

RADICAL FEMINISM AND THE AFRICAN REALITY: FROM GENDER WAR TO MENISM

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Abstract

This paper sets out to test the relevance of radical feminism in Africa. Despite the noble goals of feminism to emancipate and empower women, radical feminism considers men to be the enemies of women and therefore seeks the overthrow of men as a goal for all women. Given that this undesirable wave of feminism does not take into account the communal realities of Africa, this paper deconstructs the myth of using western feminism to “open the eyes” of African women by arguing that African women do not need to fight the men because both African men and women have a common enemy in neocolonialism which is by far a more dangerous obstacle to the emancipation of women than men. This paper frowns at the gender war heralded by radical feminism which now necessitates a reaction from men. Since the empowerment of radical feminists is not only destructive to the African social order but to the feminists themselves, I opine that African men need even more empowerment than radical feminists so as to fight the more urgent and nobler war against neocolonialism for its results are beneficial to both African men and women. Therefore, this paper projects “menism” as a needed masculine response to radical feminism for the safeguard of African brotherhood, familyhood, and as a tool for development.

Keywords:

Feminism, menism, empowerment, emancipation, neocolonialism.

Introduction

Despite the efforts made by the post-colonial era's drive towards cultural renaissance in Africa, the continent's sad historical moments of slavery and colonialism continue to extend the tentacles of alienation in ways that have proven to be ontologically damaging to the African personality. Even if it is naïve to eternally blame the socio-political and economic problems of the continent on these sad historical moments, it is even more naïve to think that the current wave of neocolonial trends on the continent can be distanced from their historical origins. Even if we can trace elements of feminism in Africa to the pre-colonial era, it is an open secret that the current trend of radical feminism is a product of imperialistic impositions rooted in the obnoxious dominance of the western



culture in the world or in the naivety of peoples of other cultures to accept all western “values” including those which were supposed to be rejected. Viewed through a neutral prism, feminism is the harmless empowerment of women to take up roles that allow them to exercise their unique qualities in a world in which males and females have to work together for the fulfillment of individual and collective aspirations. Western “liberal” feminism is supposed to be a gradual process that leads to the emancipation of women through the principles of liberal democracy. Viewed from the misguided angle of negativity and protest against the men, radical feminism has led to what Christina Hoff Sommers refers to as “the war against boys” so as to show “how misguided feminism is harming our young men”. In the same way that Africa, with open arms, welcomed the now failed concept of western “liberal” democracy that has divided people who used to live and work together as brothers and sisters from different mothers in the communalistic social order, radical feminism, which can also be more aptly described as “toxic” feminism, is another western concept that has come to destroy the social fabric in Africa especially the institution of marriage which was hitherto considered as sacred. In this paper, I examine the implications that radical feminism has had for Africa and how its tentacles have to be cut off before it causes more harm on the continent.

With the ultimate goal to emancipate and empower women, feminism is not just a theory; it is a movement, an ideology or a plan of action to give women a better place in society than that which they currently occupy. The ideological angle makes it an activism that needs to take its ideas “out there” to effect the needed change in the role given to women in the dominantly patriarchal societies. The activism becomes radicalism when the movement creates gender battles and assumes that another gender has been at war with it. It is not just about showing that radical feminism is at variance with African traditional values but also, and above all, that African traditional values do not even contradict the noble goals of (non-toxic) feminism viewed as the empowerment of women so that they can accomplish tasks which make their efforts complementary and not antithetical to the efforts of men. “Menism” is used here as a masculine response to radical feminism and as a call for African men to get ready to empower more men to mitigate and counteract the destructive effects of toxic feminism. To what extent can it be asserted that the traditional African social order has a better instrument for women’s empowerment than radical feminism? If we successfully prove that African communal values actually uphold the dignity of the woman and promote women’s empowerment, then we would have refuted the claims that western “liberal” feminism, which has been transformed into a radical movement, has “opened” the eyes of African women.

Secondly, if we prove that the current wave of toxic feminism in Africa, as imported from the West, is oppressive to the men and lays the foundations of an unnecessary gender war, then we would have argued that the “empowerment” announced by radical feminism for women actually raises the need to empower even more men to safeguard the institution of marriage and harmony in our homes. This is because our hypothesis projects the empowerment of men, alongside the obnoxious “empowerment” of women (to fight men), as a step to ensure that radical feminism does not destroy the sacred bonds of African homes. It would have justified the need for the empowerment of more men as a defense mechanism against the toxicity of radical feminism. This is done by a progressive refutation of the imposition of western “liberal” feminism in the light of more moderate and considerate traditional African approaches to feminism, as well as projections into a

future in which the sacredness of the home and the safety of the world would depend more on decent men empowered to face the negativity than on what radical feminists thought was a way to put women above men. The ultimate task is to show that radical feminism actually betrays the goal of feminism and makes the whole movement self-defeating by giving men even more opportunities to become advocates of “menism” against the calamity that toxic feminism is bringing to humanity.

How Western Feminism is Inapplicable in Africa

Western feminism is not applicable in Africa because western women set out to have a confrontation with the men as a way of protesting against the western patriarchal system that has given men an upper hand in major decision-making bodies of the various states. While admitting that African women face a similar problem, the western confrontational solution must be avoided on our continent because Africa already has a very important battle to fight against neocolonialism which requires the efforts of both men and women. If we understand that radical feminism is one of the diabolical colonial impositions in Africa, then the battle against neocolonialism is also a battle against the toxicity of radical feminism as well as capitalism as its by-products that have divided a continent that was not as bad in the pre-colonial era as the image of it painted by the colonial writers. Even in the western world, some writers (like Sommers) are seeing the evil buried in radical feminism that has become a war against men. Towards the end of this paper, we argue that this kind of feminism actually gives the men an upper hand to set things right contrary to the obnoxious goals to fight and even overthrow men from what is seen as a privileged and undeserved position in the social organization of the world.

The popularity and destructiveness of radical feminism have given rise to an unnecessary gender war in Africa whereas the men and women on this continent have a common battle against poverty. The war against men in the name of feminism ignores what Sommers calls a “simple truth” responsible for stability in the world: “It is a story of how we are turning against boys and forgetting a simple truth: that the energy, competitiveness, and corporal daring of normal, decent males, is responsible for much of what is right in the world.”* This is not meant to be an excessive exaltation of masculinity because some indecent men actually use toxic masculinity not only against women but against other men; it is meant to be a reminder that when men work for progress in the world, the progress aimed at is never meant for men alone, though women have a legitimate right to ask for more relevant roles to play in the society. Hence, the goal of this paper is not to discredit the role played by women in the growth of our societies but to argue that, if in the quest for more relevant roles in the society the women turn it into a battle against men, no one will be able to play any meaningful role as the gender war would become an obstacle to any meaningful role play for both men and women.

Western feminism, in its popular radical dimension, does no longer seems to aim at just the empowerment of women; it seems to aim at arrogantly creating disorder where order used to reign for both genders with an implicit radical claim that women are humans, a claim that no one has ever rejected. It is not just about empowering women for the good of the world but to empower them so that they can fight an undeclared and invisible war

* Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming our Young Men* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 2000), Preface, 14.

supposedly waged by men on them. When a movement to empower women makes such false claims about a war declared by men, it creates aggressive conditions and make the environment a battlefield against men who may be caught unawares with catastrophic consequences when such toxicity is allowed to reign. In the words of Sommers, “The New Feminists are a powerful source of mischief because their leaders are not good at seeing things as they are. Resenter feminists [...] speak of backlash, siege, and an undeclared war against women. [...] Real-life men have no war offices, no situation rooms, no battle plans against women. There is no radical militant wing of a masculinist movement. To the extent one can speak at all of a gender war, it is the New Feminists themselves who are waging it.”[†] This implies that even if the patriarchal systems in the West and in Africa have not made the emancipation and empowerment of women an easy task, men have never deliberately organized themselves as a movement to subdue women. The current situation also implies that even if men have never organized themselves to subdue women in the past, they may now have to organize themselves to stand against the toxicity bred by the new trend of radical feminism from the West.

Whether we see radical feminism as a war against men as declared by women or as a response to false claims of a war declared by men against women thereby necessitating and justifying the aggressiveness and battle lines drawn by feminists in the West with tentacles in Africa, the truth remains that Africa has never had such battles and does not need to get into such distractions. In Africa, without getting into any battle with the men, there have been strides against the patriarchal obstacles to the empowerment of women especially through the education of the girl child. This is a noble goal that is even supported by men who see education as a very important instrument in the emancipation of the woman in Africa. Such men will not have a problem considering themselves as “feminists” if feminism were only about a harmless and non-confrontational quest to emancipate and empower women especially through education. Unfortunately, the case is different with the new trend of radical feminism imported from the West into Africa. Tangwa rightly notes that western feminism makes it difficult for a man to be a feminist without blatant and ridiculous contradictions: “Western feminism is thoroughly defiant and confrontational and never has anything good to say about men or the Western patriarchal system. For that reason, a man, in the Western world, who honestly believes in the emancipation and empowerment of women, is in a rather untenable position describing himself as a feminist without appearing to be either effeminate or hypocritical.”[‡] When it is used as a war against men or when feminism makes false claims that men have been fighting against women, it becomes difficult for a man to be a true feminist and to ignore the projected gender war that conceals the noble goals of true feminism. Radical feminism makes it difficult for men to join hands with women for the emancipation and empowerment of women; hence, the movement defeats itself by downplaying its original goals.

The traditional role of a mother in African homes implies that motherhood is an acknowledgement of feminism. This does not mean that the place of a woman is in the

[†] Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism? How Women have Betrayed Women* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 45.

[‡] Godfrey B. Tangwa, *Elements of African Bioethics in a Western Frame* (Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2010), 135.

kitchen but that women should be represented in top positions in society but such positions must not contradict her role as a mother which is indispensable for the harmony that used to reign on the continent. The current confrontational situation has given rise to an obnoxious phenomenon whereby women are made to believe that they have to sacrifice motherhood in order to take up top jobs in the society and do well in such jobs whereas all top jobs in the civil service of Cameroon (for example) make provision for maternity leave so that motherhood should not be considered as an opportunity cost for the empowerment of women. Western feminism cannot be applicable to Africa because our colonial history implies that even African men have not yet been completely empowered as neocolonialism continues to keep the unwanted hand of the former colonial masters in major socio-economic and political decisions in Africa. That is why Tangwa thinks that “African women do not need to stir any trouble in order to effect their emancipation and empowerment because the abandoned foundations of such emancipation and empowerment are there in the traditional system and worldview, under the accumulated dust and debris of colonization and Christianization, waiting only to be salvaged and modernized.”[§] In a typical traditional African society of old, the husband clears the farm (using the machete), the wife tills the soil (using the hoe), the husband hunts and taps palm wine while the woman prepares food for the family. The husband and the wife, together, harvest crops which are the products of their combined efforts. These tasks respect the biological, physical and physiological specificities of both genders. Even if a modern African woman were to emerge as a good hunter and winetaper, she does not have to get into a fight with men to prove that she can perform such tasks nor make false claims that African men have been preventing her from developing her hunting and wine-taping skills.

Instead of seeing marriage and motherhood as obstacles to empowerment, African women could work together with the men to fight against the phenomenon of early marriage which prevents the girl child from sufficiently developing her intellectual skills. This does not necessitate a gender war because a father who sees a daughter doing well in school will never stand against her education in favour of early marriage; but the same father will never discourage the daughter from becoming a mother when the time is right just so he could be seen as a promoter of women’s empowerment. Tangwa thinks that the African traditional structure gives room for improvement about the role that women play. The method proposed by western women for the attainment of this objective is inapplicable in Africa. Even if we were to borrow the sound of the alarm bell from the West, we cannot gather women to fight against men as is the case with radical feminism; rather we can gather women to work together with the men to progressively remove the patriarchal obstacles to the self-fulfillment and collectively fulfillment of women in our localities. That is why Tangwa sees international conferences on feminism inspired by the West as a distraction that leads to unnecessary gender wars: “There is no need to create an artificial war of the sexes where none has ever existed as a precondition to the emancipation and empowerment of women. African women do not need to go to Sokoto in futile search of something that is in the pockets of their own Sokotos.”^{**} A gender war gives the impression that the emancipation of women is to be achieved by fighting men which makes the current trend of western feminism toxic not only in Africa but even in

[§] Tangwa.

^{**} Tangwa.

the West. Apparently, even if all women were to be empowered that would not be enough until they have used the empowerment to exterminate the men in an arrogant show of the superiority of femininity. That is why African women do not need to travel to devise strategies to get empowered as they actually need to work with the men in their locality since the men are not against their empowerment.

Tangwa goes further to note that given the colonial history of Africa, it might be problematic to take western women as models of what an African woman should be. This is because if the western women really wanted the African women to be empowered, they would not have supported or remained in silent complicity to the colonial evils of exploitation and dehumanization which destroyed and continuously delayed the empowerment of both African men and women. If colonialism is evil even against the emancipation of African men, then why should we trust the western female potential and complacent supporters of colonialism to lead the way to the emancipation of African women? Tangwa has an adequate analogy to describe the situation: “What Africans (men and women) and other colonized peoples have suffered in the hands of Western men (with the acquiescence, if not connivance and complicity of Western women) should be an accurate indication of what Western women have probably suffered in the hands of their men. [...] it must not be forgotten that colonialism has, probably, destroyed the values, attributes and self-worth of African men more than those of African women. Empowering African women might also help to empower African men to find their lost identity and self-respect.”^{††} While I do not agree with Tangwa that colonialism may have been more destructive to the African men than women (because if the patriarchal system implies that men lead and women follow, then the destruction of the “head” cannot leave the “tail” unaffected), the analogy between the impact of colonialism and that of radical feminism is perfect. If western feminists are fighting for empowerment in states that have never been colonized by other states, then African women are fighting for emancipation in states that were colonized by western states. This implies that colonialism, in itself, is an obstacle to the emancipation of both men and women in Africa. If that is the case, then the battle of the western women is not exactly the same as that of African women. If the western women directly or indirectly support(ed) colonial rule, then the western women (and not the African men) also constitute an obstacle to the empowerment of African women. Looking up to the same western women for solutions to the problems of women in Africa is like handing the keys to one’s house to a known thief who had stolen from the same house in the past and even continues to steal in the present.

Empowering African women through the battle against neocolonialism also implies the empowerment of the African men in the same process. If this is done, then we will be able to prove that the remnants of patriarchal obstacles to women’s empowerment in Africa are not in any way related to colonial influence and African feminists may then have the same “enemy” as western feminists. Even if African feminists were fighting against the same obstacles as western women, the toxicity of the western method is at variance with communalism in Africa. Western feminism, in its extreme level of toxicity, has forms of exclusion that marginalize African women and place it in contradiction with what is required of feminism in Africa as a mere tool for the empowerment and emancipation of women. Naomi Nkealah restates the two levels of exclusion “on the basis of gender where

^{††} Tangwa.

men are necessarily expunged from feminist spaces and dubbed ‘the enemy’; and on the basis of race where African women are classified as ‘women of colour’ and their historical trajectories are conveniently repressed in feminist theorizing.”^{‡‡} In the communal setting of Africa, no goals of feminism can be achieved without the involvement of the men who have never organized themselves to fight women even if the patriarchal system needs to be reviewed to involve women in leadership roles on the continent. The reference to women of African origin as “women of colour” also gives a racial connotation to western feminism which cannot adequately include the realities of African women since their historical conditions are not taken into consideration. The idea of “women of colour” could be pejorative because it might entail that others have “no colour” or maybe have the “right” colour suited for western feminism. This racial discriminatory undertone of western feminism implies that African women have nothing to expect from its substance but can use the awareness raised by western feminism to return to traditional African roots to empower women without fighting men.

Testing the Relevance of African Approaches to Feminism

African theories of feminism propose different and perhaps complementary approaches to the emancipation and empowerment of the African woman. With womanism, the origin of the term itself can be considered a direct response to the racial discrimination in western feminism. As used by Alice Walker, a womanist is “a black feminist or feminist of color.”^{§§} While the charge of racism directed against western feminism can also be directed against womanism, the case against the latter is mitigated by the fact that it comes as a response to the non-inclusive approach used by the former. This theory implies that western feminism, as led by white women, can be indifferent to the plight of black women or even work in such a way as to sideline the interest of black women. Hence, the emancipation and empowerment of women have to be accompanied by the upholding of the dignity of black women which has not always been the case in the western discourse on feminism. Womanism supposes that black women or “women of colour” felt and probably still feel marginalized in the pretentious claims of western feminism to fight for the empowerment of the woman whereas women in different parts of the world face non-western realities that may not be adequately understood by western feminists. If the western feminists do not take into account the realities of black women or African women in the diaspora who live in the same geographical space as the western feminists, then it is not logical to expect them to understand the realities of African women who live in Africa.

Feminism is not made irrelevant by the existence of diversities. Mary Modupe seeks a more reconciliatory and more inclusive theory of womanism to be better adapted to African realities. “Womanism better accommodates African women’s reality, identity and dynamics of empowerment. This is an inclusive approach as opposed to an exclusive, polarized one.”^{***} Instead of alienating men, this approach has to involve them in the quest to achieve the goals of feminism. If her view has to be consistent with that of Alice Walker,

^{‡‡} Naomi Nkealah, “(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges”, *JLS/TLW* 32(2), (June 2016): 62.

^{§§} Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), xii.

^{***} Mary Modupe Kolawole, “Transcending Incongruities: Rethinking Feminism and the Dynamism of Identity in Africa”, *Agenda*, 17:54 (2002): 96.

then we can say that womanism is an African theory of feminism which incorporates the realities of the black women not only in the diaspora but also in Africa. Even if the realities of the black women in the diaspora and those in Africa are not exactly the same, there must be a common denominator of the inclusion of men in the quest for the safeguard of the rights of women. This approach requires that women should not only work with other women but also with men who are not to be seen as “enemies”. Modupe’s reorientation of womanism towards African realities makes it a more inclusive theory than Walker’s initial theory that aims to give the black women a voice in the midst of the dominant voices of the white women. Beyond the skin colour of the women involved, the inclusion of men in the quest for the solution to the problems faced by women makes womanism well adapted to the African reality of communalism.

On the other hand, given that the black women could be anywhere in the world, especially in the diaspora, it is clear that the theory of womanism may not take into account the realities of women who actually live on the African continent. In a bid to overcome this limitation of womanism, the African approach to feminism dubbed “Stiwanism” tries to situate feminism within the context of the contemporary African society by identifying, so as to overcome, the obstacles to women’s emancipation and empowerment therein. As coined by Molaria Ogundipe-Lesly, “stiwanism” is derived from the acronym “STIWA” which stands for “Social Transformation Including Women in Africa”. She thinks that the new term “STIWA” is about “the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa.”^{†††} This theory assumes that the contemporary African social order, which is a complex mixture of the traditional and imported colonial and neocolonial values from the West, has repressive structures which work against the emancipation and empowerment of the woman. Such repressive systems are maintained by men and also by women especially when women accept that such systems should keep them in the position of “second class citizens” in their respective countries. This theory has the goal of seeing women take part in the decision-making process for the transformation of Africa in the post-colonial era. If the goal is the development of Africa beyond gender wars, the battle against neocolonialism is to be fought by all Africans of both genders alongside the battle against the patriarchal structures of repression against women.

An African theory of feminism cannot be indifferent to the indispensable role played by motherhood in safeguarding family values necessary for the preservation of the human species. The theory of motherism places the African mother at the centre of the struggle for the emancipation of the woman through the natural and biological role of a woman in the continuity of the human species. Beyond childbirth, motherhood is seen as a factor and symbol of unity and harmony on the continent that puts human life above everything else. According to Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, as an Afro-centric feminist theory, motherism is “[...] anchored on the matrix of motherhood [...]. Whatever Africa’s role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from [...] the Mother Continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African art, African literature [...]”^{†††} The indispensable role of motherhood in African

^{†††} Molaria Ogundipe-Lesly, *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994), 230.

^{†††} Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (Owerri: Afa Publications, 1995), 3.

communalism is one of the traditional realities that Tangwa thinks African women can rely on to lay a solid foundation for a theory of feminism that will not be a battle against the men but a quest to re-evaluate, modernize and adapt traditional realities to the changing fortunes of time. With Acholonu, “the weapon of Motherism is love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation between the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation, as has been the case with radical feminism.”^{§§§} Her rejection of radical feminism means that the role of the mother does not contradict that of the father nor requires a battle with the father and other men. Above all, the role of a mother as a unifier is even supposed to tame any elements of “masculine” aggressiveness that may be found in some women too but which is tamed by motherhood, the same motherhood that is supposed to lead to collaboration and partnership between men and women in the society.

Motherism may be heavily criticized in modern times by radical feminists who think that the “African” role of a mother is actually the reason for which many African women are not able to free themselves from the “bondage” of traditional family roles that prevent them from having an “independent” career the way men supposedly do. This is not a fair charge against motherism because the role of a mother comprises responsibilities shouldered in partnership with the father making the mother a teacher to the children, a point of stability when the family is tearing apart, a symbol of calmness in the midst of aggressive behavior. This does not make her a “second class citizen” to the man but a human being whose career has to consider her role as a female parent in the same way that the career of a man has to consider his role as a male parent but not at the same level of “biological engagement” of giving birth as women do. If that were the case then we would have expected men to go through childbirth the way women do for there to be real “biological” equality which is impossible. A woman who does not embrace motherhood can still be incompetent in her career while one who does can still succeed in her career as many do. A woman who does not succeed in her career because of poor timing or even a poor career choice can always use motherhood as a flimsy excuse to justify her failures. While motherhood means intermittent maternity leaves for career women, the repressive patriarchal structures against women cannot be justified by motherhood. Even women who choose never to embrace motherhood still have to face the structures that hamper and delay women’s empowerment. This proves that motherhood, in itself, is not an obstacle to empowerment when the woman is educated to embrace motherhood at the right time after completing her training to have a job in a particular field. The call to procreation is not particularly more beneficial to men than it is to women and so it is erroneous to assume that men “use” women to make babies while pursuing their careers unperturbed. The call to motherhood is actually service to humanity which leads to cooperation and not confrontation based on gender roles.

While motherism uses the call to motherhood as a path to growth for women and harmony in humanity, nego-feminism is an African feminist theory that takes men and women to the dialogue table to resolve their issues without confrontation or gender wars. This theory is based on the communal African lifestyle that makes use of compromise or consensus to resolve disputes among humans and groups of humans irrespective of their gender. When two or more people disagree, they do not fight each other so that one can

^{§§§} Acholonu, 111.

impose their views on the other; they discuss with each other so as to obtain a middle ground for peace to reign. Obioma Nnaemeka coins the term “nego-feminism” to fit the discourse of feminism within the reality of consensus in Africa: “I will use the different features and methods of feminist engagement in Africa to propose what I call nego-feminism (the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism) as a term that names African feminisms. Aware of a practice (feminism in Africa) that is as diverse as the continent itself, I propose nego-feminism not to occlude the diversity but to argue [...] that a recurrent feature in many African cultures can be used to name the practice.”**** When people disagree, they do not even use the ballot box as imposed by the failed system of western “liberal” democracy; they sit together and talk out their differences until they reach a compromise whereby both parties accept common gains for the good of their communities and above their egos. In the same way, rather than fight a gender war with losses for both genders, which implies losses for humanity, nego-feminism proposes moments of dialogue between men and women with “no ego” such that one gender should not impose its views on another by force or blackmail.

The Antidote to Radical Feminism in Africa

Radical feminism does not empower women so as to make their lives better and to contribute to the growth of their communities; radical feminism empowers women so that they can fight men or prove a point to men and even annihilate men to prove that women can do what men do and even better. Toxic feminism has actually created a gender war when men realized that women who were hitherto considered as partners and collaborators have taken them for “enemies” in a war that will not just destroy the men if the men lose but society at large. If radical feminists win their fanatical war against men, they will eliminate familyhood, motherhood and brotherhood which would still not guarantee the success of sisterhood in an island of its own. It is a self-destructive war for humanity when the men do not understand that radical feminism is as dangerous as neocolonialism in Africa. Even if men have never organized themselves to fight against women, it becomes necessary for men to organize themselves, still not to fight against women, but to safeguard the social harmony in the world. If the preservation of this harmony entails accepting the battle forced on men by toxic feminists, then it is a noble task. Despite the toxic popularity of radical feminism on social media spaces, many African women still believe in communal value of negotiation to attain a compromise when humans have differences that need to be sorted out. Hence, it is erroneous to think that the toxic feminists are the spokespersons for the African women. However, it is even more erroneous not to see that their toxicity is contagious and gaining dangerous ground that could shatter what is left of familyhood in Africa, a concept so dear to such great African socialist thinkers as Julius Nyerere.

In his concept of familyhood dubbed “Ujamaa”, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania sees no room for conflict between humans in the pursuit of a good life in Africa. It becomes even more unthinkable to envisage a conflict between men and women as a step to any form of empowerment and emancipation. “‘Ujamaa’, then, or ‘Familyhood’, describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of

**** Obioma Nnaemeka, “Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 29, no. 2, The University of Chicago Press (2003): 360-361.

the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man.”^{†††} This makes toxic feminism a distraction in Africa as a continent in which the exploitation of women by men has never been universally established by traditional norms. Rather, traditional norms venerate women especially for their role in motherhood whose indispensability in familyhood cannot be overemphasized. While some men see it for the distraction that it is and therefore do not give it much consideration, other men are just starting to realize that this toxic movement of imported feminism has become a major threat to the bonds of familyhood in Africa. This paper should be boldly considered as an alarm bell for African men to wake up and counteract the evil intentions of radical feminism. It is evil because it has an undertone of fatalism whereby some women who may have made wrong choices in their lives hide behind the smokescreen of feminism to share their bitterness and recruit more bitter female warriors against men, confirming the adage that misery loves company.

The real antidote to feminism is to empower more men in Africa. This is not to work against the empowerment of women which has never been a task for African men. The idea is that since the empowerment of women from the radical feminist’s perspective is to fight men and destroy the social bonds of Africa, we need to empower more men to safeguard this social bond. If we take the case of a home, for instance, it is clear as preached by toxic feminists that an empowered woman does not need a man whereas an empowered man needs a woman even more than when he is not empowered. This is because the empowerment of men produces more harmony in the family than the empowerment of toxic feminists. An empowered radical feminist sees no value in a home, let alone motherhood or childbearing. She sees in herself a warrior ready to fight and annihilate the male folk and to eternally prove that women are as good as men or even better in tasks that the society may not have valued women for. It is not empowerment to work with men as partners but to fight and overtake the men. This is clearly a wrong battle. They are not out to negotiate as recommended by Obioma Nnaemeka: “In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of ‘give and take/exchange’ and ‘cope with successfully/go around.’”^{††††} If this social atmosphere of negotiation and compromise is destroyed, even radical feminists will not survive in such anarchy. That is why the movement is self-destructive but its self-destruction entails the self-destruction of cherished African communal values of love, sharing of joy and pain, collaboration between people considered to be brothers and sisters from different mothers.

Consequently, men need to step up their vigilance and readiness to counteract the movement of radical feminism so that the empowerment of women should not be used as the tree that hides the forest of evil intended to destroy humanity at large. The projected theory can be dubbed “menism”. Menism is not a masculine initiation of war against women but a masculine response to the war declared by toxic feminists on the male folk. Menism is also a noble masculine response to false claims by toxic feminists that men have been waging a war against them. Menism seeks to restore the dignity of the man who is

^{†††} Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 11.

^{††††} Nnaemeka, “Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way”, 377-378.

not a warrior against women but an indispensable partner and collaborator to women who really want to be empowered for the sake of participation in the development of the continent and not for an egotistical display of power in vain battles. Menism, as a response to toxic feminism, goes beyond this response to even contribute to the continuation of the human species, a process traditionally associated with motherhood which is a celebration of womanhood. In this light, menism is even a nobler theory of feminism than toxic feminism because it pushes the men to empower women while eliminating the vain gender war initiated by radical feminists. Menism is for both men and women; menism is for the dignity of Mother Africa whose spirit of solidarity must be transmitted to the next generation without the toxicity of radical feminism. Menism is a reactionary projection and valorization of women who work with men to develop and not to destroy Africa. Menism is the ultimate antidote to toxic feminism in Africa.

We have to ensure that the empowerment of women is in line with the goals of an acceptable social order. I have had the chance to work with many empowered women in academic circles. When such women succeed to reconcile their careers with motherhood, they achieve a nobler goal than the toxic feminists who see empowerment as a means to discard motherhood and engage in endless and vain battles with men. Radical feminism actually destroys what Nkealah considers as the “humaneness” of African feminism. Though she distinguishes her “feminist humaneness” from “feminist humanism” because the latter, like motherism, inserts women in the global objectives of humanity while the former has a specific agenda for women, the ultimate goal is for women to play a role in “showing kindness, care, consideration, affection and understanding for another human being who is undergoing a difficult situation in life, or experiencing a personal crisis”.^{§§§§} Writing in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Corona pandemic in 2020, Nkealah sees the role of a woman as that of healing when humans are afflicted. She writes: “Transpose humaneness into African feminism and it becomes feminist humaneness, a concept I am using to capture women’s capacity to care, nurture and heal others in times of crisis. African feminism is fundamentally a feminism of humaneness because it encourages women’s cultivation of feelings and actions that are geared towards improving human relations.”^{*****} If we understand that colonialism and neocolonialism have put Africa in a position of crises of poverty, bad governance, various pandemics and social inequalities bred by capitalism, then the role of a woman cannot be conceived as one of bringing more chaos to situations that need to be made calm. If the toxic feminists cannot allow women to play the role of bringing calm to chaos, then there is an urgent need to empower more men to bring calm to the chaos caused by radical feminism.

When a man is empowered, he does not use it as an opportunity to arrogantly wage an unnecessary war with other men, talk less of women. When a man is empowered, he becomes even a source of empowerment for women while preserving motherhood. Even if much work still has to be done to remove the patriarchal obstacles to the empowerment of women, it is dangerous and even anachronistic, in the light of contemporary evidence, to think that the rise of toxic feminists will put an end to the problems faced by women in Africa. More than half of the problems faced by women in Africa are also faced by men. So,

^{§§§§} Naomi Nkealah, “Being Human in a Time of Catastrophe: African Feminism, Feminist Humaneness, and the Poetry of Joyce Ash”, *UNISA: Journal of Literary Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2022): 4.

^{*****} Nkealah.

the empowerment of women has to be beneficial for the men because the woman will also assist the man to provide for the home instead of fighting the man. If the goal is to make women producers and not just consumers, then the goal of empowerment will also help the men to diversify the means of production and obtain a variety of products that will sustain homes and alleviate poverty on our continent. No sane man can be against such empowerment. The problem arises when the empowerment of a woman is seen as an excuse for her to move away from her home, to abandon motherhood and pursue goals that ultimately have to engage men in a useless battle of egos.

Chioma Opara in commendable reflections on the reality of African women draws an analogy of the shattered female body and the shattered wealth of the continent that has now become a shadow of itself, a battleground for exploitation and dehumanization not only of women but humanity as a whole: “Applying the theory of femalism, a variant of African feminism, the female body as well as mothering will constitute the systemic site of discourse and hermeneutics. Parallels will be drawn between the lacerated female body and the mutilated African nation jostled by wars, poverty, disease, colonialism and postcoloniality. Simply put, the feminized African country evokes Mother Earth, Woman Earth - an abstract projection of the African female body. The scarred body not only aligns with the spiritual in the representation of the natural and the cosmic but also manifests the dents of a scrambled and ailing nation.”^{††††} If the body of the African woman is used merely figuratively to denounce the ills of bad governance and poverty on the continent, then it is a problem for both African men and women to solve. If that is the case, then men and women have a common enemy in those neocolonial systems of governance that lead to the exploitation of the masses by the few holders of power. Even if the men constitute the majority of the few holders of power in Africa, the vast majority of men in Africa are struggling to make ends meet and so find themselves in exactly the same deplorable living conditions as women. Thus, it is not accurate to say that African men are oppressing African women. Rather, it is fairer to say that neocolonial structures maintained by some men and very few women have been used to oppress the majority of African men and women. From the last cabinet reshuffle of 2019, the Cameroon government currently has 32 ministers and only 8 of them are women. Given the level of bad governance and poverty in Cameroon, we cannot claim that all the men of Cameroon have come together to oppress women. Rather, we should say that a few men and very few women in Cameroon are oppressing the masses made up of both men and women. It is not a decision made by all Cameroonian men not to give top political positions to women. Both men and women in the country are victims of bad governance perpetrated by few men and very few women in the government. A radical feminist who claims that she is fighting against the “the Cameroonian men” who have decided to marginalize women in the government is fighting a lost and useless battle because men would even welcome women joining hands with them to fight against bad governance perpetrated at varying levels by both men and women against people of both genders.

The moment a radical feminist wages a war against men so as to be empowered, her empowerment is a danger to women, to men and even to herself as she ends up destroying the collaborative structures that make her own life meaningful. The empowerment of

^{††††} Chioma Opara, “On the African Concept of Transcendence: Conflating Nature, Nurture and Creativity”, *MELINTAS*, (21.2.2005): 190.

women is not enough and is not even possible in a system that has not empowered anyone and that works even against the empowerment of men. Bad governance works even against the empowerment of the men that the toxic feminists set out to fight. Hence, with toxic feminism, we lose the substance and chase the shadow. If we all agree that Africa has a general problem of infrastructural and intellectual development as well as neocolonialism, then African men and women should join hands to fight against the colonial and neocolonial systems of oppression for both men and women. When this has been achieved, then if there are any remnants of structures that specifically oppress women, they have to be removed. The empowerment of the woman has to go alongside the empowerment of the man if the ultimate goal is the development of the continent. Since the ultimate goal of toxic feminism is not the development of Africa but rather the elevation of women to the position of warriors against men, the project fails even before it starts. While I agree with Chioma Opara that the image of a shattered female body can be likened to the image of the shattered continent of Africa, I disagree with her when she makes a leap to see her “transcendence” (for men) as a treatment of the woman as the “other” in what she calls “immanence”: “The essential elements of transcendence are [...] conceptualized as action, choice, freedom and consciousness. These are starkly contrasted with stagnation and oppression encapsulated in immanence which usually represents women as the Other.”^{****} The idea of treating women as the “other” erroneously assumes that African men have already attained the level of self-fulfillment that pushes them to consider women as “immanence”. The African men have not yet attained what she calls “transcendence” because they cannot take their destinies into their own hands. African men’s choices are limited by colonial and neocolonial obstacles which cannot give rise to individual and collective fulfillment. It is hasty to consider the African man as a colonial master to the woman in the same way that the West colonized Africans. It is only when the colonial bonds of the West have been eliminated that we can completely say that the current situation of the African women is caused by men and not the colonial bonds that prevent even the men from attaining their own destinies in the world.

Toxic feminism in Africa gives the impression that the African men have been beneficiaries of the systems of bad governance installed all over the continent as the relics of a sad colonial past. This is not true because it puts the men at an advantageous position to be attacked by women who take their collaborators for their “enemies” and so create “feminism” chaos to add to the neocolonial chaos that we should all be fighting against. If the trend of radical feminism continues to gain ground on the continent, then only the reverse of the goals will be attained as men could now consciously become obstacles to such toxic empowerment thereby creating two levels of challenges for women: the level of decolonization and the level of suppressing male dominance. In the same way, the wave of toxic feminism creates two levels of challenge for African men who also need empowerment: the level of decolonization and the level of defeating toxic feminism so as to preserve the bonds of motherhood and familyhood on the continent. While the men seek to eliminate neocolonialism while preserving the values of motherhood, the toxic feminists seek to perpetuate colonialism (by forcing western feminism down the throats of African men and women) and at the same time destroy the cherished values of

^{****} Opara, 191-192.

motherhood and familyhood which struggle to keep Africans together despite the extreme divisions brought by capitalism. While capitalism has divided Africans into social classes based on wealth, irrespective of gender, toxic feminism brings a new level of conflict based on gender to add to the woes of capitalism. This endangers communalism which still has a place in Africa if we do not want to give in to alienation. All this boils down to the role given to men to become superheroes of saving Africa from the hands of the neocolonialists and toxic feminists.

If patriarchy has made men the villains on the path to the empowerment of women, toxic feminism is supposed to make men superheroes with the noble task of restoring the lost dignity of Africa in the midst of corrosive neocolonial ways. Toxic feminism is oppressive to the males and to communalism. If nothing is done to curb the trend, then humanity on the continent is heading towards self-destruction that will not spare anyone. We should be able to boldly say that it is better to empower more men to fight the nobler battle against neocolonialism than to empower women to fight against the men who are fighting against neocolonialism. Toxic feminism is not just a waste of efforts for women but an invitation for the men to waste efforts that could have been used in better ventures to restore the dignity of Africa. The system of patriarchy in Africa is portrayed as darker than it is by the colonial discourse that sees nothing good in Africa. The toxic feminists depend on this discourse to wage a useless war against the men. The colonial discourse used by toxic feminists to wage a war on men results from what Olufemi Taiwo refers to as “the poverty of theory”. This means that Africans have not been able to sufficiently tell their own stories and so depend on colonial powers and their scholars to tell the stories of Africa. This leads to the parading of falsehood which is shocking to traditional Africans but seemingly normal in our “post-truth” era. In the words of Olufemi Taiwo, “African scholars in the humanities and social sciences labor under a burden imposed by the misrepresentation, falsehoods, and half-truths which characterize much of Euro-American scholarship on Africa.”^{§§§§} As long as African scholars continue to depend on “Euro-American scholarship” for a discourse on Africa, misguided and toxic movements like radical feminism will find fertile ground on the continent when the supposed intellectuals dependent on a western discourse on Africa take as their premise that the only way to liberate Africa is to fight against tradition instead of fighting against the colonial forces that destroyed the tradition. If toxic feminists and some misguided men have decided to beat the colonial and neocolonial drums in the supposed era of cultural revival, then the men, who are the declared “enemies” of radical feminists, have the noble role of restoring the dignity of Africa by fighting against neocolonial rule and restoring the dignity of motherhood and familyhood by fighting against toxic feminism. In either case, the African man needs more empowerment than the radical feminist because the empowerment of African men is beneficial to both men and women while the empowerment of toxic feminists is destructive to Africa and to the toxic feminists themselves.

^{§§§§} Taiwo, Olufemi. “Feminism and Africa: Reflections on the Poverty of Theory”. In *African Women and Feminism: Reflecting on the Politics of Sisterhood*, ed. Oyeronke Oyeronke (Trenton: Africa World Press 2003), 45.

Conclusion

On 21 June 2023, I defended a PhD thesis entitled *The Question of Truth in Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. In this thesis, one of my preoccupations is to prove that we now live in a “post-truth” era whereby postmodernity has shattered all the traditional canons of western rationality. This is in the positive dimension of incorporating the contributions of other cultures in the conception of the truth which is no longer a discovery but a construction with each culture contributing to the multidimensional angles of the truth. This is to dismiss the obsolete western quest for universality by which the western culture is supposedly considered to have the monopoly of the universality aimed at. This approach, which is non-inclusive, misleads philosophers to seek universality instead of pluriversality which is a more accommodating conception of the truth. The importation of western feminism to Africa is in a bid to perpetuate the unproductive intellectual culture of seeking universality as defined by western canons of rationality. This implies that universality is actually a form of westernization that is unacceptable in a “post-truth” era. The post-truth era does not mean that the truth has been replaced by falsity but that we need to seek alternative means to obtain the truth when the universalizing claims fail to capture the pluriversal nature of the truth. In the era of toxic feminism, African scholars are supposed to have understood that “[...] the enigmatic nature of the reality cannot be grasped through closed systems of philosophy. It is a complete deconstruction of absolute truths in philosophy to make way for relativism and partial truths that take into account the context of the subject and the object of knowledge. Here, the truth is an eternal project of discarding the methodology inherited from the past to make way for more tolerance in ideology and methodology.” ***** The ideology of western feminism has to be deconstructed in the light of the African realities that do not accommodate confrontation and vain battles in an era of collaboration and partnership between scholars and disciplines. The African post-truth era has to call into question, and reject, the western system of absolute truths so as to reconstruct the reality that takes into account differences and diversity. If this is done, then African women have no logical basis to embrace a theory of emancipation and empowerment that does not take into account the realities of their cultural space and time.

I have argued that the colonial history of Africa cannot be ignored in the quest for solutions to the problems created by western feminism and its toxicity even if Africans must not always use this colonial history as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility to sort out their differences. That is why this paper has challenged African radical feminists to take into account the realities of Africa and to review the ideology and methodology of their feminism. If the emancipation and empowerment of African women is the real goal of African feminism, then African women have to choose their battles and their “enemies” wisely in order not to make it an enterprise of self-destruction. Womanism emerged from the necessity to take into account the realities of the black women which are different from those of the western white women. But the realities of the black African women in the diaspora may not be the same as those of African women living in Africa. That is why Stiwanism seeks to adapt the requirements of feminism to the oppressive structures of Africa maintained by both men and women. Motherism is an Afrocentric and humanistic

***** Marcel Nyuysemo, *The Question of Truth in Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Art, Letters and Social Sciences, University of Yaoundé 1, June 2023), 194.

version of feminism which sees women as the custodians of motherhood which is an essential feature of stability in homes and harmony in the world. Nego feminism seeks to make women and men partners and collaborators and not the enemies projected by western feminism. Even the shattered female body of femalism is only a reflection of the shattered continent that needs healing against colonialism as a precondition to healing for both men and women in Africa. The African approaches to feminism are united by the common element of reorienting the goals of feminism towards the African realities that cannot exclude men from the picture if women have to be empowered to live in a communal environment and not in an island of their own.

As central thesis, this paper argues that radical feminism is a reality in Africa that should not be allowed to extend its tentacles to all areas and all women on the continent because it is destructive not only to the social fabric but even to radical feminists themselves. This is because it distracts us from the precondition of fighting neocolonialism as a step towards the empowerment of both men and women in Africa. Since toxic feminism assumes that the men have been emancipated and so become the “enemies”, this creates an extra battle ground for men who have to fight neocolonialism and at the same time fight women who think that the empowerment of women has to pass through a war with the men. This creates an environment of antagonism that is detrimental to social, intellectual and infrastructural development. To curb the wave of negativity and toxicity brought by radical feminism, I have proposed that the empowerment of radical feminists necessitates the empowerment of more decent males to counteract the destructive goals of women who make men their enemies as a show of emancipation. If this is done, we would realize that the real enemy of a woman is the toxic feminist and not the men who have much to gain when women are empowered to complement them in the development of Africa. With menism, seen as a masculine response to toxic feminism in Africa, we do not project a future in which fewer women have to be empowered for us to have harmony on the continent; rather we foresee a time when the empowerment of more toxic feminists has to give rise to the empowerment of more decent men so that all the efforts should not be wasted on useless battles while neocolonialism continues to hamper the initiation and execution of development projects in Africa. Since radical feminism is, in itself, a neocolonial imposition, to make the task easier for decent men, it is important to know that fighting against toxic feminism is part of the battle against neocolonialism for the complete emancipation and empowerment of African men and women. Therefore, menism is a noble theory of feminism for the good of both men and women in Africa.

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