

COSMOPOLITAN FEMINISM, WOMANISM, AND FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN RECENT NIGERIAN DRAMA BY WOMEN

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Abstract

Feminism as a movement agitates for gender equality, equity and fairness within the socio-political dynamics of a nation. At its initial stage, it was basically a white middle-class women association agitating for rights that mostly addressed their aspirations in Europe and America. This fuelled a new and alternative feminist theory by black women in the Diaspora that addressed their own problems under the coinage of Womanism. But this theory was also not all-encompassing and universal in dealing with the agitations of African women because of its obvious inadequacy in highlighting their problems. This resulted in black women from Africa distancing themselves from it, maintaining that it was against their own yearnings. Consequently, other alternative feminisms that are Afrocentric in nature sprang up. In this study we shall briefly summarise some of these theories. They include Motherism by Catherine Acholonu, Nego-feminism by Nnaemeka Obioma and STIWANISM by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie as background to the explication of the situation of the African woman within the ambit of her cultural milieu using selected plays written by Nigerian women.

Keywords: Feminism, Womanism, Patriarchy, Stiwanism, Motherism.

Introduction: A Panoramic View of Cosmopolitan Feminism.

Cosmopolitan feminism in this work is used to underscore all the theories of feminism that find origin from the Western highly industrialised societies where the women's liberation movement in all its multivariate colourations has tried to address the woman's position in

society. It is cosmopolitan feminism because it is "complex rather than simple, being all-inclusive, pervasive, being able to exist in, and affect the whole world" (Okome, par 3). Out of this myriad of differing opinions emerged four foundational theories of feminism. These are:

- Liberal or Bourgeois feminism
- Radical feminism
- Socialist or Materialist feminism
- Cultural feminism

Bourgeois feminism: This is that brand of feminism that criticises the "status quo for its failure to offer women the same opportunities as men" (Counsell and Wolf, 57). It seeks to make a case of equal rights for women in an otherwise male dominated society. It was basically a movement of white middle class women in Europe, married to influential men in their societies. In spite of this agitation, their husbands and their family are their first priority (Smith, 168). Saffiotti also argues that this feminism was fundamentally a feminism of the ruling class. She concludes that "bourgeois feminism is not feminism at all; indeed, it has helped to consolidate class society by giving camouflage of its contradictions" (Saffiotti, 22).

Radical feminism: This addresses two issues that are related. These issues border on biological inequalities, which according to them exist between men and women. Radical feminists also argue that the social class system by its makeup and *modus operandi* is oppressive to women. One of their biggest grouses rests on the argument that women have borne the greater part in the perpetuation of the human race and yet they have been the worse off. That the family was primarily set up to keep women perpetually subdued under men. This ideology emphasises the establishment of full women's culture where such subjects as literature, politics and art are reassessed from a specifically female viewpoint or

ideological framework. Generally speaking, the thrust of this feminist school is the idealisation of the female body with the insistence that women are superior to men. And so it "operates with essentialist assumptions seeking those qualities it deems inherent to women and, in an inversion of traditional value system, valorising them" (Counsell and Wolf, 33).

This idealisation of the women's bodies has resulted in an obsession by the women to protect themselves from men so much so that many agitate for "technological" ways to solve their problems so that they can be independent of the men. Issues like test-tube babies, effective contraception, abortion and family, form the core of their campaign (Ityavyar and Obiajunwa, 28). However, opponents of this theory criticise it for being "essentialist", because it views women as bodies and also its over-simplification of classifying women as one whole group, irrespective of their social, economic and cultural backgrounds. Dixon declares that:

Sisterhood, and the outward unity it provided, also disguised and mystified the internal class contradictions of the women's movement. Specifically, sisterhood temporarily disguised the fact that all women do *not* have the same interests, needs, desires: working-class women and middle-class women, student women and professional women, minority women and white women have more *conflicting* interests than could ever be overcome by their common experience based on sex discrimination. The illusions of sisterhood were possible because Women's Liberation had become, in its ideology and politics, predominantly a middle-class movement. The voices of poor and working-class women, of racial and national minority women or even of housewives with children, were only infrequently heard (Dixon, par 23).

Yet other critics also question the veracity of the claim by radical feminists that women are naturally caring while men, on the other hand,

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are naturally aggressive. Ehrenreich is very pointed in her criticism of radical feminists' vitriolic attack on men. She argues that,

The trouble with radical feminism...is that it doesn't go any farther. It remains transfixed with the universality of male supremacy – things have never really changed; all social systems are patriarchies; imperialism, militarism, and capitalism are all simply expressions of innate male aggressiveness...(Ehrenreich, par. 12).

She further contends that, apart from the fact that this attitude leaves out men in the genuine quest for reconciliation in the real spirit of "egalitarianism", a whole lot is left unsaid about women. Probably that is why it is viewed in some quarters as the "province of maladapted women" (Shelton and Agger, 28).

The Marxist Approach: This is rooted in the works of Marx and Engels. In their compendium on Western industrialised societies, they trace the oppression of women to the power relations of society where they are placed in the lowest stratum. Women were generally treated as chattels in those days. Marx and Engels take a broad sweep at society from the pristine past, revealing a deep-seated sexual inequality in society. They contend that the emergence of private property and the rise of the State impacted negatively on the status of women. Fundamentally, too, the emergence of monogamy served as an instrument for the enslavement of women who are needed to propagate male heirs who will take over the property of their fathers. They recall that before the advent of private ownership of the means of production, everything was communally owned. Even marriage was practised communally.

Marxists view female oppression in the family as a microcosm of what obtains in the larger society. The husband represents the 'bourgeoisie' while the wife stands for the 'proletariat'. She works much

but is paid little like the factory worker. Marx and Engels generally believe that the coming of private property resulted in the following:

1. The establishment of monogamous marriage in society.
2. Formation of a channel through which man secured a position of supremacy in the family and society.
3. Enslavement and social oppression of the female sex in various forms.
4. The consolidation of the State to protect the system of private property and ensure its continuity (120-1).

The bottom line is that Marxism, for all its dialectical analysis of society, has failed to address the problem of women's oppression. A related approach to the above is Marxism-feminism. This approach involves the juxtaposition of the ideology of Marxism and those of feminism. Proponents of this school of feminism argue that a combination of these two ideologies can go a long way in solving the women problem. Commenting on the fecundity of this ideology, Ehenreich declares that Marxism and feminism are pivotal to understanding the world because they share a lot in common. She further asserts that,

Both rip away popular mythology and common sense wisdom and force us to look at experiences in a new way. Both seek to understand the world, not in terms of static balances, symmetries...but, in terms of antagonisms. They lead to conclusions, which are jarring and disturbing at the same time as they are liberating (Ehenreich, par 4).

What we can deduce from this postulation is that while Marxism reveals the unequal power relations between classes, feminism mirrors the oppressive nature of patriarchy on women. The only way that people can

free themselves, she insists, is to wage a revolutionary struggle. This way, this inequality can be done away with. In the same vein, she believes that female subordination has to adopt this form of struggle to free itself from the shackles of patriarchy. She maintains that the simple fact that men are physically stronger than women gives them enormous advantages over women and that even the act of procreation places the man over the woman given that it is the man who has the power of impregnating the woman. This sexual inequality permeates many cultures the world over.

The three theories analysed above have given birth to many other feminisms. Most of these feminisms are shades and variants of the liberal bourgeois school or the Marxist, but especially the radical ideology. Some of these emergent theories include the following: Lesbian feminism, Amazon feminism, Anarcha-feminism, Cyborg feminism, Eco-feminism, Libertarian or Individualistic feminism, Moderate feminism, Pop feminism, Separatists feminism, Lipstick feminism, Post-Modern feminism, Psycho-Analytic feminism, Religious feminism, Liberal feminism, etc.

Apart from the aforementioned ideologies, there are other 'lesser' forms of feminism. Indeed the multiplicity of feminisms and the feminist movement prompted Vazquez to conclude that there "are as many definitions of feminisms as there are feminists" (qtd in Ekwierhoma, 39). The proliferation of many of these shades and colourations especially within the third wave feminism movement is an attestation of this, with new entrants like the "Girl power" that has sought to change the power relations in popular culture like television and films. The hitherto weak, gullible woman, who has had to be consistently looked after and, on many occasions, rescued from danger or helped in more gruelling and more physical tasks by the macho and strong man around, is now replaced with a more daring female character who either fights alongside the male protagonist or, on several occasions, rescues him from some lurking danger. A good example to cite here is a

television series titled *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* where we find a clear departure from the usual male super-hero mantra. In this case, the women actresses "represent a spectrum of possibilities for contemporary womanhood that includes **superior intelligence, physical strength**, the desire for relationship, the quest for independence and the refusal to be dominated, circumscribed or limited in **action and mobility**" (Byers, 173 – emphasis mine).

Alternative Feminisms

However, it will be discovered that most of the ideologies of the feminist theories discussed above are Euro-centric. They address issues of women in the Western industrialised countries where the hoopla is all about the woman 'freeing' her body from the ownership and sexual fantasies of men, as most later feminisms indicate. The obsession of the Western woman with her body and individuality has given rise to some of the theories we have discussed above. There is also the issue of gender equality that many feminists base their campaigns upon.

This ideological preoccupation has generated a debate in the developing world and a consequent rejection by African women of these theories maintaining that they do not address the woman question in their own societies. As a result of this, alternative theories of feminism have been advanced that reflect the problems of women in Africa and those in the Diaspora. These theories are more cultural in nature.

These alternative ideologies include Black feminism and Womanism. The main argument of black feminists is that they suffer a double oppression first as women and then as black people. Womanists, on the other hand, foreground their analysis on women, especially black women. Both of them view feminism as basically a Euro-American, white middle class women's movement. Proponents of this school argue that feminism only addresses issues relating to these white women. These issues are then universalised in the name of global sisterhood

without taking cognisance of cultural diversities and local variations of women's issues across the multiplicity of transnational boundaries.

Womanism itself is derived from the adjective "womanist", meaning having respect and belief in the abilities and talents of women. Walker, a black American writer and strong advocate of womanism, clarifies it as the totality of identifying with women issues and aspirations in all its ramifications. The woman, therefore, remains the centre of focus as far as this ideology is concerned. There is a suggestion that Womanism is more "colorful, exuberant and audacious than its white counterpart" and that there exists a fundamental difference between black feminism and white feminism (Bellis, 10). This is at the point of their respective relationship with men. While white women, especially of the radical school, see men as a problem, black women view men as part of the lot oppressed and suppressed by many centuries of slavery and suffering.

African Feminisms

However, there is another shade of womanism, which is African in orientation. Proponents of this viewpoint are composed of African women. These women argue that womanism, as advocated by black women in Diaspora, does not address issues that directly impact on African women. The veracity of this standpoint is underscored by the cultural antecedents, which are specific to Africa and the women therein. Women here are not fighting against racism or to control their bodies – whether to give birth or not, whether to be heterosexual or gay. African womanists do not question the human programmer that prescribes sexual division of roles. They do not preach misogamy or lesbianism. Neither do they view mothering as an aberration, nor something to despise or something to be ashamed of. Oyewumi proudly acknowledges the vitality of this heritage. She states that in Africa, it is a privilege to be a mother. Emecheta, a womanist herself, comes down strongly on feminists who despise motherhood. She asserts that, "...those who wish

to control and influence the future by giving birth and nurturing the young should not be looked down upon. It is not a degrading job. If I had my way, it should be the highest paid job in the world" (180). Okome corroborates this standpoint. She maintains that giving birth and nurturing children is a blessing. Contrary to what obtains in the Western world, an African woman is not complete if she has not publicly showcased her fecundity by bringing forth a child and that, "the kneeling position that is assumed at the moment of birth – confers privileges on a mother. Ideally, mothers ought to be respected, ought to be heeded, ought to be able to ask their offspring to transcend the limits of doing just enough" (Okome, par 24).

The pitiable circumstances of the Woman Penitent as a result of her barrenness in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Ebriere's inability to conceive as a result of her husband's impotence in John Pepper Clark's *Song of a Goat*, and Emotan's loneliness due to her inability to have children in Irene Salami's *Emotan: A Benin Heroine* are good examples to cite to buttress the argument for the importance of motherhood in Africa. Sheldon contends that "African women...embraced a feminism that developed out of their anti-colonial struggles combined with their intrinsic appreciation of local customs and history" (Sheldon, 81). Sheldon further avers that because of the distinctiveness of African feminism, African advocates of this have had to coin new names for their brands such as 'womanism'. Many African feminists therefore view feminism as culturally specific, insisting that it is bound to mutate from society to society according to the needs and yearnings of the women in that particular society. They strongly reject the seemingly homogeneous nature of feminism (Nnaemeka, 14). They further lambaste African writers who rush into adopting Western views of feminism contending that this "universalisation and essentialisation of the woman question erases or, at best, trivialises the natural multidimensionality of social, economic and political realities of entire areas of the world." Ogunyemi upholds the view that "Western feminists

ignore African women's problems completely or speak in the name of all women without really being sufficiently informed about the problems of women from other...countries" (qtd in Ekwierhoma, 47).

One writer even goes ahead to contend that it is this lack of understanding of other cultures that has given rise to this Western "prototypical female experience" a myopic gloss at what they supposedly think they know about other women (Oyewumi, par 4). Bell Hooks calls it "false sisterhood" because it is based on racist assumptions of white women (Hooks, 296). Spivak laments that women from the developing world have been made to be the "Other" by Western feminists who impose Western perspectives on them (*Microsoft Encarta*). Chandra captures this phenomenon by commenting that "the homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials but rather on the basis of secondary sociological, anthropological universals" (262). Of course, it should be noted that this anthropological universalisation is determined by Western feminists. The picture of the African woman in this arrangement is that of illiteracy, dowdiness and docility, while the picture of the Western woman is that of an emancipated, educated and liberated person. However, this is far from the truth. The lack of understanding of the dynamics of the African society further reinforces this presumptuous claim by Western feminists of the condition of the African women with the resultant 'stereotipification' and over-generalisation.

It is on this premise that we shall briefly summarise the pre-occupations of a few feminisms that are African-oriented. These include, but not in any way limited to, the following:

STIWAN: This is a Womanist alternative theory to Western feminism which uses "the spaces and strategies provided by our indigenous culture for the social being of women" (230). It is an acronym coined by Ogundipe-Leslie to mean Social Transformation including Women. The ideological underpinnings of STIWAN are captured in her book,

Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation, where she argues for the "inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa" (230). She further posits that this participation by women must not be in the periphery but must be in the "core". Women must be part of the decision making, not just some passive 'rear wheel' passengers who are merely on the sidelines and watching only to be told what to do or how to do it. For society to move forward there has to be a deliberate collaboration between men and women. Ogundipe-Leslie chides those who think feminism is not relevant in Africa and thus brand African feminists as copycats of Western feminist ideologies. She summarises the expectations of African feminism under the following arguments:

1. That feminism need not be oppositional to men. It is not adversarial gender politics.
2. That women need not neglect their biological roles.
3. That motherhood is idealised and claimed as strength by African women and seen as having a special manifestation in Africa.
4. That the total configurations of the conditions of women should be addressed rather than critics being obsessed with sexual issues.
5. That certain aspects of women's reproductive rights take priority over others.
6. That women's conditions in Africa need to be addressed.

A closer look at the issues raised indicates a clear departure with the Euro-centric models with their essentialisation of the woman's body.

Nego feminism: This brand of feminism propounded by Nnaemeka Obioma, a Nigerian professor of French based in America, is also rooted in the African world view. It emphasises "the way that African feminists negotiate, collaborate and compromise in their political work that aims to support women's needs" (in Sheldon, 81). Arnot similarly highlights the

ideological bent of Nego-feminism by explaining that it "essentially challenges the Cartesian duality of public/private spheres and male and female forces on which North American and Western European research is premised" (61). By and large we still find similar a meeting point between Nego-feminism and STIWANISM given their rootedness in the African cultural milieu.

Motherism: This is another Afrocentric feminist alternative to Western models of feminism. Just like other forms of African feminism, it notes that African womanists are not fighting for male castration like their Western counterparts. Theirs is not a tirade against the headship of men for whom they have great respect. Also, most of them do not view men as a threat. On the contrary, they see themselves as playing roles complementary to those of the men (Acholonu, 107).

Acholonu queries the quest for the equality of the sexes – a position of many Western and radical feminists. She styles this "mechanical equality", claiming that it is "confrontational and self-destructive" while complementarity is "diplomatic, mutually supportive and dynamic" (107). Her theory of feminism, which she calls Motherism, is a multidimensional theory which cuts across the whole gamut of human endeavours, focusing on:

Ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother nature at all levels of human endeavour ...and the task of the Motherist is that of healing and protecting the natural cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment (110-111).

It is interesting to note that all these shades and colourations of African feminisms portray similar, if not the same, arguments. They all set out to promote the agenda of women inasmuch as they are tolerant of patriarchy. They can, therefore, all be viewed as womanist in nature but

with the African colouration. Davies (as cited in Ekpa) summarises the basic thrust of these womanist ideologies. She argues that if African feminism is practiced with an African bias while also respecting the local value system, it will most certainly succeed. She outlines goals that should indicate genuine African feminism, as follows:

- Recognition of a common struggle with African men for the removal of the colonial domination (for which reasons, it is not antagonistic to African men, but challenges them towards an awareness of women's subjugation).
- Recognition of the inequities and limitations in traditional societies which have been reinforced by colonialism.
- Recognition of the nature of African societies as ancient societies and the proposal that women's problems must be studied logically and historically.
- Examination of African societies for institutions which are of value to women and, in effect, nullify those which work against women. African feminism, therefore, "does not simply import Western Women's agendas; rather, it respects African women's status as mothers...it sees utility in the positive aspects of the extended family and polygamy."
- African feminism respects the African woman's self-reliance and the penchant for cooperative work and social organisation but rejects the "muledom" that has been the lot of African women. It also looks at traditional and contemporary avenues of choice for women, accepts an international feminism and a global sisterhood proposed by the international women's movement but rejects the European and American models of feminism (Ekpa, 31).

African Feminisms in Recent Nigerian Drama

Recent Nigerian drama, especially the type written by women, has projected a potpourri of dissenting and often contradictory tones in terms of its feminist configurations. A number of these women playwrights have experimented with the ideology of Radical feminism, with its often vitriolic invective in their works. And so plays like *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested* by Stella Oyedepo and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* by Tracie Chima Utoh with their 'Bolekaja' women combatants can be categorised under this. However, the ideology of womanism has, by and large, dominated the pages of most gynocritical works – whether in the colourations of STIWANISM or Nego-feminism or Motherism.

Nevertheless, the womanist ideology permeates most of the recent Nigerian drama, especially those written by women, portraying the world of the African woman. In Onwueme's *Tell it to Women*, we are faced with a highly militant and combative group of women. But these women are not radical in the Western sense of fighting men or pushing for issues like same sex marriage or lesbianism as such. On the contrary, in the play "an acid attack is made against this ideology" (Jeremiah, 21). Unlike the Western accommodationist stance toward lesbianism, Onwueme presents this in her play as an aberration, something that is very foreign to the African culture.

Furthermore, in a clear and unambiguous voice, Onwueme projects Ruth and Daisy, the two women 'liberators', as mere Western-oriented feminists, engaged in sloganeering and other such invectives, using foreign concepts of feminism on the poor rural women in the name of women empowerment. Yemoja, a villager from Idu, is chosen by Ruth and Daisy, the two lesbian feminists, to follow them to the city to act as a go-between for the village women when they subsequently go to the city to attend the Better Life Programme – a programme of women empowerment. She is, however, rough handled and abused by the duo.

Their disdainful attitude is completely at variance with the ideology of the so-called sisterhood and female identification very much preached by cosmopolitan feminists. Onwueme showcases the power of the woman not through the Western prism but through the Afrocentric cultural milieu in the play thus:

Yemoja: They say you lack power
what power is greater than
the power of creation.
Idu daughters, what name is stronger than
the Umuada of Idu?

Chorus: None!!

Yemoja: But why are you here?
Are you not here because the ones who
speak from their nose tell you that
woman is powerless?
That you are used and abused?

Chorus: Never!! (pp. 278-9)

The above situation does not indicate women who are in any way emasculated or powerless. The point to note is what constitutes power, an issue that cosmopolitan feminists have consistently failed to problematise but have continued to gloss over because they construe it only through their local dynamics but at the same time universalising it. In terms of the male/female power relations, Chinweizu has actually argued that women come tops, given their control of three key issues – the cradle, the kitchen and the womb. To Chinweizu, these three have become “the control centres of female power which are then turned into political power” and that every day of a man’s life is dictated by a woman either as a mother or wife who exploits his vulnerability right from infancy to adulthood. (Chinweizu, 15). To him “the womb is basic

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power, the cradle is strategic power and the kitchen is tactical power, (and) to hold all three is to have overwhelming power" (20). He ends by saying that "men rule the world but women rule men" and that, consequent to this oppression, men should unite to fight for their freedom.

Most of the theories of African feminism project women as mother figures who care so much and are generally very protective towards their families. They are submissive to their husbands and society at large, but they are also willing to guard their homes with everything they have. They are generally well grounded in the area of housekeeping. However, they are not necessarily slavish and will, if need be, be assertive, especially when they are taken for granted. This is what STIWANISM, Nego-feminism and Motherism highlight.

A good example to cite is that of Edewede in *Edewede* by Julie Okoh. This is a woman who cares passionately for her family. Her whole life revolves around her husband and children. She cares so much for them that she is willing to sacrifice herself for their survival. A meek and mild housewife, she is transformed into a tigress, ready to tear anybody apart when the peace and survival of her home is threatened. She does not care a bit that she will incur the wrath of the village by challenging the old-fashioned belief and practice of female genital mutilation. Like mother hen, she is willing to meet force with force. Edewede and Eriala, the local nurse, are therefore able to mobilise the women in the village to embark on a strike action by relocating en mass from the village in protest. This action yields the much needed support of prohibiting female circumcision in the village. They love their families so much that they are willing to lay down their lives for them; especially their children whom they stand to lose as a result of this needless but inimical initiation ceremony they undergo at puberty.

The same could be said of Fola and Nneora in the plays *On His Demise* and *Nneora: An African Doll's House* by Oyedepo and Utoh-Ezeajugh, respectively. Both women love their families passionately.

Nneora cares so much for her husband, Ikenna, that she literally sacrifices everything for him, even risking the consequences of going to her ex-boy friend to facilitate his passage for overseas treatment when he falls ill. Fola, on the other hand, remains faithful to her husband and children even when she is physically thrown out of her home having refused the levirate system of marrying one of her husband's brothers.

Chief (Mrs) Sijuade, in *Who Owns This Coffin?* by Utoh, also cuts the picture of a sensitive woman who cares so much for her family. The evidence of this attitude is the philanthropic work she does through the Dynamic Women's Dance Group. She is uncompromising when it comes to issues of ethics, and will rather do that which will bring blessings to the generality of the populace than collude with others to cheat. Professor Nona Odaro, a presidential candidate of the UPLP party in *More than Dancing* by Salami, still cooks for her husband and does other household chores in spite of the fact that she has a housekeeper. She is respectful and courteous to him and will, on many occasions, defer to his opinion. She, however, also asserts herself when the husband starts exhibiting a cranky behaviour. She refuses to be intimidated by his fractious attitude just like the women in UPLP party call off the bluff of the men and succeed in recording a resounding victory against them, in spite of the innuendos and other verbal assaults inflicted on them by the men.

In *Then She Said It*, also by Onwueme, the exploitation and rape of the land and the people by international corporations in concert with their local collaborators is resisted fiercely by the masses. Out of this group emerge strong women leaders who lead the revolt. The pivotal leadership of these women is captured beautifully through the warrior status which the playwright ascribes to them. They are not the usual confused, disorderly lot, whom you will find with children strapped on their backs running away in terror from war. Rather, they are even the initiators of the rebellion and are right in the centre of the action. The brutal wheels of oppression by the agencies of exploitation elicit the

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reaction that emanates from the people and the fact that women give leadership to this important movement should not be lost on us. The fearlessness of these women is indicative of the fact that as much as they are complacent and, to a large extent, even docile, they can be militant when they are provoked. The women in *Then She Said It* fight for their livelihood; they fight for the preservation of their environment, which is their mainstay, given the pastoral nature of their economy. Therefore, it should not be construed that because women are accommodating, they are completely devoid of any form of assertiveness. They have a way of fighting tradition and making themselves to be heard, too.

In Irene Salami's play, *Emotan: A Benin Heroine*, Emotan, the heroine of the play, displays this act of bravery by helping the exiled prince, Ogun, to take back his throne from the usurper, Uwaifiokun. She secretly raises an army which she uses to depose Uwaifiokun. Meanwhile this is a woman that one would meet on the streets and would not even look at twice. She has a Motherist spirit; a humane disposition that makes her highly likable by all and sundry. She is, at the same time, fearless. She is not awed by the splendour and glory of the Oba, so much so that when he indicates interest to 'acquire' her as one of his new wives, she flatly, and without flinching, turns him down. She is malleable, but when occasion demands, she is firm and uncompromising.

Another strand of the womanist ideologies immanent in women's plays is the co-operative spirit in women. This is one of the arguments that womanists put forward which suggests that African women are even more bonded and capable of greater cooperation and collaboration than the 'cosmopolitan sisters' of Western feminism. Emotan is a good organiser of women. She encourages them not to be lazy and slothful, but to engage in productive endeavours. Edewede is industrious and hardworking. She is able to bring the women together to tackle a problem that affects them all. The Umuada of Idu in *Tell it to Women* and the Dynamic Women's Dance Group in *Who owns this Coffin?* are all rallying points for women to support one another.

As individuals, women have defied the "muledom" image very much identified with them in many such faulty significations of themselves whether in literature or history. Nneora is able to break free of the stranglehold of poverty and privation through sheer backbreaking petty trading. She does not, however, hesitate to help Ikenna by paying off his debts when accosted by Mama Uduak to pay up, neither does she give it second thoughts when it comes to giving all she has away so that she can support her husband. Fola, in *On His Demise*, shows her faithfulness to her 'late' husband and will have no other man come close to her. She is also ready to give up everything for her children.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have outlined the tensions that exist between African feminism and the Western cosmopolitan models. This tension has led to the rejection of these Western models of feminism because of the universalisation of their local experiences. STIWANISM by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Nego-feminism by Obioma Nnaemeka and Motherism by Catherine Acholonu, three of the alternative theories discussed here, are culturally aligned to African women. Their sympathetic and compassionate outlook is what womanists take note of in their theories. The excellence of their humanistic spirit and 'womanity' in all ramifications is celebrated in most African women's writings whether as theories of feminism or as written plays. That is why the plays analysed above resonate with this cultural ambience of Africa where family values and communality are still very strong, unlike in the Western world where attitudes of individualism and alienation are still very prevalent.

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