collins, 2000: 4). Moreover, according to Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 4), these factors also constituted major forms of oppression against African Americans and, against black African American people in particular. Consequently, Black feminist thought, as an ideology was born out of the realization by African American women that they were being excluded from mainstream feminist movements. There was, on the one hand the issue of exclusion, but also, on the other hand, proponents of Western feminist discourse were, as Hill Collins (2000: 5) maintains, paying lip service to the need for diversity within the feminist movement. Even the most competent and influential U.S. white women researchers and scholars in the feminist movement acknowledged the need for diversity, yet they omit women of colour from their own work (ibid., 8).

There has been an outcry from African American women about the way in which Western feminism deals with issues affecting them as well as the representation of their lived experiences within feminism. Izgarjan and Markov (2017: 306) argue that, although the initial goal of feminism was to win equality and to end the suffrage for women, it was already clear already in the nineteenth century that there were two separate movements. White women outright refused to support black women in their
struggle, nor did they acknowledge, in their writings or protests, the suffering of black women. Hill Collins (2000: 5) contends that ironically, U.S. and European studies have challenged the nature of the hegemonic ideas of elite white men, while the very same studies, on the other hand, suppress the ideas of black women. She argues that Western feminist scholars have resisted having black women as colleagues and equal counterparts, as a result, this suppression of black women had a very conspicuous influence on feminism (*ibid.*, 6). In particular, the suppression of black African American women influenced their relationship with feminism.

It is both mine and Hill Collins’ (*ibid.*, 8) belief that this ongoing suppression of African American women directly fosters a kind of activism that is very particular to African American women. It is an activism that seeks to prioritise issues of race, class and gender as well as to highlight a point of intersectionality for these issues. For Hill Collins (*ibid.*) the knowledge gained by African American women at “intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender provides the stimulus for crafting and passing on the subjugated knowledge of Black women’s critical social theory”. This then becomes the theory we have come to know as Black feminism. It exhibits itself as an activism of resistance against the ongoing suppression and onslaught of black African American women. Black feminist activism transcended the level of basic theorising and manifests itself through activities such as poetry, music, dance and art.

The suppression of black women in America did not only come from their white feminist counterparts, however, it is a suppression that resonated with black American men too. bell hooks, in her 1982 book titled *Ain’t I A Woman* captured this ordeal of the black on black oppression very well. She argues that black women and men equally participated in the struggle for survival in America; they equally participated in the struggle to end racism, but however, did not equally advocate and participate to end sexism (hooks, 1982:4). They rallied together fighting for political rights, however, “white men supported giving black men the vote to right while leaving black women disenfranchised” (*ibid.* p.3). This was endorsed and thought of as “one hurdle crossed” by black men, completely forgetting that this was meant to be equality for all. Sojourner Truth (in hooks, 1982:4) anticipated this patriarchal victory for black men and its consequences for black women when she made a public statement that was meant to
remind America that sexist oppression as is racial oppression is a real threat to the freedom of black women. Truth proclaimed (in hooks, 1982: 4):

There is a great stir about coloured men getting their rights, but not a word about the coloured woman; and if coloured men get their rights, and not coloured women theirs, you see the coloured men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before.

Unfortunately, even after this proclamation together with the protests that by both white and black women, black men were still granted the right to vote. The very same black men could not acknowledge sexist oppression, they executed it on black women themselves too. According to hooks (1982: 5):

Black male activists publicly acknowledged that they expected black women involved in the movement to conform to a sexist role pattern. They demanded that black women assume a subservient position. Black women were told that they should take care of household needs and breed warriors for the revolution.

While some black women succumbed to the demands of black men regarding their positions in the struggle, some strongly resisted this. What had started as a movement to free all black people from oppression quickly became a movement with its primary goal being the “establishment of black male patriarchy” (ibid., 5). The fact that black women were suffering from both racism and sexism seemed insignificant to black men and to some extent, left black women deprived of voicing their concerns of sexism freely within the black movement, nor could they raise them within the white feminist movement either because they were not welcomed. hooks (1982: 7) maintains that black women in America is the only group that has ever had their identity socialised out of existence. She argues that black women are “rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group "women" in this culture". When black people are spoken about, the focus tends to be on black men and when women are spoken about, the focus tends to be white women (ibid. ). Black women’s existence is always consumed in the categorisation of other social groups without receiving the necessary attention they deserve. As a result, black
women, as it were, could not associate themselves with white women given the clear racism of the rights they advocated for.

According to Izgarjan and Markov (2017:306), white women in the South built their ego by oppressing black women who were at the bottom of the social ladder. White women’s refusal of the basic rights of black women, the pure disrespect and rejection of their humanity is also captured in Walker’s (1983) writings of her mother’s southern experience in Georgia. Walker’s mother went to the distribution centre to collect flour that was distributed by the Red Cross. Upon presenting her voucher for the collection of the flour, she was confronted by a white woman “who looked her up and down with marked anger and envy” (ibid. p.15). This is how the conversation goes:

“What’d you come up here for?” the woman asked
“For some flour”, said my mother, presenting her voucher
“Humph”, said the woman looking at her more closely and with unconcealed fury.
“Anybody dressed up as good as you don’t need to come here begging for food”
“I ain’t begging, said my mother; the government is giving away flour to those that need it, and I need it. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t. And these clothes I’m wearing was given to me”
But the woman had already turned to the next person in line, saying over her shoulder to the white man who was behind the counter with her, “The gall of niggers coming in here dressed than me!”
This thought seemed to make her angrier still and my mother, pulling three of her small children behind her and crying from humiliation, walked sadly back into the street (Walker 1983:16).

The problem here is with the fact that the black woman appeared, in the way she was dressed, as though she might be a ‘better’ black and the white woman took offence and chose not to give the black woman flour. The white woman prioritised the fact that the black woman dressed better than her over the fact that she needed the flour in order to feed her children. The white woman was putting the black woman in her place; a place where she is below her and not better than her. How then, under these
circumstances, does one think white women, in their feminist movement were fighting for equality of all women? The equality of all women in this America was impossible. Race was as much an issue for white women as it was for white men.

William O’Neill’s book *Everyone Was Brave* (in hooks, 1982: 7), highlights clearly the racism of white feminist women. He contends that white women were strongly against white men supporting black men’s suffrage. In fighting for women’s rights, it was clear that white women could not understand how is it that black men were given the right before they could even have that right. O’Neill writes:

Their shocked disbelief that men would so humiliate them by supporting votes for Negroes but not for women demonstrated the limits of their sympathy for black men, even as it drove these former allies further apart (*ibid.*).

hooks (1982: 7) argues that this passage fails to accurately capture the racial and sexual differentiation that is responsible for the exclusion of black women. In this passage, the word ‘men’ is, in fact, referring to ‘white men’, while the word ‘women’ is only referring to ‘white women’ (*ibid.*). According to Valerie Bryson (2003: 227), a very important aspect of the privilege of white women has been their ability to assume that when they are talking about themselves, they are, in fact, talking about all women. There is a clear separation and exclusion of black women from other socially categorised groups, which, as a result, leaves them displaced given that they are not accepted, nor do they belong, in any of these groups.

This continuous onslaught of black women in America eventually led them to create a kind of movement that is sympathetic to both their struggle and lived experience. Izgarjan and Markov (2017: 308) maintain that “womanism reflected the decision of coloured women to clearly state their objections to such an exclusive position of white feminists and to create a paradigm which would incorporate values important to them”. Black feminism became a theory that strongly rejected mainstream feminism and completely dissociated itself from it. Womanists, according to Izgarjan and Markov (2017: 308), “wanted to decenter white feminists and challenge the ‘normality of their
perspective”. As a response to oppression and exclusion, Izgarjan and Markov (2017: 309) argue that

Womanism grew from an answer to the exclusionary practices of feminism into a larger form of political activism and became a tool for coloured women with which they could not only challenge policies which marginalized them, but more importantly, provide the framework for the empowerment of coloured women and women from ethnic minorities all over the world.

Moreover, womanism presented itself as an alternative to the dominant feminist models while retrieving the submerged history which led to the transformation of the already existing norms as well as the broadening of traditional ideas (ibid.). It became quite clear that black feminism does not want to be included in mainstream feminism on existing terms but rather, wanted to deconstruct feminism in order to construct a kind of feminism that accommodates issues that affect black American women.

According to Bryson (2003: 229), when analysing the suffrage of black women, one cannot overlook and take for granted the intersectionality and interdependence of the nature of their oppression. A black feminist is one that realises that race, class and gender cannot be isolated when dealing with and addressing the oppression of black women. Unlike white feminism, black feminism does not only concentrate on gender inequality. Izgarjan and Markov (2017: 309) maintain that black women's analysis of the interlocking and interdependent nature of the oppression they experience has “constituted a paradigm shift in feminist understanding”. This paradigm shift placed African American women and other excluded groups in the centre of analysis, whilst highlighting the intersectionality of race, class and gender which enabled awareness of other systems of oppression (Bryson, 2003: 230). This category of feminism opened itself up to be undertaken by other marginalised social groups. Women in Latin America, as well as other in other Third World countries started embracing womanism since it gave them tools to deal with and confront different forms of oppression (ibid.). Examples here include theorists such as Maria Lugones and Rita Segato who started embracing black feminism as a critical theory and using it to explain their gendered conditions.
My reservations

In this section I point out two primary weaknesses that I identify as emerging with black feminism as a category of feminism. I acknowledge the strengths of black feminism, with one of them being that it is a well put response to the issues that black women were facing in America. Black feminism, from both a theoretical as well as a practical standpoint, has strong arguments that help feminists understand the conditions of oppression for black African American women during slavery. Also, it is a theory that can help feminists understand the intersectionality of issues such as race, class and gender. Black feminism is a theory that began in America, following its history of and encounter with slavery. Black African women, after having been excluded by white women in the feminist movement on the one hand and not receiving support from black men on the other, decided to respond to this segregation by creating a theory that will be sympathetic to their experiences.

Despite this, however, I argue that black feminism does not form an adequate response to the problems faced by African women in Africa. I use short-hand appellations to identify these two weaknesses: I refer to them as “place weakness” and “time weakness”. I acknowledge that there may be more weaknesses with this category, but I reserve a discussion of other weaknesses for another occasion due to space constraints.

My first point of contention with this category - “place weakness” - is that, despite its attempt to be inclusionary, Black feminism was created as a response to an exclusion that was particular to black African American women. Black feminism focuses on and is a response to the issues that were facing women of a particular place. Its initial point of departure is one that addresses the issues that black women faced in America. This is not to say that black African American women’s experiences are not similar to experiences of any other groups of people in the world. However, it is important to note that one creates responses that address one’s own particular situation. As a result, if anyone is to respond to issues faced by African women, they will need to come up with a response that addresses the particular situation of African women. I admit that womanism and black feminism provide a good starting point in terms of
moving away from the white feminist movement. It helped enable women who have been marginalised gather around a movement which expressed their concerns - concerns which were different from the concerns of white feminists from economically developed countries (Izgarjan and Markov, 2017: 311). However, my view is that womanism cannot clearly capture the experiences of marginalised women from other parts of the world, particularly, in this case, African women. This is specifically because the history of African American women is so different to that of African women on the African continent. History is as important as the present situatedness of a people. In order for people to understand their struggles, they need to do so from a position that takes into account their history and lived experiences. A just response or reaction to gender oppression in Africa would be a response that is cautious and critical of African histories. Consequently, if we accept that feminism as a response or reaction to gender oppression, I think we should also accept that a feminism that is responding to problems in Africa should be a kind of feminism that takes into account the history of Africa.

Secondly, as open, inclusionary and accommodating as womanism or black feminism may seem to be, its timeline only begins during slavery in America. This is what I refer to as “time weakness”. Black feminism does not critically engage the pre-slavery history and existence of African women or people. As hooks (1982:15) makes it clear, black feminism is a response to the retrospective examination that dates back to the experience of the black female slave in which sexism is considered as large an oppressive force as racism was in the lives of black women. As a result, womanism and black feminist theory does not, in my view, provide an insight into the history of indigenous Africans which then leads me to conclude that womanism cannot be presented as an alternative to western feminism for African women.

Two significant things arise when we talk about the exclusion of black or African women from mainstream Western feminism. Firstly, black women have been excluded from Western feminism based on race. Secondly, the exclusion included, not only the rejection to participate in the feminist movement, but also the rejection of the double oppression of race and gender that black women were experiencing. Womanism denounced the exclusionary perception and practice of Western feminism and pursued a kind of feminism that was inclusionary. However, as I have shown,
womanism, in its very attempt to be inclusive, is also obliterating diversity. I acknowledge womanism’s emphasis on diversity, as well as its attempt to not present women as homogenous. Nonetheless, in my view, the experience of African American women cannot serve as a basis point for an African feminism.

It may be objected that my discussion of womanism has neglected to acknowledge that there has been a significant development in this movement: Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) coined the term Africana Womanism in order to describe an alternative to Black feminism, African feminism, Womanism and Western Feminism. She characterises it like this:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanism (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 24)

She notes explicitly that it is not Walker's Womanism. "The Africana womanist is not to be confused with Alice Walker's "womanist" (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Like its Western African American counterpart, Africana Womanism has as its premise, inclusion. However, it also takes into account the experiences and struggles of all African women both on the continent and those living in other countries and it also includes children and African males (Hudson-Weems, 2017). I think that what is necessary is a kind of feminism that gives the necessary attention to African women in the African content who still concede and relate to the indigenous African practices. Africans deserve the necessary attention that takes heed of their particular experiences without glossing over issues that are definitive of what it means to be African.
Most importantly, it differs from Walkers’ concept of Womanism in that it tackles colonialism as a shared history between the females and males of Africa (Hudson-Weems, 2004). However, its focus, similar to that of Walkers womanism, is during colonialism. Hudson-Weems’ womanism also does not provide an insight into pre-colonial African societies.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that black feminism does not reliably represent the struggle of African women in the African continent. I presented two primary weaknesses with this category – ‘time weakness’ and ‘place weakness’. Consequently, I argue that including African women in the black feminism category would be, in a sense, defying the project of decolonisation. I contend that given the history that has excluded African women and denied them recognition, African women need to be given the necessary attention in order for the representation of their histories and lived experiences to be accurate. Black feminism is not cognisant of the pre-colonial period in the African continent, neither is cognisant of gender issues that are particular to African women, as such, black feminism cannot be used as a foundation of African feminism.
Chapter 3 – Critical African Feminism

Critical African feminism is a stream of African feminists that are critical of the use and effects of Western gender frameworks on African feminism. This category of feminism is critical of and denounce the Western hegemonic perspectives on gender within African literature. Feminists working in this stream question the literature on African people and undertake unconventional approaches to issues of gender and attempt to paint a picture that is different to one that exists in the literature about African people and their cultures. In a sense, critical African feminists attempt to salvage the tainted image of African people and, in particular, the image of African women. I engage this category of feminism as a one that could provide a critical foundation of what African feminism should look like. Given that critical African feminists are concerned with critically analysing and deconstructing the feminist literature on African people, I use this approach to expose and highlight some of the important elements of feminism that scholars of African feminism should be wary about. One of the ways in which critical African feminists do this, is by showing counter-situations of pre-colonial African women who would be (according to contemporary feminism) be considered feminists when, in fact, those women were just living their lives.

The image of an African woman has been tainted throughout history. This is evident in the literature, media and in society. For Mojúbàolú Okome (1999: 2), in mainstream feminist writings African women tend to be portrayed as “confused, powerless and unable to determine for themselves both the changes needed in their lives and the means to construct these changes”. Western feminists act like superiors of knowledge; “they define relevant issues for African women, how these issues ought to be promoted and pursued and what the end result should be” (ibid.). Okome (ibid.) characterises Western feminism discourse on African women as what she calls reformist feminist evangelism. She maintains that the discourse replicates the missionary evangelism of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century colonialism, missionaries and any other attempts of exploring brutally colonised Africa. A similar notion of Africa’s powerless women is one of the African continent as a dark continent in need of the enlightenment of the West. This idea still permeates secular thought, Western discourse, art and even (as I have shown in the previous sections)
writings on African feminism. Okome (1999: 3) highlights an interesting parallel between the activities of colonialist missionaries in African and contemporary feminists, she argues that:

First, both groups actively prospect for converts through widespread proselytization that rejects all other sources of knowledge as illegitimate and inferior. Second, Western trends, phenomena and ideologies are idealized as both modern and desirable. Indeed, they are presented as the only pool from which viable solutions to human problems should be drawn.

As a result, it is easy to relegate African traditional practices and institutions such as marriage, polygyny, and circumcision to the realm of the patriarchal, given that they are judged against Western norms which are often taken as the universal standard. Okome (1999: 3), for example, contends that “practices such as polygyny continue to be drawn out as a symbol of male domination in feminist literature”. Furthermore, she highlights the possibility (as it has been done) of qualifying female circumcision as an imposition by men on women in order to keep them celibate as well as to own them, all this without really understanding and exploring the cultures and traditions concerned to figure out reasons why people do what they do (ibid.). Yet, as Oyéwúmi (2003:25) points out, in current as well as historic African studies, the “creation, constitution and production of knowledge” remains dominated by the West and this resulted in the perpetuation of certain myths about Africa. This is a view similar to the one held by Taiwo (2003: 53) when he argues that when it comes to the relation of Africa men and women, Western feminists stand in the same position as their male counterparts do.

The use and application of Western frameworks is easy to overlook, especially considering that in fact most African scholars themselves have been trained within colonial structures. Over and above this, Western education is still the most sought after. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 8) thinks that this explains why “African scholars continue to seek affirmation and validation of their knowledge from Europe and North America”. He argues:
This affirmation and validation take the form of publication in the so-called international, high-impact and peer-reviewed journals. Europe and North America constitute the ‘international’ and the rest of the world is ‘local’. Consequently, international, high-impact and peer-reviewed journals, and internationally respected publishing houses and presses are those located in Europe and North America. Highly ranked universities are located in Europe and North America. Taken together, these realities confirm the existence of epistemic hegemony (ibid.).

Much the same as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Oyewumi (1997: 22) argues that:

At the core of the problem is the way in which business is conducted in the knowledge-producing institutions; the way in which the foundational questions that inform research are generated in the West; the way in which theories and concepts are generated from Western experiences; and the way scholars have to work within disciplines, many of which were constituted to establish dominance over Africa and all of which have logics of their own quite distinct from questions about the social identity of scholars.

I concur with the idea that African scholars often fail to interrogate these social phenomena, but rather embrace and impose Western social constructs on African social systems in their attempt to present Africa in light of the West (Apusigah, 2008: 28). In relation to gender and feminism, Femi Nzegwu (2001: 48) notes this clearly when she argues that

despite the 40 years of restoring African independence, European colonial definitions of gender in Africa still constitute the basis upon which policies affecting African society are conceived, planned and implemented, both by foreign as well as vast governmental/institutional structures.

This suggests a rather deeper rooting of the use and understanding of the concept of gender, particularly by and for Africa(ns). Undeniably so, colonial structures still inform
a lot of African social institutions and considering Nzegwu’s claim that, in fact, these institutions appeal to colonial definitions of gender, I think this has far reaching implications for African people. It implies a continued hegemony of the West in Africa which has carried over into post-colonialism; into independence; into democracy. Moreover, it has an implication that a European conception of gender informs much of Africa’s policies which should be helping to redress effects of colonialism in the first place.

According to Oyewumi (2003: 25) in order for one to investigate how gender has been constructed in contemporary African communities, one would first have to examine the role that the West has played in impacting and shaping African societies. She argues that the examination has to be done not only because most African societies came under the European rule in the late nineteenth century, but also because there still is a continued dominance of the West in the production of knowledge (ibid.). As such, it is essential for scholars of African studies, particularly of African feminism, to realize and not take for granted the fact that all African people still suffer the effects of colonialism.

Femi Nzegwu (2001) provides compelling colonial definitions and interpretations of gender and the portrayal of African women in the literature from several authors. She contends that “the European colonial typecast of the status of the African woman in her society is encoded within a retrograde spectrum – ranging from male dominance to total and complete female subordination!” (Femi Nzegwu, 2001: 50). She makes an observation of the contemporary literature by drawing from authors like E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Kathleen Frank and Marie Umeh to highlight the point that for Africans the struggle for freedom is very complex and the misrepresentation of African women is at the centre of this complexity (ibid., 52). For instance, Marie Umeh is quoted arguing, in her review of Buchi Emecheta’s *Double Yoke*, that:

The choices available to the possibilities of African women’s liberation are fraught with immense difficulties: In order to be liberated and fulfilled as a woman she must renounce her African identity because of the inherent sexism of many traditional African societies. Or, if she wishes
to cherish and affirm her “Africanness” she must renounce her claims to feminine independence and self-determination (*ibid.*, 52).

In addition, Kathleen Frank is quoted arguing, in her discussion of *One is Enough, So Long a Letter,* and *Double Yoke,* that:

> These novels embrace the solution of a world without men: man is the enemy, the exploiter and oppressor. Given the historically established and culturally sanctioned sexism of African society, there is no possibility of a compromise, or even truce with the enemy (*ibid.*, 51).

The two above quotes draw our attention to the kinds of conclusions that have been reached in literature when it comes to Africans and, in particular, with regards to African women. Unfortunately, this kind of thinking about Africans has permeated contemporary literature. According to Femi Nzegwu (2001: 49) African people have been described and labelled as ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’, ‘savage’ and ‘backward’. This, in a way, suggests an inherent need for Africans to be saved from themselves by the “great” West as the saviour. For Femi Nzegwu (2001: 49), “an inevitable disturbing outcome of this scholarship is of course that it provides contemporary society (particularly in the Western World) with the ‘knowledge base’ to define and interact with the African humanity”. Given that this already comes from a misinformed knowledge base, it goes without saying that the entire knowledge that comes out of this scholarship will be completely misinformed.

African feminists should be cautious of the epistemic frameworks they appeal to when investigating traditional African cultures and practices. It is a known fact that Africa (pre-colonial, colonial and to some extent post-colonial) has exercised an oral tradition and that has made it very difficult for anyone attempting to investigate African cultures and traditions. However, this does not imply that the investigation cannot or should not be attempted. Agnes Apusigah (2008: 23) states that “in this era of growing new right thinking and counter resistance liberatory praxis, post-colonialists are challenged to strengthen their politics and re/invent their analytical tools in ways that can facilitate effective contestation of the threats posed by anti-liberatory forces”. 


Similarly, I maintain that anyone who claims to undertake the task of decolonisation has a duty to unearth all that we think we know and reveal what has not been realised. Dosekun (2007: 43), for instance, advances Bisi Adeyele-Fayemi’s argument that “because Africa has the oldest civilisations in the world, it has the oldest patriarchies and therefore, the oldest traditions of resistance to patriarchy”. I do not see how this logically follows, and this is simply because traditional African civilisations are not the same as colonial civilisations. Again, patriarchy is not dependent on civilisation, nor does civilisation imply the existence of patriarchy. Furthermore, she highlights Amina Mama’s claim that the argument that feminism is un-African implies that “the ‘real’ African woman is content with her subordinate position as wife, mother and beast of burden” (ibid., 43). I take this as an actual example of the application of a Western gender framework and thus a misrepresenting of African cultures and traditions. The idea that feminism is un-African does not suggest, in any way, an acceptance of some sort of subordination of African women.

**What Woman?**

In this section, I interrogate the conception of “woman” as it appears in the literature of scholars that I classify as critical African feminists. The idea that emerges from these scholars, in my reading, suggests that there is no “woman”, in the African context that Western feminism is referring to. They establish, as illustrated in the previous section of this chapter, that the West has misrepresented Africa and its people, and in particular, African women. They condemn the idea of ‘Africa in need of a saviour’ and propound what I contend is a more accurate and thorough representation of African people, their cultures, and traditions. Therefore, the response from these scholars, one might simply put it, is ‘what woman, in the African continent, is Western feminism referring to?’, hence the title section: ‘what woman?’.

According to Signe Arnfred (2011: 186) the notion of gender – the relation between male domination and female subordination - was brought along with the European colonial powers and was supported by Christianity. She argues that it has been understood through its natural implications that lie on the biological difference between men and women which has been taken to suggest that women are naturally
subordinated to men (ibid.). Arnfred (2011: 186) makes reference to Oyéwùmi (1997) in her argument that it is only under colonialism that countries such as Nigeria and Mozambique started undermining the authorities of female chiefs. If the practice of colonial gender-based politics and public participation is a direct reflection of a Western culture that does not view women as equal to men, then it seems reasonable to posit that the idea of female subordination is one that was imposed on Africans.

Oyéwùmi (1997: 124) argues that for African females, unlike African males, “colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination”. She posits that in the process, females were reduced to “women” and this was based on their anatomy which led them to be considered incompetent to occupy leadership roles (ibid.). According to Oyéwùmi (1997: xi), common ideas in Western feminism revolve around the idea that the conception of ‘woman’ is one that is pre-culturally fixed and universal and also, the notion of ‘gender’ as a fundamental principle in organising societies. Similarly, Arnfred (2011: 187) argues that “Western epistemology is concerned with unambiguous bodies”. She maintains that in the Western culture, bodies should either be male or female and if they happen to be something else, they need to be corrected because the gender dichotomy is justified by the very same bodies (ibid.). This shows the importance that lies in one’s physicality as a human being in Western culture. Western culture values the human body to the extent that its societies are structured based on bodily distinctions.

Oyéwùmi (1997: 1) claims that “the idea that biology is destiny – or, better still, destiny is biology – has been a staple of Western thought for centuries”. She argues that “in the West, biological explanations appear to be especially privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race, or class” (ibid.). She contends that “those who are different from those in positions of power are seen as ‘genetically inferior and this, in turn, is used to account for their disadvantaged social positions’ (ibid.). The kind of society that arise from this conception, according to Oyéwùmi (1997:1), is that “society is constituted by bodies and as bodies – male bodies, female bodies, Jewish bodies, Aryan bodies, black bodies, white bodies, rich bodies, poor bodies. The point made here is that “the body is given a logic of its own” and that by just looking at it one can tell a person’s beliefs and social position or lack thereof” (ibid.). This is how the
body has been understood and made sense of in the West and history can also attest to this. This is the kind of thinking that was used during the colonial conquest.

The thinking behind colonialism was that Africans needed some sort of civilization and for many years, colonizers tried by all means to prove themselves superior to Africans. Research was done to prove the size and shape of African people’s bodies somehow made them inferior; there was research done to prove the existence of race in the biological make-up of Africans and ultimately for colonizers to try and justify their superiority. For instance, Frantz Fanon () in *Black Skin White Masks*, refers to Dr. H.L. Gordon’s published article from when he was an attending physician at Mathari Mental Hospital in Nairobi. Gordon declared (in Fanon, 2008: 18) that “a highly technical skilled examination of a series of 100 brains of normal Natives has found naked eye and microscopic facts indicative of inherent new brain inferiority… Quantitatively, the inferiority amounts to 14.8 percent”. This is how far colonisers went to prove their superiority.

Oyéwùmi (2003:2) draws the distinction between African Women and Western women by arguing that “in much of Africa, “womanhood” does not constitute a social role, identity or a position because in the African culture, an individual possesses a multiplicity of overlapping and intersecting positions with various relationships to privilege and disadvantage”. Making reference to the Western conceptualization of gender, Oyéwùmi (2003: 2) claims that in the Western setting, gender cannot exist without sex and that in most African societies many social categories do not rest on the physical make-up of the individual. She argues: “in Western conceptualization, gender [the purported social category] cannot exist without sex [the biological category] since the body sits squarely at the base of both categories (Oyéwùmi, 1997: 8). From this claim, she concludes that the distinction between gender and sex cannot be sustained in the West, because the existence of gender relies on sex and vice versa (Oyéwùmi, 2003: 2). One of the reasons she gives for such a claim is the example of the “female husband” of the Igbo culture (*ibid*.). In the Igbo culture, a female could be referred to as a husband by virtue of having married another female and this was not seen as abnormal or taboo because, socially, in most African cultures, sexuality was not attached to gender. Similarly, Oyéwùmi (2002: 3) distinguishes between ‘oko’ and ‘inyawo’, categories which are used in marriage. She posits that the
distinction between the two categories is not that of gender but rather a distinction between those who are born into a family and those who become members of the family through marriage. Additionally, those who are born into the family tend to take a superior position to those who enter the family by marriage. She argues that within the Yoruba family, the category ‘oko’ (which could be understood as ‘husband’ in English) is non-gendered specific because it encompasses both males and females and that ‘inyawo’ (which could be understood as wife in English) actually refers to in-marrying females (ibid., 3). This distinction helps us to understand the claim that Yoruba families appeal to a non-gendered hierarchy of superiority where female ‘oko’ would be regarded superior to female ‘inyawo’. Essentially, one can note that both these roles do not take into account the notion of gender nor are they taken up by individuals of a specific gender.

Motherhood is also often misunderstood as well as misinterpreted by those who write about and claim to understand African people. It is also recorded as an oppressive role and institution suggesting some level of passivity to women who take up the role of mothers. According to Nzegwu (2001: 22) “motherhood does not only include a woman’s capacity to conceive and have a child, but an overall philosophical thrust that clearly incorporates a familial and communal responsibility”. Motherhood, Oyéwùmi (2003: 12) argues, is essential to both African households as well as the organization of the family. Nzegwu (2001: 22) maintains that, for Africans, motherhood “remains the embodiment of love, nurturing, wisdom or temperance (constantly acting as a mediating voice of reason in the home and community). Moreover, Oyéwùmi (2003: 12) contends that mother-derived ties are the most culturally significant, and that mothers have agency and power (ibid., 13). It is also equally important to note that motherhood is also not usually constructed in relation to or in opposition to fatherhood; motherhood is conceived in its own right (ibid). According to Oyéwùmi (2003: 13):

> Mothers are perceived as especially powerful – literally and mystically, in regard to the well-being of the child… mothers are therefore the pivot around which family life is structured and the child’s life rotates.
This notion of motherhood provides reason to take seriously the claim that much of Africa, its roles, practices as well as its people have been misconstrued in order to entertain an agenda that seeks to rescue Africa from itself.

**Analysis of Nkiru Nzegwu’s Dual-Sex System**

In my view, a very interesting point is made in Nkiru Nzegwu’s (1994) ‘Gender Equality in a Dual-Sex System article’. In her examination of equality in a dual-sex system and her aim of understanding the notion of equality in a dual-sex system, Nzegwu (1994: 84) argues that the construction of equality in any given society is culturally dependent. Okome (1999: 3) maintains that Nzegwu, in this paper, “makes a convincing case for the impossibility of dialogue if one uses Western mono-sex categories of thought in investigating indigenous societies”. Nzegwu (1994: 74) uses a docu-drama to illustrate the grounds of distinction between gender identity in a dual-sex system (African) and mono-sex system (Western); a dialogue which she uses to project back in time in order to facilitate the conception of a dual-sex system (or pre-colonial) conception of equality. The most fundamental objective of this article is to illustrate the difference between the two systems.

The dialogue is between Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer on the one hand as representatives of the mono-sex system and Omu Nwagboka and Onyeamama on the other as representatives of the dual-sex system (ibid.). She chose these particular women on the basis that they are cultural types (ibid.). The African women embody a female-centered consciousness of dual-sex organizations while for Western women, she was intrigued by the underlying masculinist impulse of the mono-sex system that pervades most of the present-day feminist strategies and writings (ibid., 75). Her use of these contrasting cultural structures is to highlight, what also is my concern in this paper, the employment of Western lenses as the most acceptable standard of analysis. Often, this is applied in such a way that it disregards other cultural observations and the outcome becomes that different ways of doing things becomes the ‘bizarre’ way of doing things.

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12 I have to note that she examines the notion of equality in a dual-sex system against equality in a mono-sex system. However, for the purpose of this minor dissertation, I am only interested in the dual-sex system.

13 Onitsha Society in particular, which I will use interchangeably with ‘African societies’.
In this paper, Nzegwu draws a distinction between African and Western gender frameworks. She makes an interesting observation from her reading of Western literature and in relation to Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*. She maintains that Rawls’ book told her a lot about white men’s dreaming and nothing about the life that she knows (Nzegwu, 1994: 73). This indicates the point of the control and dominance of the white male figure in the literature which is often accompanied by a disregard of other worldviews. She appeals to her reality in North America and states that it tells her that equality as autonomous and the same is a dream that only privileged white men can have; they project themselves as the “natural proprietor of themselves and their capacities owing nothing to society for them” (*ibid.*, 73). For Nzegwu, privileged white men are all-powerful patriarchs that have universalized this myth so as to conceal their social, political, legal, economic, educational, professional, and many other privileges (*ibid.*, 73). This suggests an immense influence from Western patriarchal cultures and structure on how we should view and understand the world.

The same applies to the colonial context, even though it was not a democracy, ethicists who were writing and had a huge influence in literature at the time upheld the notion of humanity and equality but never acknowledged non-whites as human enough. The point here, without making this about equality, is that White (Western) people know nothing about being African, and in Nzegwu’s case, the basis of my argument, they know nothing about being a black African female in a white man’s world. They hail equality and claim that sex and race are irrelevant but yet they constantly hold it against Africans. Nzegwu (1994: 73) posits:

> Who do white people think they are fooling? Why do they think equality necessarily begins with individual autonomy and in sameness? We begin life and form our relational identity in the nexus of a caring, sharing family and society. Yet, they insist our conception of equality must begin with antagonistic, solitary individuals who lack social and family histories. Why do white male thinkers privilege the mythical figure of the solitary individual?
The above is a clear endorsement of the claim that Western culture has imposed its ideas and values through institutions that appropriate its framework as the only satisfactory standard of analysis. It might have been deliberate, it might not have been, and that is not the point. What is important is the fact that we are, at this juncture, at a point where equality is likened to a certain image which does not seem to fit with the notion of equality for other human beings and societies in different parts of the world. For instance, in the dialogue, after being at logger-heads for some time with the Western feminists trying to convince the African women that they are indeed oppressed, Omu responds by saying:

We seem to be talking at cross purposes… Why do you find it difficult to comprehend that women can be strong, being women? With all your knowledge, how come you do not understand that sex could be a systematic source of social advantage for women? Why do you assume any definition will necessarily be negative? (Nzegwu, 1994: 82).

This indicates a lack of openness from the West as well as the unwavering position of hegemony over cultures. One can pick up, from Omu’s response that she comes to a realization that Westerners are not taking them seriously and that they are operating from a position of trying to illuminate them without understanding and understanding their culture.

Gender is a social phenomenon which is inextricably tied to structures as well as the organisation of society. It is often related but not limited to one’s sexuality but is very much dependent on how society functions. I find the clear acknowledgement of the effects of colonialism within African communities in the literature very hypocritical, and this is because the acknowledgement explicitly goes up to a certain point; socio-political economical and (generally) social. However, the social is hardly ever acknowledged from the position of gender. Freya Schiwy (2007: 274) states that gender often enters reflections on the “coloniality of power and processes of decolonization” as an afterthought. Gender is often not considered as an essential element to colonialism; hence it is also not thought of as essential to the process of decolonization. Schiwy (2007: 274) argues that the aftermath of how gender imaginaries entered colonial constructs seem to not receive the same attention.
compared to how the invention of race has been privileged as a marker of the coloniality of power. Essentially, the privilege of race over gender is perpetuated through literature and discourse. The meanings and parameters of race are constructed in intellectual and academic treaties which, at some point, responsible of explaining and producing our understanding of the world (*ibid.*).

I maintain that Africans were destroyed and displaced to the core, and also believe that one of the major reasons Africans are, at the same time with all their other struggles, also fighting the battle of confusion and recognition is because of the distorted interpretation of their traditions in the literature. Among these is also a misrepresentation or (in accordance with Schiwy) a complete disregard of the African conception of gender. An argument similar to the one made by Schiwy (2007: 273) when she argues that gender has been paramount to the process of decolonisation. This is because gender is inextricably tied to people’s understanding and organisation of themselves and their societies and given the history of colonialism, it is a known fact that societies were deconstructed, and individuals displaced. Consequently, part of the program of decolonisation should be to investigate the concept of gender.

The use of this dialogue is to emphasize the imposition of Western culture in (particularly) the African continent. Nzegwu represents Western women as they appear and are referenced in their scholarly works. Her depictions of de Beauvoir in particular are quotations directly from her book *The Second Sex*. Western scholars come across as very authoritative and controlling. They have come to Africa with the intention of drawing Africans out of darkness and bringing them into the light. The insistence from Western scholars is that for as long as gender oppression is a problem in the West, it must be a problem in Africa as well. They claim that their proof of sex discrimination in Africa is entailed in studies that have been undertaken by (Western) anthropologists about Africa. A deliberate appeal to Richard Henderson is made; he is quoted making claims such as:

> The act of marriage is socially defined as "taking a wife" (inu nwunye), a process in which a man and his agnates negotiate with a woman's parents and her other kingsmen while the woman herself plays a predominantly passive role as an object of value. A woman may refer to
her own participation in these activities as "taking a husband" (ínu dí, but publicly the process is defined from the husband's point of view) (ibid., 77).

The greatest worry and concern for African women in this dialogue is not merely that Western scholars are researching and writing about Africa and its people. However, what lies at the centre of their problem is the question of who Western scholars consulted with when they were conducting their research about Africans? And this is merely because none of what has been accepted and codified actually resonates with and relates to African people. For instance, Onyeamama (ibid.) responds to this claim by postulating that a lot is just wrong with Henderson’s claim, mainly because he does not quite understand the use of African languages and cultures but did not really gather an informed input of those that speak the language, practice and understand the culture. Onyeamama argues that ínu (marry) at no point has it become welu (take); it is evident in their language that welu iku (take a cup) cannot become ínu iku (marry a cup) (ibid., 77). This point is to illustrate that women are members of families and not objects of value that can be taken. Furthermore, Omu strongly contends that in their society, marriage is a union of two families and the representation of a female as an object to be taken is an insult to her family (ibid., 77). Again, this is a point that one can make only in so far as they fully understand both the language and culture of a given society.

When Onitsha women ask Western women what they mean by equality, again the response is something they do resonate with. They basically want to have the same powers as men in the society and this, they claim, means that women should not be given menial jobs; they should be given the same opportunities, the same social expectations and not be declared subordinates because they are women (ibid., 79). Omu, in her response to this Western conception of equality, finds this claim very strange. Strange in a sense that it seems that in order for equality to prevail, women should be men. The concern is that the Western notion of equality takes men as the yardstick and measure women against men (ibid.). The implication is that men epitomize the best in life and in order for one to be free they should live like men. This expectation often takes for granted that men and women are not the same and do not initiate each other's sexes. Omu posits that the difference is not just sexually but that
it also manifests itself spiritually. People in Onitsha (very much like in most African communities) are valued based on their contribution to the smooth running of society and not based on their gender; men and women are regarded as social complements.

This complementarity of men and women in society is a view that is echoed by Freya Schiwy (2007). She states that gender complementarity is a concept that is often used by discourses of indigenous movements whilst also used as a template for thinking decolonized gender relations (Schiwy, 2007: 271). Contrary to popular belief, Schiwy (2007: 271) argues that “the notions of femininity and masculinity are themselves colonial constructs that have pressed more complex notions of gender, sexuality, and desire into a binary”. This constant desire into a binary is particularly enforced by epistemic colonial structures that still inform much of society today. Hence there is a need to ask how colonial constructs of gender are still perpetuated as this will help us to have a better understanding of how decolonisation itself pushes against coloniality and how it sometimes recreates it (ibid., 273). To guard against this, Apusigah (2008: 23) points to the challenge facing post-colonialists and scholars of decolonisation; the challenge to strengthen their politics and re-invent analytical tools in ways that can facilitate effective contestation and resistance from existing structures.

Western scholars (as they are represented in Nzewu, 1994: 80) seem to not acknowledge the point that there are other different ways of looking and understanding things. This is prevalent in the persistence that African women are either blinded by culture or they are justifying their oppression. Westerners are adamant that if women do not get to do what men do, then they are not equal, they are subordinate. They maintain that equality can only exist if women can assume men’s roles and if not, they are oppressed. Westerners ask, what happens when women want to plant men’s crops? Africans answer, some women who have the strength to already do, however, others do not because men’s crops require substantial amount of labour (ibid., 81). African women ask, how is it that equality can be achieved when women do things that place them at a disadvantage? The imperative point is that in Onitsha society, the difference is that value is assigned to what the members of the society do. However, Westerners do not see it as such and also do not acknowledge that it could be.
There emerges a constant attempt to universalize concepts within epistemologies that govern our thinking. This is something that has been argued to be a Western tradition of Eurocentrism. The idea that anything is good only in so far as it abides by Western standard completely disregards or acknowledges that there are other ways of looking and dealing with social issues. The universalization of cultures also often misrepresents other cultures, when most of them are fundamentally different from Western cultures. This fallacy calls attention to the rationale that other cultures are not deserving of recognition, which simply means that they are not valued. Consequently, this is a perpetual epistemic injustice to the cultures in question. Hence Nzegwu is against the idea of equality as sameness. She argues that the Western notion of “equality as equivalence obscures the fact that it is only at a minimum trivial level that everybody is equal” (Nzegwu, 1994: 84). For Nzegwu, equality depends on the character of the institutional structures as well as the value that is assigned to the different sexes in society. Interestingly, she highlights that even according to the West’s standard of equality, their highly commodified societies also work against the principle of equality and the assumption that people have the capacities to be their own persons (ibid.). For instance, people who belong to the working class are often not considered equal to those in the lower class and have control in political, economic and social matters. As has been shown, Nzegwu identifies what fundamentally distinguishes a dual-sex from a mono-sex society. She argues that:

In a dual-sex context where individuals are valued for the skills they bring to community-building, and the role they play developing the culture, gender identity is differently constructed. Identity is not abstractly constructed in terms of sameness, but concretely defined in terms of the equal worth of social duties and responsibilities. Because gender equality implies comparable worth, women and men are complements, whose duties, though different, are socially comparable (ibid. p.85).

This again speaks to the claim of the impossibility and injustice of generalising across cultures. African cultures (or the Onitsha culture in Nzegwu’s context) exhibit characteristics that are different from those of the West and they need to be judged on their own merit. Unlike the more individualised Western societal constructs, African cultures seem to be more communal. The emphasis of the value of an individual in
African cultures is based more on how well one executes their role and how that role benefits the society rather than it is about people performing the same roles.

This notion of generalisation is also denounced by Oyéwùmi through her advocacy for differentiation between societies, cultures and epistemologies. A very fitting title to her chapter in the book *African Gender Studies* (1997): ‘Visualising the body: Western theories and African subjects’ highlights an important misconception that often arise from Western literature of analysing Africa(ns) using Western approach and theories. Oyéwùmi’s focus on the body points out what, I think, is an often-overlooked supremacy that the West had and continue to have over other forms of epistemologies. She claims that in the West “biological explanations appear to be especially privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race or class” (Oyéwùmi, 1997: 1). This points out and affirms my call for the need for decolonisation in every sphere of Africa. This minor dissertation forms a menial part of the decolonial project.

**My reservation**

I have one concern with the critical African feminism category. This category of feminism seems to be stuck in a kind of circular criticism of contemporary feminism. Back to Serequeberhan’s (1998) notion of the practice of African philosophy as a critique of Eurocentrism I think that critical African feminism has not moved beyond the notion of criticising Eurocentrism, hence my proposition that critical feminism forms a good foundation of African feminism. I accept and support the deconstruction of existing African feminisms and even beyond that, a deconstruction of the literature on African people, African cultures, African histories and African traditions. Hence the objective of this mini dissertation being a deconstruction of African feminism. However, I argue that we need to move towards a construction of African feminism that is highly cognisant of the deconstructive moment as well as cognisant of the problems that I have shown in the first two categories of African feminism; pre-colonial African feminism as well as black feminism.

**Conclusion**

I have shown, in this chapter, the extent to which Western gender construct have been imposed in African cultures and societies. I argue that critical African feminism can serve as a good foundation for the construction of African feminism. Critical African
feminism is critical in its approach of feminism. However, I am of the view that it is stuck in the deconstructive mode. As a result, I contend that in order for critical African feminism to be successful in constructing African feminism, it needs to transcend the decolonial mode and start with the constructing.
Conclusion

As I shown, in this mini dissertation, a philosophically satisfying African feminism is one that is responsive to the project of decolonisation, and sensitive to the fact that what we understand by Africa and African was “invented” (Okome 2003: 67). The objective of this mini dissertation was to interrogate and deconstruct existing attempts at developing African feminism(s). I presented and interrogated three categories of African feminisms, pre-colonial African feminism, black feminism and critical feminism and with each category, I discussed its weaknesses and deficiencies.

The task of interrogating existing African feminist literature is the task of decolonisation. Moreover, decolonisation, as I have set out, is not an easy task. The challenge comes, primarily, from the process of deconstructing and critically analysing what exists in the literature. As I have shown, in this mini dissertation, the literature about African people, African cultures, African histories and concepts have been misinterpreted and have also not been analysed from their respective positions. As a result, if one is to establish an African feminism, one needs to do so from a position of openness and caution given that the literature has brutalised and destroyed the image of Africans, neglected their histories as well as lived experiences. This mini dissertation is a contribution to an ongoing conversation that has begun within the critical African feminism stream but also, it is a proposition for the advancement of critical feminism to go beyond the deconstructive mode.

In chapter one, I argued that pre-colonial African feminism is not decolonial in its approach and this is because it is not critical in its reading of the literature on African people. Pre-colonial African feminists seem to be implicitly accepting of the Western gender frameworks that permeate the literature on African feminism. This can be seen as a continued mode Eurocentrism given that comparison of African cultures often happens against Western cultures.

In Chapter two, I argued that black feminism, in its attempt to be inclusionary and separate itself from the exclusionary approach of Western feminism, it still does exclude African women. I supported my argument by presenting two primary weaknesses of the category – ‘time weakness’ and ‘place weakness’ – and argued
that these weaknesses do not allow for black feminism to be representative of African women and ultimately, of African feminism.

In chapter three, I presented a category of African feminism which I entitled critical African feminism. I argued that this category critical and decolonial in its approach of African feminism. Critical African feminists present unconventional and alternative perspectives about African people, African cultures and African women that have not been given the necessary scrutiny in the literature. Theorists of critical African feminism note the difficulty that comes with engaging African feminism but propel anyway because of their realisation of the significance of decolonisation to African people. I presented my concern of their preoccupation with deconstruction and propose a transcendence into the construction mode.

I concluded by arguing that both pre-colonial feminism and black feminism as categories of feminism are not adequate to be used as foundations with which to construct African feminism. I raised my concerns with having these two streams of feminism representing African women and their struggles. I maintain that African feminism should be cognisant of the history and development of African people right from indigeneity into post-coloniality. African feminism needs to be mindful of the effects of colonisation on its people; not only the effects of colonisation during colonialism but also the effects of colonisation post-colonialism. Eurocentrism continues to invade the literature about African people in a way that it attempts to redefine African cultures, and as a result, misinterprets them. I contend that the bedrock of African feminism should be one that is critical and deliberate in exposing and analysing African cultures independently of the West and also, should be intentional in the attempt to remove Western lenses when dealing with anything that is African. This is what I call decolonisation.

The focus and scope of this minor dissertation was to deconstruct existing attempts at developing African feminism(s). However, the work that I was not able to cover and that will hopefully follow in future is the construction of African feminism; one that takes into account the points that have been raised in this project. An African feminism that is radical and critical in its approach and also, one that prioritises the histories, cultures, practices, traditions and lived experiences of African people; African feminism that is decolonised.
Reference List


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