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# Feminism: Critical Analysis of Barclays Ayakoroma's a Matter of Honour

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*Abstract: Over the years, feminism has grown to be a crucial subject of debate and study in African literature. A Matter of Honour by Barclays Ayakoroma is one of several plays and criticisms on many facets of feminism in Africa. However, the weight of African feminist ideology and the many ways it manifests itself in African feminist dramatic texts (the various facets of feminism) have not received the necessary critical attention. The present research was interested in this. The core play text selected for the research was critically assessed using feminism as the guiding principle. The study used literary, qualitative, and analytical methods. The research comes to the conclusion that the play used for the study is a feminist text since it addresses the responsibilities of being a woman. Beyond this representation, the play addresses the many strands of feminism by addressing the position of women and their reactions.*

**Keywords:** Barclays Ayakoroma, Feminism, a Matter of Honour, Drama, Africa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism, or the women's movement, has developed into a topic for serious academic discussion across many fields, including play. Feminism asserts that there is a need to rectify this skewed scenario since it holds that women are not treated equally to men in terms of politics, sexuality, intelligence, and economics. Women have been oppressed for eons as a result of their exclusion from political participation, property ownership, and education. For instance, Plato states in his "Symposium" (2020) that "man is the beginning of woman and her end, just as God is the beginning and end of every creature" and that "woman is subject to the man on account of the weakness of her nature, both of the body and mind." Drama has

transformed from an entertaining art form to a more elegant, illuminating, and astonishing form of creativity. Drama has evolved into a tool for disseminating knowledge, expressing viewpoints, and offering advice for educational objectives in order to bring about a change in human society that is urgently required. This led to the development of several critical perspectives through which a dramatic work might be examined, with feminism being one of these ideologies. Long before the 1960s, which got their start as a revolutionary movement, there was a movement known as feminism. It adheres to the belief that men are given more respect than women. Norbert Juma (2019), in quotation Ordu and Odukwu (2022) assert that women have been fighting patriarchy and a mostly sexist culture throughout history. Women have united to fight for issues such as the elimination of rape culture and the right to vote. Though feminists have achieved some notable triumphs, the fight for gender equality has grown into a significant movement, led by aspirational feminists. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a concern with themes of femininity and female consciousness as a result of changes in the position of women. The year 2022 One significant philosophy that has drawn the attention of dramatists and literary experts from all over the globe, including Africa, is feminism. It is evident from Norbert Juma's statement that feminist concerns have existed for a very long time. It's interesting to see how the feminist movement is making progress. However, even as the patriarchy tightens its grip to support women's further marginalization, there are still some infantile problems that need to be addressed. Feminism is a vast subject of study. Both literary academics and creative authors have discovered and studied a number of facets of feminist discourse. Scholars have studied and uncovered a variety of feminisms through their analysis of literary works.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the womanist theory as articulated by Nigerian literary critic, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, in her article entitled "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English". Ogunyemi points out that her "notion of its meaning overlaps with Alice Walker's" who "employs it to denote the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to a sense of herself as a woman" (28). "The young girl inherits womanism," according to Ogunyemi, "after a traumatic event such as menarche or after an epiphany or as a result of the experience of racism, rape, death in the family, or sudden responsibility" (28). Then, a womanist, as she puts it, is a "woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female" (28).

The above definition of a womanist, she argues, makes womanism a favourite theory for all feminists because of its balanced portrayal of the woman. She explains that "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks" (28). She proceeds to assert that womanism's ultimate vision is to ensure "black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a "brother" or a "sister" or a "father" or a "mother" to the other" (28). Thus, the above description contrasts the perspective of a typical radical feminist who sees the oppression and subjugation of the woman ultimately as a consequence of patriarchal dominance.

However, it is worthy to note that womanism is just a type of African feminism. There exists other types such as Motherism propounded by Catherine Acholonu, Nego-feminism by

Obioma Nnaemeka, Snail Sense feminism by Ajkachi Ezeigbo, Stiwanism by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, and Femalism by Chioma Opara.

However, Naomi Nkealah (2007), notes that each of these types as earlier explained in the work have one form of problem or the other. She asserts that a general problem African feminism have is that they tend to focus on one aspect of the African woman's problem to the exclusion of the other. This is how she puts it. "One of the contradictions of African feminisms is that each brand is conceptualized for a particular segment of the gender-conscious human population to the exclusion of other segments." Also, because lesbians are also women, Nkealah argues that African feminisms frown at lesbianism and only champion heterosexual relationships. This is how she puts it:

Sexual orientation also forms the basis of exclusion in West African feminist. This is both overt and subtle. African womanism overtly rejects lesbianism, while stiwanism subtly dismisses lesbian politics. These feminisms place heterosexual women at the centre of their feminist politics with their emphasis politics with their emphasis on negotiation with and accommodation of (heterosexual) men – husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. (65)

Critiquing Ogunyemi's womanist theory, Nkealah avers that Ogunyemi's theory seems indecisive on whether to focus particularly on matters concerning the Nigerian woman or to focus on the challenges of African women around the globe (Nkealah 2007) argues thus:

A factor that complicates matters for (West) African feminisms is the question of whether to focus on local imperatives or to expand the scope of the theories to meet global challenges. Ogunyemi (1996: 104) speaks specifically about Nigerian women when she states that "women's politics has emphasized the interdependence of the sexes as a womanist idea... in addressing the multi-faceted Nigerian predicament." Ogunyemi moves from the premise of global womanism (incorporating both African and African-American versions of womanism) in her 1985 article to that of Nigerian womanism in 1996. (69). This shift from a global feminist perspective to a more culturally/nationally defined agenda signifies unresolved tensions in (West) African feminisms. On the one hand, a global perspective privileges the needs of African women globally, with less focus on the specific needs of continental Africans. On the other hand, a localized perspective means that Nigerian womanism is so narrowly defined as to alienate women from outside Nigeria whose feminist politics are moulded by political environments just as repressive as the Nigerian one.

However, despite Nkealah's criticisms of Ogunyemi's womanist theory, Womanism, as propounded by Ogunyemi, remains very relevant to this study because it promotes the necessary survival of men and women and stresses the notion of complementarity and collaboration. These ideas are reflected in the selected text,

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodological approach shall be literary, qualitative, and analytical. Therefore, as the works are literature-based, the content analysis of the primary selected texts forms the bedrock of this research work. Then using the applied theoretical frame work, pertinent passages from the text are picked and grouped into sub-themes through critical reading. According to Melakneh (2008), grounded theory practice, ethnography, case study, and textual analysis are all data-gathering methodologies used in qualitative research. Using textual analysis, this study investigates how women are used as a representation acts.

### **3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

Normally, A Matter of Honour does not have a particularly overtly feminist theme. The play between all three selected texts is most likely the hardest to define as a feminist piece. Ayakoroma plotted the play as an inter-communal rivalry and conflict over a corpse and burial ownership between Amabiri, the patriarchal community, and Angiama, the matriarch's. In the real, literal sense, issues surrounding both communities revolve around the theme of burial. This cannot be classified as a play with feminism discourse, but of course, deeply-rooted feminists such as Ben Binebai have, under conscious and critical observation, come to perceive that there is an argument of patriarchal oppression over the ownership and burial of the corpse and thus have placed "A Matter of Honor" as a play with feminism discourse. Obviously, Barclays Ayakoroma did not write this play with the consciousness of feminism, as reflected in Binebai and Otiotio's article titled "Dialectic of Burial and Territoriality in A Matter of Honour."

In A Matter of Honour, the issues at the centre of discussion and the main conflict are death, burial, pride, and nationalism. The play dramatises death and puts forward the burial of the dead as the major subject of disagreement that sets the dramatic action rolling until it gets to its ending. The conflict is based on the death of Oweibi, who is to be buried where he died. Amabiri is his birthplace, his fatherland, but all through his life, Oweibi lived and died at Angiama, his motherland. According to Binebai and Denise:

The ancient Ijaw culture and tradition, a man and a woman, whether they die in their fatherland or outside their fatherland or even outside both father and motherlands within and outside their environment, are brought back to their fatherland for burial. It is therefore a well-built tradition that Ijaws that die are buried in their fatherland. The value placed on this tradition is so strong that it has the face of pride and the force of nationalism. Thus, a community in Ijaw land draws honour, pride and nationalism in burying its own dead people (104).

Having critically examined Ayakoroma's "Matter of Honor" and the dramatic opposition between the motherland and fatherland, it is therefore affirmative that the inter-communal battle is a feminist confrontation against patriarchal hegemony in the disguise of cultural and traditional laws to subjugate and marginalise women.

An African global phenomenon asserts that the father is the rightful owner of a child. While medical theory holds that both parents have equal ownership rights to their child, This claim restricts only a father's ownership of a child. Of course, there are ethnic groups in Nigeria and some parts of the world that believe that a child belongs to the mother. It is from this point of view that Barclays Ayakoroma's side of the play was formed. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, it is the belief of an Izon man that a child born to him is his, not the wife's. Whether or not they played a fatherly role in the upbringing of that child, This text is written from a feminist perspective, revealing child abandonment by the father, forcing the mother to shoulder both responsibilities. The story mocks patriarchy as the karma of rejection becomes their lot:

Dikumo: to me, that is left for the people of Angiama. We all have been told repeatedly that Oweibi was our relation...

Gbaki: Our blood brother!

Dikumo: Yes, I know. But the point is, did he ever identify with us? He had decided to stay with his mother's people.

Abere: You can't say that. He did not decide.

Dikumo: Then why did he not come and stay with us?

Abere: He was just a boy when his father, Kiridi died. Agonodi who took Oweibi's mother as wife in accordance with our traditional made life difficult for her and the children. When she could bear it no longer, she decided to go back to her parents. All attempts to bring her back failed because Agonodi did not show any remorse. And so one market week turned into one full moon; one full moon turned one year; one year has turned to these several decades. (25-26) An old African adage says that not one person owns a child. If Agonodi abandoned Oweibi, his mother, and his siblings, why did the elders not care for them? This adage served as the foundation for Oweibi's daughter's argument with the maternal and paternal kinsmen during the burial preparations, when the people of Angiama insisted on having Oweibi's corpse buried in Angiama because they raised him from childhood to adulthood and he remained with them until his death. Pifa: The facts are there for us to examine. A child belongs to the father and mother, we brought up Oweibi. Now he is dead. We bury him in accordance with the traditional burial rites (36-37). This was a statement made by an elder of Angiama in support of their rights to Oweibi. As he was theirs in life so was he in death; this means he will be buried as an Angiama citizen not Amabiri. According to the Ijaw ancient tradition, a dead body must be returned to the paternal home for burial, whether married or single. Customarily, the men were buried in their paternal homes, so the law was for the women. A woman's corpse must be returned to her fatherland. In this context, a dead male is demanded to be buried in his maternal home, which breaks all traditional laws. The Angiama people are requesting this law in their favor, citing the possibility of raising Oweibi without paternal support. This point has been corrected and carried forward because late Oweibi's daughter is of the same opinion, as her speech confirms.

Doubra: then that tradition did not tell you to take care of my father when he was a child? If you had taken my father as your brother, you would have known when he was sick, you would have thought of his medical treatment, and now, how to help us with the burial (37-38). This statement was spoken in agony by the daughter of the deceased. She is irritated by their unlawful and prideful claim to the corpse, which at that moment in time is inflicting stress on the children and on their matriarch counterpart, who is bereaved for their loss.

Another perspective of feminism in the selected text is seen in women's ownership. The play announces women as objects and properties to be inherited. Africans have a custom and tradition in which a widow is pinned down and transferred for an inheritance to her brother-in-law, whether he is married or not. Nigeria is no exception; the entire ethnic groups of Nigeria partake in this custom, which has left many women handicapped and defenseless. Women who are passed from a deceased husband's brother to another suffer tremendously, for reasons owing to: not being their choice of woman; an absence of love; an already existing wife they adore; anger and rebellion for imposing unplanned responsibilities; etc. Oweibi's mother was a victim of these traditional laws and customs; hence, Oweibi and his siblings suffered the consequences.

### **Burial feminism**

A Matter of Honour by Barclays Ayakoroma adds a new dimension to the feminist discourse. Ordinarily, it is a play about burial, pride, and nationalism. The feminist question is built into the burial beliefs and traditions in Ijawland. It is a tradition that places the male world over and above the female world, a tradition in which men decide where a dead person can be buried.

Interestingly, the parties involved in the burial argument are all men, but the difference is that Amabiri people are the male owners of the dead Oweibi, while Angiama men are the female owners of the dead Oweibi. The fact that Oweibi is biologically a male and the son of Amabiri gives the Amabiri folks the privilege to insist that Oweibi should not be buried in a woman's land. It is very clear that the conflict dramatised in *A Matter of Honor* is between the land of men and the land of women, and the discrimination is against the land of women as it concerns burial and burial pride. This is no doubt a feminist victory, as the contest between the male and female lands is won by the female when Oweibi is buried in his motherland. From the narrative of the text, it is clear that the feminist question is once again brought up in relation to burial tradition as contained in Ijaw land. The Ijaw culture is thus offering burial feminism as a contribution to the feminist debate in scholarship through Ayakoroma's drama.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The feminism dilemma as it affects Nigerian women is addressed in *Dimensions of Feminism*, which uses Ayakoroma's creative writing as a benchmark for addressing these crises from whichever perspective they appear. According to the findings of this study, the strength of feminist arguments is directly correlated with the approaches and ideas used to counter them. No matter how feminism has changed or been altered, intersectional feminism is the answer to every feminist conflict. Whether the issue is one of accommodation, radicalism, motherism, womanism, or funeral feminism, among others, intersectional feminism has the solution.

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