

Gender Equity, Ethics and Feminism: Assumptions of an African Ubuntu Oriented Society

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ABSTRACT Feminism is a key transformative movement which impacts on women's rights and has been an essential and important influencer on critical theory and, although, pursuing its very distinct agendas, has assimilated aspects from theories such as Marxism, Deconstruction and to an extent Postmodernism. What is especially interesting is its schema to comprehend the nature and contrivance of male oppression and the way in which the fairer-sex experiences this oppression. The experience of African women in an Ubuntu oriented society, such as South Africa, is particularly important to understand, since this is a suppressed discourse requiring greater analysis. By interpreting feminism and feminist ethics in African society in a way which allows it to view itself in new forms, the researcher seeks to provide an overview of feminism as well as the role of ethics in African culture. The present research, thus, serves to promote gnosis as well as deeper understanding of the philosophy of Ubuntu and will assist in determining where African women fit in the scheme of universal expression.

INTRODUCTION

In a world replete with gender biases and social structures which delineate the women's responsibilities, feminism is an activist movement as well as a corpus of thoughts that underscore the need for an affirmative transformation of society in a way that females and their critical roles in society are not marginalized. The feminism is indeed a collective movement and it has huge concern for individual rights. Its aim is to secure additional rights and privileges for women in all societies and while it is assuming greater global prominence its primary impetus is in the Western world. In Africa for instance, women bear many social ills which are directly attributable to regional cultural beliefs, many of which are outmoded, which invariably accompany an inevitable degeneration of humanity as such. It is imperative that the fairer sex be afforded their rightful place as full citizens in all spheres of life and that social injustice be fought, since in the traditional world, female submission is considered to be a natural act of ideal femininity in patriarchal societies. The Feminist Ethics focuses on women's as opposed to men's interests and rights and it seeks to modify, recreate, or reorganize many features of traditional western and African ethics that downgrade or diminish the moral experience of females. For example, due to the patriarchal cues they obtain both within and outside the home, young girls and boys

automatically accept that "masculine" values such as justice and reliability, which are associated with culture and the public environment, are further fully *human* than "feminine" values as caring, sympathy, empathy and kindness, which they tend to relate to nature and their private existence.

This research is based on literature reviews from a wide range of predominantly secondary sources. It provided an overview of feminism as well as the role of ethics in African culture and promoted gnosis as well as a deeper understanding of the philosophy of Ubuntu. It will hopefully assist in determining where African women fit in the scheme of universal expression from both a global and South African perspective.

Feminists seek to deconstruct the conventional dominant male archetypes and construct a female viewpoint which is based solely on the female experience of life. Jaggar (1991) suggested that traditional western ethics is flawed since it fails women in a variety of ways. In the first instance, it considers men first when it comes to rights and interests. It diminished the value of women and their problems as they carry out their many private responsibilities and duties such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children and the elderly. It erroneously suggested that women are less developed beings and greatly over-values masculinity and the traits that are linked to it such as independence, self-sufficiency, separation, mind, reason, traditions, transcendence,

war and death. In likewise fashion it tended to undervalue many culturally feminine traits such as interdependence, community, connection, body, sentiments, nature, immanence, peace and life. Critically it tended to support culturally masculine ways of moral reasoning which accentuate rules and regulation, universality, and neutrality over culturally feminine ways of moral reasoning that highlight relationships, fastidious action, and partiality. There is ample evidence from the literature reviewed that numerous women have expended great amounts of time and energy fighting for social and economic equality with men and the danger is that some women may have forgotten the true significance of the femininity and its place in the metaphysical view of creation which is indeed be a sad omission.

Feminism, essentially, has its origin in the Latin word '*femina*' which designated women's concerns. It is a predominantly a western movement which gained impetus in the latter half of the twentieth century and has over the course of, especially, the last two decades, reshaped attitudes on the role and position of women in society and to a large extent altered the lives of many people, especially Westerners, but also those who have adopted western value systems. It originated in the fight for women's rights and began in Europe in the late eighteenth century when women began to be cognizant of their 'lesser' status in society and sought to make amends. Gradually, it began to take root in America as well and this is where its current attitude is honed. Feminism then refers to the enduring struggle to liberate the female species from millennia of oppression and exploitation, and to a greater extent marginalization in global society. Its clarion call is to eradicate patriarchy and to expose, deconstruct and remove all the practices which tend to promote and sustain gender inequality, from whatever quarter. Feminism views women not merely as a biologically different grouping, but also views them as a social category. Consequently, women are oppressed based on their sexuality and are viewed as lesser beings that are inferior to males. Feminism, thus, spotlights the experiences of women and isolates the various types of oppression which the female gender is subjected to in the society. In societies which are all patriarchal, males dominate and are, thus, the core of social inequality as it affects women. It is, thus, important for feminists to remove all the obstacles to wom-

en's liberation whether these be in the social, economic or political or whichever other arenas. Women are not to be viewed as intrinsically inferior, submissive or less intelligent than their male counterparts. It is clear that feminism seeks to destroy the existing sexist power structure which pervaded societies across the globe.

A feminist ethic focus on the realization of equality and fairness for women in all spheres of life, both private and public, and the ending of oppressive patriarchy in all its guises and in all its practices and seeks to transform societal institutions. The notion that men and women think differently has traditionally been posited to justify anti-feminine discrimination. Aristotle suggested in his writings that women are less rational than their male counterparts. His ethics, however, is a reflection of the values of Athenian citizens, namely property owning Greek males. The values of Greek females and even foreigners and slaves, male or female are not in the least considered. Despite this shortcoming, the traditional western ethicists argued that Aristotle's ethics applies to both sexes equally and to all people. They assumed that it would be injudicious to deliberately create an ethics that focuses on any specific group of people irrespective of sex.

Immanuel Kant to a large extent supported such a notion and explained that women lack civil personality and are thus incapable of making a meaningful contribution in the public sphere. Jean Jacques Rousseau asserted that men and women have different virtues so that women are suitable for managing their homes while men are naturally leaders. In the 1960s women were told that they differed to men psychologically and women were viewed as stereotypical emotional beings while men were considered to be rational. Feminists abhorred such explanations and asserted that women are indeed different in that they have been conditioned in oppressive patriarchal systems so that behave in ways that are considered to be feminine. While it is accepted by feminists today that women do think differently, this is due to the fact that women's thinking gives up insights that are generally missed in male thinking. One of the main ways in which women differ and in which they are supreme beings, is in the field of ethics and in particular virtue ethics. Women viewed from a moral perspective, seek a society in which all people live happy and satisfying lives. A fem-

inist ethic is, thus, rooted in a vision of the world in which women are no longer oppressed or marginalized or subjected to male violence and bullying. The researchers strongly suggest that such an ethic is an integral part of the equation which leads to the pursuit of freedom, and is, indeed, a major part and parcel of the ethic of social responsibility that the sexes share.

The notion of feminism pervades most aspects of society, although, it does not always manifest under the title of feminism *per se*. This fact makes it difficult to define the term 'feminism'. The sociologist, Maggie Humm (1992:1) stated that "the word feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society." Others such as Cuddon (1991:338) define feminism as "an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature". From an African perspective, Steady (1981:28) defined African feminism as emphasizing female autonomy and collaboration, nature over culture, the fundamentality of children, multiple mothering and affiliation with a clan. Steady hypothesizes that African feminism is primarily concerned with the liberation of all African peoples, irrespective of gender. Whilst taking the lead from Western feminism movements, it further created a uniquely African feminist discourse which carefully demarcated anxieties that are uniquely African in nature. African feminism tends to raise questions about certain features within traditional African culture but does not in any way disparage them. Such features, for example, the role of patriarchy may be viewed in a different light by women emanating from different socio-economic strata in African society.

Ethics is Feminist in the sense that women have virtues, values and rights which are at least equal to those of their male counterparts. It does not presuppose that females are superior to men. Neither does it negate values and virtues that have been hitherto associated with males. In any event, women make thorough moral judgments and are moral agents that demonstrate superior ethicality than men in many situations. In politics for instance, female politicians such as Indira Gandhi, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Golda Meir, Benazir Bhutto, Margaret Thatcher, and more recently, Angela Merkel have aptly demonstrated this in their reasoning.

Unfortunately, men have higher status in societal eyes when it comes to reasoning and

most of the time this equally applies to their values and virtues. Women's rights are also often flouted in patriarchal societies. This suggested that female moral reasoning requires greater consideration. Feminism rejected the notion of natural hierarchy but accepts merited hierarchy. It strives for an egalitarian, relational and integrated society in which there is unity of body as well as spirit. It seeks justice for the marginalized in society. It argued that real virtues need to be cultivated in each of the sexes. There may well be some virtues which are feminine in orientation but this should not diminish their status.

Feminist ethics as such is a field of philosophical inquiry which investigates ethical issues as they relate to women's experiences in their continual association with the male gender in society. It strives to answer moral questions in feminist ways and seeks to ascertain how feminist values and beliefs can be lived out in the public sphere (Cole and McQuin 1992:1). In an African context, how exactly do patriarchal systems prompt oppression of the fairer sex? What is the position in ethics of female traits such as a spirit of caring and compassion? Women invariably fight patriarchy in many countries and not only in Africa and all that varies is the degree (Eboh 1998: 333). The objective of the research is to enlighten people as to women taking collective action under particular sets of conditions and circumstances in Africa and beyond.

Feminism in World Religions

In the Christian viewpoint, St. Paul says: "There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Orthodox Study Bible, Galatians 3: 28). Clearly then, women are equal to men. In Christianity, Being is God the Father. The masculine pole is the *Paraclete* (Holy Spirit) while the feminine pole is the *Theotokos* or Godbearer (The Virgin Mary). Existence is in Jesus Christ as the Son of God the Father. The Neo-Platonic School of Athens separated the active and passive poles into in to a dynamic and static mode respectively. The active masculine pole distinguished between intellect and spirit while the passive feminine pole distinguished between *natura* and *materia*. The former alluded to the maternal aspect of womanhood while the latter relates to the passive foundation of all manifestation (Casewit 2000). In

Christianity the woman Eve, is the universal archetype of the attracting and psychic nature of women while the Virgin Mary is the spiritual and liberating archetype (Schuon 1993:25-45). Unfortunately, the Church also spoke of God in masculine terms which adversely affect women socially. Johnson noted, "...this 'impl[ies] that women are somehow less like unto God...if God is male, then the male is God' (2007:99).

In Islam, women are graced through motherhood as a reflection of the mercy of God. Women are sources of compassion who produce and nurture life. The Holy Quran referred to humanity as *insan* which is a collective including female and male as originating in the Divine. Men and women are only truly men and women if they remain true to their human calling to accomplish the will of the Creator (Casewit 2000). Each of the sexes are equal before God and are judged individually by God once they die physically: "...men who guard their modesty and women who guard their modesty and men who remember God much and women who remember, God hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward" (Quran, Surah 33, Ayat 35).

If we are to comprehend God's purpose for women, we need to consider "the nature of God and humankind as created by God" (Grenz and Kjesbo 1995:144). Unfortunately, despite utterances relating to equality and often dogma, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions have not been helpful in supporting the plight of women. Both Christianity and Islam are patriarchal in essence. For one, polygamy is allowed for men in the Islamic religion and a man can, thus, marry as many as four wives (Quran 4:3). Women by contrast are forbidden to having more than one husband. In Islam, it is also stated in the Quran that "... women (wives) shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. Further, Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise" (Quran 2:28). The penalty for women guilty of adultery according to Islamic Sharia is death by stoning but there is no such equal punishment for males guilty of the same offence. In Christianity the man has authority to rule over the woman as Christ rules over His church. In the book of Genesis in Judaism and Christianity, woman is presented as inferior to man and she also has a negative image as a temptress (Gen. 1-3). In the Quran (7:19-23) the same Creation reasoning is applied to women. In most of the African Traditional Religions women are merely the possessions of men.

Hinduism considered the feminine pole to be vital in religious practices and goddesses are all symbolic of aspects of the Supreme Principle (God). Hinduism sees men and women as part and parcel of a duality. The passive feminine mother pole is *Prakriti* while *Purusha* is the essence or masculine father pole. From these two poles is derived the cycle of existence termed the *samsara*. The feminine principle is organized into a heavenly trinity comprising *Lakshmi* (Goodness), *Saraswati* (Wisdom) and *Parvati* (Divine Punishment). These are equal and divine complements to *Brahma* (The Creator), *Vishnu* (The Preserver) and *Shiva* (The Destroyer). The *Shakti* is a further, feminine aspect of God. This is the heavenly energy of the Supreme Principle which has power to attract and also save. She saves as a Mother via her purity and attracts humanity to God as a pure virgin. Every virtuous woman is a manifestation of *Shakti* and requires the quality of *deva* in man as creator and master (Casewit 2000). In Ancient Egypt she would be likened to *Isis* while in Judaism to the *Shekina* (divine presence).

In the Chinese Buddhist view, male and female are in harmony with the universe and produce balance and cohesiveness. The *Yang* represents the active masculine pole while the *Yin* represents the passive feminine pole. These poles caused the universe and their origin is the Tao (Supreme Ultimate Principle). Both the poles have an active and passive element and the Earth and Heaven are their concrete manifestations. Their bond is strong and is depicted in the Yin-Yang symbol. Each gender requires an aspect of the other for equilibrium to exist (Schuon 1993: 25-45).

However, when viewed from a contemporary vantage point, the religions appear to be biased and unjust towards the fairer-sex mainly because, each of the religions prioritizes the woman's social role as a wife and mother. Such roles are not accepted by certain members of the modern feminist movement and as they appear to go against individual rights and in a world where there is an increasing breakdown of constraints on sexuality and more 'freedom' is desired in certain feminine quarters, religions are seemingly not helpful.

Developments in Feminism

The underlying humanistic philosophy of feminism can be traced to the egalitarian and liberal ideas of the Enlightenment and during

the Industrial Revolution when individualism became a cornerstone of especially Western philosophy. Many women became employed alongside men in robotic work in factories and mines but received lesser treatment in the form of lower wages and in the political sphere they had no vote. As values became more materialistic in the capitalistic system, the tendency was for spirituality to decrease simultaneously with deeper human consciousness. Mores generally deteriorated in society. Women were obliged to move out of the home and family units began to break down almost to the point of total destruction. Society made huge demands on women without any fair treatment being meted out to them.

Since its first exertion of influence on critical theory, Feminism has tended to absorb what it needed to aid facilitate its growing influence from a wide range of theories including Marxism, deconstruction and postmodernism. Throughout this time it has steadfastly maintained its course and agenda. It strived to grapple with the nature and apparatus of male oppression and to arrive at a greater understanding of how females experience patriarchy. Its critical role is to challenge male domination, and in particular in the arts and to create of a female 'canon' of works. Feminists retain the belief that the dismantling of all systems and practices, and indeed structures and institutions that fashion or preserve undesirable power discrepancies between male and female, is the necessary prerequisite for the creation of gender equality. Barrow and Millburn (1990:128) asserted that feminism is in essence "a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women".

The sex politics is an apt way to describe the Feminist approaches to ethics since they are distinctively "political" in that feminist ethicists are primarily committed to eliminating the subordination of females and other oppressed groups in all of their expressions. When considering ethical issues the first thing that comes to mind in the feminist mind is, thus, the extent to which one group or individual dominates or subordinates another. The feminists invariably tend to propose action guides intended to undermine the current methodical subordination of women. However, not all feminists agreed on what feminism actually means. How Feminism is understood or even interpreted is to a large extent dependent on the political and sociological ex-

aminations and objectives of the feminist concerned. Sheila (1980:4) stressed that Feminism is most likely "a perspective, a world-view, a political theory, or a kind of activism."

In the Post Marxism era, Marxist feminists have increasingly become hyper-critical of Marxism and whereas it was initially considered to be an important theory by them, now tend to view it as an upholder of patriarchal attitudes which stifle the liberal development of females. The class struggle issue dominated Marxism to such an extent that it lessens the value of gender issues and to most Marxist feminists this is a deplorable state of affairs. Their desire is for gender issues to dominate. The result is that a post-Marxism bias now exists in which gender equality is viewed as an important precursor to Marxist revolution which is in any event unlikely without the genders being on an equal footing.

Gynocriticism is another term worth looking at in the male-female debate. It primarily concerned itself with developing a specifically female criticism that critiques works that are written by women. The American feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter classified critical work such as her own which focused exclusively on literature penned by female writers. The objectives are to recover 'lost' or 'neglected' women writers and to understand how women construct textual meaning. She created the term "gynocritics" to explain what she believed women should be doing as they read literature in which there women's experiences are narrated. Such actions would serve to bring women into the main discourse of cultural history, and away from where patriarchy has tended to expel them to. The male bias, thus, needed to be countered at every opportunity.

The term is not widely used today, but the two key examples of gynocriticism, namely Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977), are still read today, so the practice of gynocriticism, if not the word, is very much alive. The objective of the critique is to identify the unique features that existed between women's and men's writing so as to lay a path towards the future generations of women writers who should in any case not be reliant on male models. Women writers should be able to understand and cultivate their own great female literary space. In the Charlotte Bronte's masterpiece *Jane Eyre* (1847), the character Bertha

Rochester is a symbol of women and their vulnerability in a patriarchal society. Equally, in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), the mad woman who is imprisoned in an attic also comes to represent the experience of females who are under the dominion of male influence and power in a world in which patriarchal power rules supreme. In direct opposition to the assumption that females are inferior to males, this we find *écriture féminine* (French Feminism) which challenges patriarchy *per se* but in the writing of language which allowed women to present themselves as they wish rather than as males wish them to be presented. In fact, the French feminism of the late 20th century is primarily associated with psychoanalytic feminist theory, especially the work of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva (Zajka and Leonard 2006). Hélène Cixous (b. 1937) is the prime advocate of this theory and expresses the belief that men should write about men and women about women. However, her terminology is considered to be vague since it is virtually impossible to define female practice in writing as this cannot be theorized.

Writing apart, the Liberal Feminists posit the idea that the prime cause of the subordination of the female species are the established informal and formal laws of society which essentially stifle the ascent and success of women in the civic sphere. As such women are not able to attain the heights they would otherwise be able to reach in the global marketplace and many other fora. Indeed, women shall never become equal with men as long as they lack the opportunities afforded to men. The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* (1949: 601), that “*One is not born a woman; one becomes one*”. This implied that femininity is, thus, the result of cultural conditioning rather than something which is biologically determined. De Beauvoir explained that there are numerous reasons why women may not resist their label of ‘Other’. These could include a lack of resources, having close ties with men, and often apparent advantages in being ‘Other’. De Beauvoir uses the ‘nature-culture’, ‘female-male’ binary to contend that women’s epistemological grounding is essentially different to that of men due to their biological make-up and experience. She viewed women as being devoted to irrationality and disordered superstitions; their time is circular, not linear and do not display any “sense

of factual truth” (1949: 611). In addition, they are not conversant with logic (1949:482). Epistemologically, each of the sexes is defenseless in the other’s territory. How women live their experience is indefinable in masculine terms. The many differences between the sexes in terms of epistemology and cognitive processes are created by the division between their abstraction and experience.

The Marxist feminists tend to disagree with the ideas posited by their liberal counterparts. Their primary point of departure is in the notion that no oppressed person, neither male nor female, is able to prosper in a class society. They suggested that women will always be enslaved by the capitalist system and argue that a socialist system is what is required in which workers irrespective of sex are paid a fair wage for their endeavors. First and foremost is the requirement that women become equal to men politically, economically and educationally before any real power can be attained by them.

A form of radical feminism termed Separatism, maintained that resistance to increasing levels of patriarchy is best achieved through concentrating selectively on women and girls (Skelton and Francis 2009: 104). Within this movement there is, however, a number of feminists who suggested that males cannot make any positive contribution to feminism since they in any event tend to reproduce the subtleties of patriarchy (Hoagland 1988:60). Marilyn Frye referred to separatist feminism as “*separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege—this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women*” (Frye 1997: 406-414).

A post-feminism period between post-modernism and post-structuralism emerged in the early 1980s, when journalists and academics began to proclaim that ‘feminism is dead’. Essentially, the movement believed that feminism had achieved its objectives and that the time was now right for women to distance themselves from the movement. It is, thus, a new form of empowerment and independence in which individual women can make their own choices in relation to issues such as inter-alia, consumerism and sexual pleasure. In this movement there is a new emphasis placed on the female form and

it makes space for new understanding the linkages between feminism and femininity which are highlighted in the media. In some magazines targeting young women readers, the issue of sex is deliberated on via the terminology of pleasure-seeking, and sex as such is fashioned as something needing continual attention, discipline, self-surveillance and great amounts of emotional labor (Gill 2007: 151). The post-feminism is, thus, concerned with eliminating binary thinking. In the process patriarchal paradigms and issues such as gender are questioned. The central thought is the issue of 'difference' (Lotz 2001). The post-feminist popular cultural texts are prospective breeding grounds for "*emancipatory discourses ('the political') and at the same time extend and stabilise, but also critique and question ('the critical'), a hegemonic neo-liberal consumer culture*" (Adriaens 2009).

New Feminist Ethics

Martha Nussbaum (b. 1947), a feminist philosopher of note, maintained the firm belief that men enjoy inventing elaborate abstract formal 'systems' which are then imposed on other human beings and their moral predicaments. She questioned whether females do, indeed, have virtues which are only female in orientation. In terms of the *ancien regime*, women are generally considered to be highly irrational beings, selfless, passive, genteel of spirit, more intuitive and more sympathetic than their male counterparts. Such labels have in essence restricted women to the domestic orb. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was vehemently opposed to the view of a female nature as an ideological construct. This was primarily because its function is to give credence to and essentially legitimize male supremacy in public life. She stated that there is, indeed, a difference between the biological 'sex' of women and their socially and culturally determined gender. Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, and essentially argued that the morality of men and women is equal and that it seems to differ because of the many limitations placed on women in patriarchal societies. Consequently, when there are good traits in women, these become bad traits due to lack of opportunity.

Elizabeth Stanton argued that women have superior virtues to men and that by suppressing

these virtues a great disservice has been done to the world. The higher virtue of women is their self-development. Virtue is self-giving and sacrifice and justice for the community which concurs with Reinhold Neibuhr's thinking. Women are by nature self-giving and this is often to the point of self-destruction and is primarily due to their biological make-up, conditioning and experiences. The female virtue of care which is community driven is supreme. Humans are inherently relational, responsive beings and that the human condition is one of connectedness and interdependence in which male and female experience themselves in relation to others and that the origins of morality are to be found in human relationships. A feminist ethic is opposed to the injustices which are to be found in patriarchy and must of necessity transcend gender binaries and hierarchies (Gilligan 2011). The belief in an essentialist feminine temperament or nature is problematic for any feminist ethic if female nature is actually a social and historical construct. Julia Kristeva (b. 1941) stressed that there is no such thing as an 'essential woman' because of postmodernist doubted about the notion of 'identity' itself. Gender bias and androcentrism however, continue to pervade societies and patriarchy still maintains its dominant position in the male-female debate. The women and indeed, men must seek to transform the current patriarchal institutional cultures which differentiate against and disempower women and generally hinder their intellectual autonomy through normative ideas and suppositions and discriminatory, domineering and offensive practices.

Feminism Waves

Feminism has gone through a series of waves from 1940 onwards. First-Wave Feminism began during the Second World War. In most of the countries directly involved, women either volunteered or were conscripted to support their national war efforts. Consequently, most of the women in the affected nations took on extra work over and above their regular household chores. This created a further feminism debate space. The second-wave feminism essentially emerged in the early 1960s and lasted up until the latter part of the 1980s. During this period there was somewhat of a convergence between political and cultural inequality which related directly to women. The females were urged to comprehend

their personal lives and as being heavily politicized and reflective of a raging sexist power struggle. Ending discrimination against women and fair treatment became the tenets of this wave of feminism (Freedman 2003). This period was also marked by greater enrollment of women in higher education and the establishment of academic women's studies courses and departments (Howe 2000). Lesbianism during this wave was visible within and without feminism and there were of course a wide range of "feminisms" depending on the origins from which groups had joined forces. These fall beyond the scope of this research. The lesbian movement was, however, welcomed into the conventional women's movement at this time. Third-wave feminism was inaugurated in the 1990s in response to the perceived failure of the second-wave. It vehemently challenged many second-wave White, upper middle class "essentialist" definitions of femininity. The focus fell to an extent on the juncture between race and gender. The reproductive rights became more important as did contraception and birth control as women sought greater sexual freedom. It is not surprising that it is currently commonplace for more Black women than ever before to publicly shore up the idea and practice of abortion and birth control in tandem with their White counterparts. The rights for women to have an abortion have moved from the periphery to the mainstream of the discourse about Black and White feminist activism.

Research conducted by Gilligan (1982) and Nelson (1988) suggested that there are indeed fundamental distinctions between men and women but there should nonetheless be support, egalitarianism and fair play between the sexes. Some feminists tend to stress that there are differences between the notions of sex and gender. Sex is considered to be biological and relates to the physical attributes which determine if a person is male or female. Gender by contrast relates to socially created roles credited to women and men, and not the biological and physical characteristics of a person and as such gender and sex differ. The distinct nature of the sexes comprises part of the responses of the sexes to issues in their immediate environments. Imam states that "the sexual division of labor is linked to biology, but it is not found on it; instead it must be conceived as a relation mediated through complex social processes and subject to sometimes contradictory determinants" (1985:18).

Since 1948, the United Nations Organization has hosted a series of world conferences on a range of women's issues aimed at advancing women's rights. The World Decade for Women was declared by the United Nations in 1975. It was aimed at highlighting the status and progress of women globally in their pursuit for equality. This initiative raised global awareness of the plight of women as they strive for liberation from psycho-social dominance by men. In the same decade, three World Conferences for Women were held in each of Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985). The United States of America hosted a National Conference for Women in Houston, Texas, in 1977. Each of these added to creating greater activism. The objective of the first world conference was to develop a global "plan of action" to advance the position of women; the conference in Mexico assessed advancement on the plan. The Nairobi conference put forth a plan of action for women to be executed up until the year 2000. The prime objective of the Texas conference was to generate an American adaptation of the world plan for American women. Especially, African-American women benefitted since numerous opportunities arose for organizing feminism movements locally, nationally, and internationally. The 1985 Nairobi conference was the defining moment event of the decade for African-American women. It also exposed a feminism which constituted the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, socio-economic strata, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds. More than 1,100 African-American women were among the nearly 20,000 attendees. This was the biggest number of women ever to come together at a worldwide women's rights conference. Many debates ensued on reproductive freedom for women (NWCC 1988).

The conferences have highlighted intrafeminism division that further highlighted large disparities between economic development, attitudes towards forms of female oppression, the definition of feminism, and the stances on homosexuality and lesbianism, female circumcision, and population control. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of women, and defined by them for themselves. This diversity builds on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy which, however, is only the first

step in articulating and acting upon a political agenda (Catagay et al. 1986: 403). In 1995 a fourth conference, namely the United Nations International Conference on Women was held in Beijing (Sen and Grown 1987), where there was greater commitment to realize gender equality and the empowerment of women through what was termed “*gender mainstreaming*”, or allowing the sexes to “*experience equal conditions for realising their full human rights, and have the opportunity to contribute and benefit from national, political, economic, social and cultural development*” (CIDA 1999). At the time of this conference in Beijing, many African women had begun recognizing the socio-cultural factors which had kept them in servitude for decades. African women are increasingly familiar with the idea that social and political circumstances and the social institutions in their countries are central in forming virtue and morality. Education undoubtedly plays a great role in engendering this awareness and additionally promotes the idea of upward social mobility for women.

What is termed the fourth-wave of feminism is not recognized as a historical wave of feminism, but it is in motion mainly due to the lack of activism in the other waves of feminism concerning a myriad of contemporary cultural issues. It is reliant on social media technology for connecting and establishing activism exertions. It was Pythia Peay who in 2005 first argued for the creation of a fourth wave of feminism, within which spirituality and justice would assume centre stage (Peay 2005: 59-60). Jennifer Baumgardner states: “*Second Wave friend of mine, Rosalyn Baxandall, notes that the First and Second Waves were part of larger social movements—abolition and civil rights—and were thus different than the trickles of activity she sees as having come later. But I see the cultural transformation that my generation harvested from the Second Wave’s ideas and revolution was the social movement of our day. Likewise, the Fourth Wave’s deployment of social media has once again transformed politics and feminism*” (Baumgardner 2011: 250-251). She also suggested that a fourth wave may have come into existence in 2008 encouraged mainly by the “Take Our Daughters to Work Days” and the social media which stimulated post-abortion chat lines, the hunt for reproductive justice, support for transgenderism and male feminism and sex work acceptance. In 2014, Betty Dodson, one of the

main leaders of the 1980s pro-sex feminist movement, stated that she considered herself to be primal as a fourth wave feminist. In her opinion, preceding waves of feminism were predictable and anti-sexual, hence her willingness to be associated with the emergent fourth wave feminism (Smith 2014).

Laura Bates, a British feminist writer was the founder of The Everyday Sexism Project, a website which began in April 2012 as a social media campaign. The site created a forum for the documentation of daily instances of harassment and sexism against women as reported by a global audience of contributors. The site promoted the notion that there is indeed a huge problem facing women and this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency (Bates 2014). Such endeavors have unlocked debate concerning a plethora of feminist issues and exposed the shortcomings of the earlier waves of feminism. Radical feminists such as Bates insisted on an end to all arrangements and constructions that restrict the sexual preferences and procreative choices of women in general. Women need to be truly free to either have or not have offspring and to love or not love men. Failing this freedom of choice, women will continue to be subordinate to men. In addition, the psyches of women also require transformation so that they may realize their true worth. Juliet Mitchell (2000) a British psychoanalyst and socialist feminist states that when “*Freud first formulated the ‘castration complex’ it explained all there was to know about the difference between the sexes...it defined the girl and made the boy abandon his incestuous wish for the mother. The girl felt totally inferior, because she lacked something, and the boy felt temporarily inferior to his more phallicly powerful father. The castration complex ended the boy’s Oedipus complex and therewith his infancy. It seemed to lie behind all neuroses, to dominate all dreams and perversions, to account for the social inferiorization of women...and for the glorification of men*” (Mitchell 2000:75-76). She also proposed that “*Freud was inclined to make quips against feminism. One suspects that the intention was to make the militant women feel that they were vainly, and somewhat madly, tilting at windmills. But... his aloofness has only further infuriated the second wave of feminists who have had the decades of ‘the psychological sell’ to fan their fury. Freud is target number one...*” (Mitchell

2000:303). She demonstrated her utter contempt for patriarchy when she says, “*It is not a question of changing (or ending), who has or how one has babies. It is a question of overthrowing patriarchy. As the end of ‘eternal’ class conflict is visible within the contradictions of capitalism, so too, it would seem, is the swan-song of the ‘immoral’ nature of patriarchal culture to be heard.*” (Mitchell 2000:416) There is, also, in addition to feminists such as Mitchell, what are termed *Multicultural feminists* who asserted socialist feminist thought, but they believe it to be remiss on racial and ethnic issues. For example, they emphasize that in the United States of America “White” culture does not pay tribute to the physical attractiveness of African American women in a way that corroborates the natural array of Black facial features and bodies, but only to the extent that they look White with straightened hair, very light brown skin and thin figures. In this sense given that they also discriminated against on race, African-American women are even more unliberated than their White and Hispanic counterparts (Giddings 1984: 140-145). Global feminists who are mainly women from African and Asian countries face additional challenges such as, for instance the absence of contraception.

Despite the numerous biological similarities, different groups of women from different corners of the earth deal with infinitely different social realities. In America and Africa, Black women have tended to place reproductive health issues in historical as well as socio-economic and political context that makes the reproductive freedom movement pertinent to the fragmentary struggle against racism and endemic poverty. Feminist approaches to ethics to a large extent now tend to focus on how authority is used to repress *women* and non-feminist detractors complain that such an approach is “female-biased.” Such critics argued that Ethics as such, cannot proceed from any specific perspective such as that of women and still be viewed as ethics. Surely any societal values and rules apply equally to all rational persons irrespective of gender?

When one develops a feminist approach to ethics they are merely doing what Aristotle, Rousseau, and Kant should have done initially. They should have been paying attention to the moral experiences of women as well as men. In the process they may also be acknowledging that it

is inadequate for traditional western ethics to view females as moral agents or include female issues. What is imperative is a recalculation and reflection of the ontological as well as epistemological hypothesis upon which the value and role of women is constructed. The numerous research studies by psychologists on emotions, morality and gender do reveal some differences between the sexes. Women were found to be far more empathetic and caring about close personal relationships while men generally seem to care about shallow relationships. The sexes do think differently about ethics but the differences are not that pronounced. Women seem to care more due to the social roles they fulfill and their psychological conditioning (Rachels and Rachels 2012:150-152).

Carol Gilligan maintains that women are more caring than their male counterparts: “*The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the ‘real and recognizable trouble’ of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference, the rights to life and self-fulfilment*” (Gilligan 1982)

To her mind, women epitomize the essential moral characteristic of true care. The morality displayed by women is truly far more inclusive and tends to bind relationships. Women also tend to be problem solving oriented without sticking to rigid resolutions (Gilligan 2011). While women wish for the world to be a better place for all, they should first and foremost focus on making it a better place for their gender and children and the elderly. They should also vigorously critique how they are dealt with and fight subordination in ways that are morally valid.

African Feminism

There are certain claims in Africa that feminism is a purely Western and/or European phenomenon in orientation. Such a notion has been propagated by those who perceive that feminism due to what it projected of societies where patriarchal privilege would no longer be anticipated to be the natural and cultural way of society was in fact wrong. The feminist struggle was, thus, viewed as a European imposition since some believe society was tolerant towards women before colonialism. Irrespective of such be-

liefs or misgivings, there is ample proof that African societies have been highly patriarchal and were as such long before colonialism. It may well be the case that after the Second World War, Feminism focused on the requirements of middle class White women in the western world but nevertheless posed as a global movement for the liberation of all women from the clutches of patriarchal systems. African women were essentially marginalized. Collins says: “*Even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in White feminist organizations*” (1991:7). Korany et al. (1993) asserted that persons who contribute towards feminism in Africa have some things in common, especially, “*a firm commitment to gender equality, a painful awareness that such equality is far from achieved, and a continuing desire to work toward such equality.*”

The notion of Ubuntu which is discussed later in this research is the core to the understanding of morality and ethics in African philosophy (Mkhize 2008: 35). Within this context, if Feminism is to triumph in Africa, The African Women’s Movement is obliged to develop into a quasi-political movement which will be positioned to more clearly define itself in relation to the great challenge of women becoming far more effective and real citizens within their respective societies. Nonetheless, African women’s movement have tended to focus on the state and made some inroads and they continue to be very active participants in both civil society and non-profit work. They also play a huge role in many African countries where there is for example, great social unrest and upheaval, epidemic disease, HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Ebola, violent conflicts and even war. They play critical roles as sustainers and re-constructors of what are often devastated communities. They continue to fight for rights in highly patriarchal societies. In their endeavors they play roles as peace makers and promoters of sustainable livelihoods and political rights and seek to end sexual abuse and violence against females. The networks they create both within and without their countries promote the development and growth of their communities and support is gained in crushing injustices that are perpetrated against them. In African Universities women are making gradual inroads

in what were considered to be areas of male preserve (Barnes 2007). Unfortunately, African feminists have often been decried as being “unauthentic” by Europeans of both sexes who studied African women as atypical and dissimilar to Europeans.

Gebara sought to uncover the origin of women’s oppression in Africa and concluded that this is a very difficult if not totally impossible task since “*evils are not without historical causes*” (2002:140). In Nigerian societies for instance, theories of women’s subjugation seem so customary and ordinary that even women actively participate in socializing young boys and girls in the family to accept as true that females are indeed inferior to males. Consequently, Nigerian women agonize under male domination in three ways, firstly, as daughters secondly as housewives, and thirdly, as subordinates in the workplace. In each of these ways, Nigerian culture has gender specific words and phrases which are employed in the quest to perpetuate and give greater credence to patriarchy and, thus, Nigerian men maintain psycho-social dominance over women.

Interestingly, from a writer’s perspective, African women’s writing in the 1970s predominantly set out to dismiss mal-representations of African womanhood that flourished in African literature. In this context, both writers and feminism activists wanted to establish that they were significant to the African setting. More importantly, they did not merely want to imitate their European and American feminist equivalents. Attempts have also been made to conceive of a theory that is indigenously African in the gender discourse and rooted in the atypical experiences of the African female in Africa as recommended through what is termed “Motherism” (Acholonu 1995). Motherism is presented as an African alternative to feminism and tends to spotlight the centrality of maternity in the African female life-experience. Others such as Molar Ogundipe a Nigerian scholar and activist who is recognized as one of the foremost writers on African women and feminism propose what is called Stiwanism which is defined as the ‘social transformation including women of Africa’. She stated that she: “... *wanted to stress the fact that what we want in Africa is social transformation. It is not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centu-*

ries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest. The new word describes what similarly minded women and myself would like to see in Africa. The word "feminism" itself seems to be a kind of red rag to the bull of African men. Some say the word by its very nature is hegemonic or implicitly so. Others find the focus on women in themselves somehow threatening ... Some who are genuinely concerned with ameliorating women's lives sometimes feel embarrassed to be described as 'feminist' unless they are particularly strong in character" (1994: 1-2).

While these ideas are at least attempts to promote African feminism, neither Stiwanism nor Motherism has however achieved broad acceptance or even remote popularity as potential indigenous African gender theories. There, thus, remains a huge need to create or produce an indigenous African theory of feminism so as to afford African women a place in the ongoing gender discourse based on their unique experiences in what are generally highly patriarchal African societies. Evans maintained that if women in Africa fail to grab the initiative to arrive at a meaningful feminism for Africans then they will be nothing more than "headless chickens" (1983:219-224). Okome (1999) stressed that in feminist writings such as these, African women are portrayed as disorderly, ineffective and impotent to decide for themselves both the changes needed in their lives in patriarchal societies and the manner in which to go about crafting meaningful changes. Western feminists are usually viewed, by themselves first and foremost, as role models who strive to aid and edify African women on feminism issues. Such arrogance can often be observed in the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and also in the political sphere. It is clear that western Women direct the dialogue on feminism and this is generally at the expense of African women. African feminism is essential for the liberation of African women from patriarchy. What is sorely needed is a uniquely African paradigm of feminism that attends to the needs of Africa's women. What is equally important is to eliminate the androcentric male dominated ethic that exists in society and which diminishes the value of women. Not only men are custodians of moral conduct and decide what is right or wrong and such thinking

is archaic and in need of replacement. Female autonomy cannot be undervalued as it is.

Steady (1981: 28) outlined African feminism as accentuating female autonomy and co-operation; nature above culture; the significance of children, multiple mothering and an ability to affiliate. In this light African feminist literature tends to concern itself with the freedom of all African peoples. The African feminist dialogue carefully defined the concerns that are unique to the African context. Steady also maintained that feminism in Africa cannot simply accede from the opposite sex and in this sense it is a unique concept to Western Feminism. What hampers feminism in Africa is the fact that two diverse strands of feminism have emerged- intellectual feminism and popular feminism. The former is advocated by the urban elites in Africa who have adopted their ideas from Europe and America and import these to Africa. The latter strand of popular feminism provided for the majority of African women, many of whom are illiterate. Their stimulus and root of feminism resides in the value of women in traditional African society. In such societies, woman plays a huge role in subsistence farming and previously also participated in the liberation of Africa against colonialism. The popular feminists strived for liberation from patriarchy based on their handling of life in the daily activities they undertook such as for instance, food production in especially the pre-colonial African landscape (http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/bulletin/Toure_etal.pdf).

Africa's current problems are to a very large extent the by the products of the inhuman slave-trade that existed on the East and West coasts of the continent, the destruction of traditional values by colonialism and alien religions, apartheid, neocolonialism and globalization. Women in Africa have a great role to play in the recapturing of traditional African cultural values in which they are appreciated as women and where they complement men as they used to centuries ago. In such a quest, popular feminism has the far greater attraction for especially many African women who regarded their culture as a critical aspect guiding their identity. This is what they grew up to believe and be familiar with. Western style feminism is thus generally insufficient for the particular concerns of African women. African culture is heterogeneous and needs to be carefully considered if African problems are to

be solved, and feminism is a critical aspect requiring attention. Popular feminism, unfortunately, is not enough as it stands since it often fails to rally against many cultural practices which are considered to be despotic. Intellectual feminism in Africa is on the other hand also condemned for being too paternalistic in attitude towards African women. Despite their shortcomings, each strand is important and their adherents should seek consensus if feminism is to advance in Africa.

The cultural practices in for instance Nigeria, concerning gender issues are intriguing. Generally, parents as a first choice prefer male children. This is particularly common practice in rural areas in which people are usually illiterate. Even mothers preferred male offspring since these carry the family name. In addition, to this, it is only male children who are eligible to inherit property from their fathers. Males are sent to school first while their sisters if there are any, are married off from a young age. An obvious result of this practice is that women are usually illiterate in rural settings (Gberikon 2003) and this is typical of women in Third World African countries. Boys (1989:159) stated that “*gender does matter - not simply as a natural consequence of sex difference, but as an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social reality*”. The culture of people assisted them to comprehend and give legal status to the normative categorization of individual members of a society through the complex process of socialization.

Ogundipe (2005) asserted that African women need to carefully consider the fact that they are women but also third world persons. It is important to contextualize any feminist position that is made. Consequently, African women need to expose the flaws that existed in their societies and cultures but simultaneously not merely aspire to western-style feminism at the expense of indigenous cultures. Feminism, thus, needs to be more operational and representative when it comes to African women. The renowned African feminist Nnaemeka says, “*The issue of balance is neglected in the one dimensional Western constructions of African women - usually poor and powerless. We African women have witnessed repeatedly the activities of our overzealous foreign sisters, mostly feminists who appropriate our wars in the name of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called third*

world. We watch with chagrin and in painful sisterhood these avatars of the proverbial mourner who wails more than the owners of the corpse. In their enthusiasm, our sisters usurp our wars and fight them badly - very badly” (2005:57).

The African Women’s Movement still lags its Western counterpart and is to a large extent disadvantaged and constrained by the doggedness of nationalism as the leading philosophy of most women within it. Nonetheless, it has bolstered the admission of African women into the public sphere which is indeed, a highly significant achievement this far (Amadiume 2000).

Ubuntu and Where Women Fit In

Ubuntu (Ndebele or Nguni) is a relational ethic which has a number of definitions (Gade 2012: 484-488) but it essentially meant humanness founded on values of compassion, empathy, sympathy, sharing, deference, compassion, equality, reciprocity, and interdependence. Kamwangamalu (1999:25), listed the following expressions as instances that the basic idea of Ubuntu is indeed African in orientation and is shared by various indigenous peoples in sub-Saharan Africa under diverse names such as ‘*umundu*’ (in Kikuyu, Kenya), ‘*umuntu*’ (in Kimeru, Kenya), ‘*bumuntu*’ (in kiSukuma and kiHaya, Tanzania), ‘*vumuntu*’ (in shiTsonga and shiTswa, Mozambique), ‘*bomoto*’ (in Bobangi, Democratic Republic of Congo), and ‘*gimuntu*’ (in kiKongo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as in giKwese, Angola). Ubuntu affirmed that society, and not a transcendent individual, gives people their humanity. Humanity emanates from one being part and parcel of a tribe in which “I am, because we are” (*umuntu ngamuntu ngabantu*). Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the individual possessing an Ubuntu spirit as a “*generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate*” person (1999:30). This African philosophy, which is basically a way of life stressed that all human beings should be treated respectfully, equitably and with justice and should conform to the tribe and its customs and traditions. Ubuntu governs the norms of conduct and criteria for achievement and is characterized by a profound sense of communal life, which articulates itself in a complex network of social and kinship relationships (Katongole 2001).

Mokgoro describes Ubuntu as “*a basically humanistic orientation towards fellow beings*” (Mokgoro 1998:2), while Eze explained the crux of Ubuntu as follows: “*A person is a person through other people’ strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative inter-subjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance*” (Eze 2007: 190-191).

Ramose explained that “*to be a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them*”. This should undoubtedly include members of each of the sexes (Ramose 1999:52). In Ubuntu, the communitarian stance required that strangers and foreigners are expected to be treated well especially since they may be required to be called upon for some reason at a later stage-but women are somehow sidelined in this thinking. Ubuntu also supported the notion of redistribution of wealth. The socialization aspect of Ubuntu assumed that a particular community empathized with ‘others’ and that there is a vested interest in collective prosperity. Eze believed that Ubuntu encouraged an idyllic situation of shared human partisanship that promotes a community’s wellbeing via the unconditional recognition and appreciation of individual distinctiveness and diversity (Eze 2008: 386-392). In African societies, it is culture which determines the worldview of a people and which sways their use of cultural perceptions and construct. Women are also victims to the fact that their gender role is culturally and not biologically established. If Ubuntu is indeed practiced and all people are to be treated equally and with justice, how is it that patriarchy is able to easily supply the principles which lead to the secondary status of women and essentially sideline them and subjugate

them? It is clear that the patriarchal culture which pervaded African societies must be dismantled so as to influence gender equality positively. As things stand now, the African woman in most societies in Africa, has no moral viewpoint because of the caprices and notion of patriarchy which is disguised in the philosophy of Ubuntu.

Women have without any doubt played huge leadership roles in the development of many African societies and they have contributed immensely to socio-economic and political transformation. In the realm of education they have been a huge asset to Africa. In pre-colonial traditional African society gender never really played a huge part since virtually all individuals understood and played their role in the societal setup. Women as well as men fulfilled traditional gender roles and women supported men. Each of the sexes played a significant role in maintaining the tribe or clan and this led to sustainability of these organs. Gender biases manifested themselves during the arrival of colonialism (St. Clair 1994: 27). However, this is not to suggest that patriarchy did not exist since men were still considered to be societal leaders in a system in which women complemented men. St. Clair stated that “there was a codependence and a balance that existed” (1994: 27). African woman generally played a critical and fundamental role in the upbringing and education and of their children. They nurtured them and imparted to them customs, social, and ethical as well as moral values based on acceptable cultural standards. Ethical and moral reasoning, as realistic reasoning “operates first by the logic of conventionality. It tries to reason about the world in the way custom and tradition has taught” (Browning 1996:183). The Social and religious institutions that exist in a society largely establish the customs and traditions of people and in Africa, women are very active in these institutions to this day. Women were and are homemakers and care for the indigent by providing them with basic foodstuffs to sustain them while caring for their families. Women are very often the backbone of the family in traditional African society.

Leith (1967: 34) accentuated that: “*Culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and were responsible for instilling traditional values and*

knowledge in children. Men were also essential in the transmission of knowledge to the youth because they had a different type of knowledge of the earth and environment, and also of ceremonies and traditions that were performed exclusively by men”.

From the era of colonialism, African women have been marginalized by capitalism and its excesses and this trend is increasing in the globalization era. Women are now sidelined even more in some ways, such as in the defining of their unique roles and responsibilities. It is now the time to advocate for more women’s rights and a clearer vision of their duties and location in society as equal to men is in urgent need of attainment. A truly traditional African perspective on the issue of clearly demarcated and equitable gender roles is fundamental to a sustainable African future.

It is blatantly clear from media reports that the issue of gender disparity exists in virtually all parts of the world, from Asia to Africa, from Europe to the Americas (Amartya 1994: 13). To what extent has South African society transformed in this respect?

The South African Case

A patriarchal mentality has always been aspect of South African society long before neo-liberal policies. There is clear evidence in South Africa that the procedural aspects of gender transformation have been institutionalized to a large degree. The emphasis on gender equality is the primary objectives of an African feminists and this was also the case amongst women who occupied and continue to play vital roles in the striving for democracy in South Africa. The poet Lebogang Mashile is an instance of an ardent feminist who passionately decries the inhumanity of gender bias and intolerance. The feminism required in Africa must go beyond mere commenting on the difference between women’s and men’s life experiences. It should be seeking to comprehend as well as challenge this patriarchal gender hierarchy that pervaded societies across the continent. “Patriarchy’s in love with nationalism and militarism because they produce unambiguously masculine men and submissive women” (Essof 2012), and so all three must be challenged as much as possible. Further most women in South Africa are located in the marginalized and generally underprivileged non-for-

mal sector of society and since the macro-economic policy usually favors the formal sector, gender inequality is rife. Women also lack requisite education and skills as a result of gender based discrimination and lack of financial resources to pursue meaningful education. Culture and tradition tend to inform access and opportunity to education for many women and boys are usually expected to do better at school than girls and be more responsible for bringing financial resources into the home.

In contemporary South Africa new forms of patriarchy are masked as a conservative traditionalism and militarism for example in the uptake by popular culture of songs such as ‘*Umshini Wami / we baba / awuleth’ Umshini Wami*’ (my machine gun / oh father / please bring me my machine gun) a song which was historically linked with the liberation struggle against apartheid, but which is now adopted in an un-reconstructed way as the signature tune of President Jacob Zuma (Essof 2012). This song is militaristic but also conveys heteronormative sexual innuendo. In addition to this, the political language of the liberation struggle of women has been vastly appropriated by the system and depoliticized. The former President Thabo Mbeki, took the project of liberal feminism further than anyone else (Essof 2012). He strove to allow women equal representation in the existing power structures. Women had greater recourse to the law and “*equal representation through the language of quotas and gender equality and it opened up the project of building South Africa as a competitive capitalist democracy to the participation of women*” (Essof 2012). Today the Gender Equity Law and the Affirmative Action Policy in South Africa attest to strides that have been made to uplift the voice of women in society. This integration of gender issues into the legislative processes bodes well for the future. The greatest success however in transformation is noticeable in the political and decision-making processes. Despite its masculine slant, Ubuntu is a philosophy that can assist in reconstructing different communities in the country (Motsei 2007: 10). The gender transformation of society that goes further than merely processes should essentially be guided by Ubuntu (Chitando 2008). We need to take more to recognize the unique worth and indeed invaluable contribution of women in our society, which are naturally complementary to the con-

tributions made by men. What are required are practical tools to assist in instilling a humanist gender transformation drive (Battle 2007). One cannot justify marginalizing women because of their gender (Mafunisa 2008) and so the battle continues.

Feminist Activists and Affirmative Action in South Africa

The South African Government's racial policies during the apartheid era made it intricate for feminist activists of diverse races to gather and discuss common opinions about injustice, lack of toleration, oppression and gender inequality. In 1991, an assembly of South African feminists took place at the Women and Gender Conference held in Durban in the Kwazulu Natal province. Unfortunately, racism raised its head at this conference as certain of the attendees articulated grievances about the character and nature of some of the papers that were presented by White academics which related predominantly to Black women's struggles. Black gender activists attending the conference held that White presenters of papers had scant understanding of the issues they were conferring on. The result was the marginalization of Black presenters and other conference attendees (Wilkinson 2002). It was apparent from the presentations that White women in particular had overlooked the stratified types of oppression experienced by women of color in South Africa, who were not only discriminated against based on their skin color, but also on their gender (Wilkinson 2002). Consequently, very little was achieved as a direct result of the attendees' diverse ideas of what oppression meant to Black and White women. Feminist attempts to find common ground between the races thus suffered a setback. However, since then legislation in South Africa in the post-apartheid era has prioritized spending in a number of areas of critical importance such as for instance education and welfare and has also altered various laws to be more reflective of the new constitution. This was evident in inter-alia the White Paper on Affirmative Action (1998). In 1994, there was a concerted drive by both women's coalitions and the government to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to promote equality and justice. As one consequence, legislation was drafted to ensure that South Africans would be able to compete for

positions on an equal basis irrespective of gender, creed or race. In line with such thinking, the Department of Labor drafted new laws such as the The Labor Relations Act of 1995 (LRA) and The Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 (BCEA). Henderson (2011: 100) referred to discrimination as "*distinguishing between people and, therefore, treating some differently from others*". Manohar (2012) provided a definition of gender based discrimination as "*an adverse action or differential treatment against a person that would not have occurred if the person had been of another sex*". In this regard, women in Southern Africa as a whole are generally employed in what are termed 'new forms' of work such as temporary work, self-employment in the informal sector, part-time work, piece-rate work and some are small scale entrepreneurs. As a result, there is much insecurity and women are very vulnerable as a group. It has been estimated that 60-70 percent of the poor in the SADC region are in fact women (ANSA 2007:143-145).

The special reference has been made to gender equality in the country's Constitutional Act of 1993 which is of great importance for women in general since "...no person shall be unfairly discriminated against on one or more grounds (including)...race, gender, sex..." (Section 8, Act 200 of 1993). In spite of such legal provision for equity and fairness, however despite the myriad of legal apparatuses in place to support the upward mobility of Black and White women in the workplace, men still receive preferential treatment in this regard. The Abolition of Discrimination against Women Act, and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities and the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (Cloete 1996) were also important Acts supporting women.

The Bill of Rights of the new Constitution of South Africa states under the heading 'Equality': "*Equality includes full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic of social origin, color, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. Discrimination on one or more of the grounds*

listed above is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair" (Dubourdieu 1997).

The gender equality is also protected in the new Constitution, when it states that the Republic of South Africa is founded on "non-racialism and non-sexism", and that the Bill of Rights guarantees freedom from discrimination on the grounds of both sex and gender (Dubourdieu 1999). Discrimination is not tolerated in any sense. The significant affirmative action legislation in South Africa is the Employment Equity Act (EEA) which came into effect in 1999. The Act seeks to redress wrongs against women and, especially, by the achievement of equitable workplace seeks to break the 'glass ceiling' that has prohibited Black and White women from accessing jobs that were once only meant for males by inter alia:

- (i) Promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination;
- (ii) Implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment, to ensure equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in workforce.

Consequently companies, big and small are legally obliged to employ, develop and retain women employees. In fact, there are even companies which tend to offer female employees or prospective female employees preferential treatment over their male counterparts when each has similar qualifications (Cloete and Mokovo 1995).

There is a need for greater gender sensitivity if poverty is to be eradicated in South Africa and the region. Consequently a gender analysis is imperative. Such an analysis must consider gender-based differentials and the imbalances in the gender split when it comes to labor issues. By fixing poor infrastructure such as child-care facilities and the supply of water, women will be afforded time to be employed. The needs of women need to be addressed and they must have greater access to resources and the control of resources. Equal opportunity is paramount if women are to effectively participate in social, economic, cultural and political processes and achieve their rightful place in society.

It is clear from the legislation that South African law has identified women as people who deserve equal treatment in terms of opportuni-

ties that are opened to all and who are deserving of the same respect and consideration as males. Unfortunately, women are still discriminated against by many in society and viewed as inferior to men which begs the question, 'where is the spirit of Ubuntu?' Clearly "...culture is a double-edged sword that can be used as a weapon to strike a blow for empowerment or to threaten those who would assert their own self-expression of identity" (Maathai 2010:164). This is especially important to consider given that violence against women is pervasive in South African society while in other countries, the cultural values and norms of society also serve to disregard and reinforce abusive practices that are perpetrated against women and male values continue to inform human-rights frameworks. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair discrimination (Act 4 of 2000) states: "...*discrimination means any act or omission, including a policy, law, rule, practice, condition or situation which directly or indirectly imposes burdens, obligations or disadvantage on; or withholds benefits, opportunities or advantages from, any person on one or more of prohibited grounds*" (RSA 2004:4). Despite legal frameworks such as these described above which are but the tip of the iceberg in terms of the promotion of gender equality, women are still discriminated against. There are numerous cases in the literature where women are treated unfairly in the workplace relating to benefits, perks and bonus issues. These are over and above the pay that female employees receive. Many organizations have clear pro-male biases with regard to training initiatives and employee development. Further, the gender is a salient factor in determining salaries.

There is still no true agreement on gender equality in South Africa as evidenced by President Jacob Zuma's highly publicized 2006 rape case. Despite numerous inroads into state legislation regarding gender equality, justice and fairness, really little has been accomplished as the country still has the worst figures of gender-based violence for a country which is not in a state of war" (Moffett 2009). The Zuma trial exposed the idea that women live to serve men and in a land which supposedly upholds Ubuntu as a philosophy of life, that is anathema. Women cannot easily gain any access to wealth and services. Many are unable to retain "*even control of their bodies through practices such*

as female genital mutilation, early or child marriage, and rules of disinheritance” (Maathai 2010:164).

CONCLUSION

The feminists and indeed all women should be regarded as equal to men and as human beings who are empowered. The marginalization of women is contrary to the spirit of Ubuntu and as such it is critical to inculcate an ethic of tolerance and respect for gender and other diversity from the primary school years onwards. Businesses as well as government need to create and drive their gender based and other training strategies which are specifically designed to promote a positive image of women. It is equally important for the law to be firm so as to discourage negative treatment of women at home, in the workplace and in society in general. Where there is affirmative action this should be carefully planned and transparent in application. Feminism is basically the advocacy for equal rights and equal opportunity for all women in Africa and globally. It is an idea at an important crossroad. To empower women is not un-African, but is rather to eliminate grave injustice.

In the post-apartheid era all peoples irrespective of gender should be celebrated. While preserving cultural identity is an important aspect of life in South African society, it should be discarded where gender bias and intolerance exist based on the inferiority complexes that some males may harness. The gender discrimination cannot be maintained if South Africa is to truly prosper in the 21st Century and to this end the feminist schema needs to be driven so that gender equality may prevail.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A transition and transformation are required in shifting male mindsets. Moments of adversity in the lives of women should become the catalysts of growth if our nation is to mature and move away from the traditional power structures. It is time for human consciousness in South Africa and Africa to rise again in the real spirit of Ubuntu. Males cannot continue as the sole gatekeepers in society and continue to disregard the huge contributions that women make and consider feminism to be a rebellious movement. The real challenge is for the real men to begin to accept the so called liberated African woman.

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