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Intersectional Feminism in Irene Salami's Sweet Revenge

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Abstract: Feminism has become a major topic of discussion and research in African drama over the years. Playwrights as well as critics have written numerous works on different aspects of feminism in Africa, Irene Salami's Sweet Revenge. But the burden of the African feminist ideology and the different ways it is reflected in the African feminist dramatic texts (the different dimensions of feminism) have not gotten the needed critical attention. This caught the attention of the current study. The study used a literary qualitative and analytical approach, with the primary play texts chosen for the study being critically analysed using feminism as the guiding theory. The study concludes that the play chosen for the study is a feminist text because it deals with the burden of the woman. Beyond this portrayal, the play deals with the place of women and their responses in different ways, thereby attending to the different strands of feminism. The study concludes that the only way to wholly appreciate the play is by connecting the various strands of feminism in their appreciation. The study recommends that there are new emerging approaches to feminism, such as "burial feminism," "snail sense feminism and that these approaches should be studied alongside the existing strands using intersectionalism.

Keywords: Feminism, Sweet Revenge, Africa, Dimension, Drama.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, feminism, or women's movement, has become an issue for serious scholarly discourse in many disciplines, even in drama. Feminism arises from the belief that women are considered unequal to men politically, sexually, intellectually, and economically, and insists that there is a need to redress this biased situation. The subjugation of women has existed for ages, as women were excluded from education, ownership of property, and political representation. For instance, Plato, in his "Symposium," (2020) considers in his words, "the woman is subject to the man on account of the weakness of her nature, both of the body and

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mind... man is the beginning of woman and her end, just as God is the beginning and end of every creature."

Drama, though it began as an entertainment art, has evolved into a more exquisite, enlightening, and phenomenal creative art. Drama has become a means of conveying and distributing information, airing opinions, and making suggestions for didactic purposes to create a needed change in human society. This gave birth to different critical positions from which a work of drama can be viewed, and feminism is one of such theories. Feminism as a movement began long before the 1960s, which initially started as a revolutionary movement. It holds the ideology that women are treated as less important than men. Quoting Norbert Juma (2019).

According to Ordu and Odukwu (2022), throughout history, women have been battling against patriarchy and a predominately misogynistic society. Women have banded together to fight for their right to vote, disband rape culture, etc. Feminists have won some great victories, but the battle for gender equality has evolved into a powerful movement, with ambitious feminists leading the charge. With changes in the status of women, the eighteenth century witnessed the birth of a preoccupation with issues of femininity and female awareness. Ordu etal (2022)

Feminism is one major ideology that has piqued the interest of dramatists and literary scholars all over the world, including Africa.

Based on Norbert Juma's observation, it is clear that feminist issues have been present for a long time. Interestingly, the feminist battle is breaking through with positive outcomes. However, there are still some teething issues that need to be addressed even as the patriarchy tightens its fists to uphold women's marginalisation even more. Feminism is a wide area of research. Several aspects of the feminist discourse have been identified and worked on by both creative writers and literary scholars. Several forms of feminism have been researched and discovered by scholars through their interrogation of literary texts.

Drama as a sociological art has greatly influenced the issue of feminism. Many dramatists have created plays that deal with the molestation of the female gender by male counterparts. with its subject matter aimed at raising global awareness about female intimidation and marginalization. Ordinarily, females are trained and groomed to believe that male dominance is the original order of the world; thus, the advent of drama as a weapon deployed by feminist dramatists to combat patriarchal domination has given voice to the voiceless female gender. in works like The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives by Lola Shoneyin, Everything Good Will Come by Seti Attah, Second Class Citizens by Buchi Amecheta, Karena's Cross by Ben Binebai, and Zulu Sofola's Wedlock of the Gods. The question of women's subordination is amply portrayed and interrogated.

This research is also conceived to look at the question of feminism, but essentially to examine the various ways in which the subject has been treated ideologically by the dramatists selected for investigation. The study is interested in the various approaches to the question of feminism and wants to know if there are new perspectives to the feminist discourse.

Feminist Consciousness in Africa

African Feminism is a brand of feminism introduced by African women that especially give expression to the conditions and needs of African women living in Africa. According to Naomi Nkealah (2007), this brand of feminism contains many strands which include: Motherism, Womanism and Femalism, Nego-feminism, Snail sense, and Stiwanism.

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African feminism arose as a result of the inability of Western feminism to address the conditions and needs of African women living in Africa. African women face segregation because of their colour and also because of their gender and Western feminism has failed to address this. (Nkealah 2007) takes this argument further when she posits that at the moment, Western feminism puts all African women in one group, "women of colour," thereby erasing their diverse historical roots and experiences. According Hazel Biana (2020) tells us why the experiences of white women are perceived as representative of the experiences of all women: "History has constructed our sexuality and our feminity as developing from those qualities with which white women as the prize objects of the Western world have been endowed." However, African women express the need for white feminism to stop excluding African women from feminist theory because Africa is humanity's Mother Continent, and as such the experiences of its women will continue to be very significant.

It is however worthy to note that African feminism arose as a result of two factors: as a protest against the tendency of white feminism to exclude the experience of African women and as a genuine need to reflect African women's different historical trajectories and experiences. Stanley Ordu (2021) makes this clear when she argues that "far from being constructed in simple opposition to Western feminism, feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure". He argues thus:

In African contexts, feminism is at once philosophical, experiential, and practical. It informs women's movement, political strategy and practice on the continent, making it a very complex phenomenon to conceptualise. As a movement, feminism in Africa is made up to multiple currents and undercurrents that defy simple, homogenizing descriptions.

Thus, when we say "African feminism,"what should come to our mind is the various experiences of African women in Africa. The condition and experiences of women are best given expression to by acknowledging the similarities and differences in the detinition of a woman. Mary Modupe Kolawole (2002) puts it succinctly:

A brief overview of the trends in the growth of gender studies in Africa shows the importance of focusing on the specific needs of African women. This briefing does not legislate for criteria that make feminism second, as I do not think the issue is one of success. I agree that it is a matter of letting African women define themselves as they wish, so we can stop the dogmatic imposition of 'isms' and get on with the practical aspects of the struggle to empower African women and stop oppressing and gender inequality.

(Nkealah 2007) lends her voice: "African feminism" strives to create a new, liberal, productive and self-reliant African woman within the heterogeneous cultures of African. Feminism in Africa ultimately, aim at modifying culture as it affects women in different societies."

Furthermore, their notion of "African feminism" has been contested. Critics at the forefront of the argument posit that the regional, ethnical, political and religious differences amongst African nations tremendously influence how African women determine what feminism and freedom mean to them. For instance, while Egypt, Denya and Uganda may have some common feminist goals and orientations, differences in the way they articulate gender and it struggles will exist. Thus, cultural differences shape the way these women see the world. (Kolawole 2002) summarizes this point obviously:

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The number of national, tribal and ethnic groups is as important as race, colonial experience, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, military rule, culture, tradition, religion, modernity and more recently, globalization. All these factors impact on African women's reality in particular ways, and have to be dealt with in any investigation o the interdependent relations of feminism, "gender theory, gender relations and power constructs in Africa."
Therefore, it is quite improper to group these feminist as one. What should instead be done is acknowledge the difference that exists as a consequence of these diversities. Kolawole further argues thus:
To fully apprehend the place of gender and feminism in Africa, a historical analysis is as important as cultural contextualization. The idea is not to merge all women under an unrealistic canopy of sisterhood, but to recognize and respect specificities, diversities and difference. There are common denominations to women's struggles all over the world. But women's needs reality, oppression and empowerment can be best interrogated by an inclusive accommodating understanding of the generic and generalized issues as well as the peculiarities and group attitudes to self-definition as women.
Men are often not represented positively in feminist scholarship. Kolawole quotes Molara Ogundipe-Leslie who posits thus: The word 'feminism' itself seems to be a kind of red tag 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…" It is on the aforementioned note that (Kolawole 2002) recommends that feminism should be inclusive. "Gender in the African context needs to be inclusive, as many women prefer to engage themselves in gender theory and activism by bringing men on board" "Policy changes that will address women's needs," she argues, "cannot succeed if men are alienated. An inclusive approach is a strategic necessity as most policy makers in many African countries are men, subtle tactics may be more productive in gaining grounds for African women in situations that require policy changes in favour of women" She correctly notes that "many African women place a high approach to gender struggles." "Many African women," she correctly asserts, "desire the elimination of gender and other forms of oppression parripassu and this often necessitates working with men"

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 afavourite 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

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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,

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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.

Motherism, Womanism and Radical Feminism

Salami's Sweet Revenge is a feminist work of art. The text clearly projects the hurdles of the female gender in marriage, raising children (single parenting), home management, career, etc., with Aisosa as the protagonist, leading an inspiring portrayal of a marginalised female in patriarchal-fisted terrain.

From Salami's point of view of creative narration, she exhibits an organised plot that showcases feminist discourse as it surrounds her female lead character in an attempt to present topics of feminism, using her protagonist Aisosa's experiences as a yardstick. Salami demonstrated realistic behavioural attributes of Nigerian men, husbands, and politicians in the person of her fictional character Sota. We discover the extent of Dr. Sota's deception as he intimidatingly insults the intelligence of women. It can be concluded that the African ideology of women not having brains and only being good enough or qualified for kitchen work and child rearing has come to surface via Sota's character. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari is a perpetrator of this school of thought.He quoted, "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen, my living room, and the other room." (BBC News, 10/14/2016).

For Sota, women should be wifely and motherly; other than that, no other position should be vacant for them. Society and political affairs were reserved for men. This is revealed in a dialogue between his British wife and himself, who is curious to know the roles Nigerian women have to play in his journey to becoming a senator, but he deceitfully dodges giving her a direct answer:

Cheryl: And what role will the women in this new Nigeria?
Sota: …. As soon as things are sorted out, they will be duly compensated.
Cheryl: You talk as if they are not part of the system. They should be involved right from the start.
Sota: Well things don't work out that way in Africa… There are other things to consider. (Salami 10-11)

This scene exposes the African male instinct that women are irrelevant and can receive compensation as a display of value and honor. Sota constantly repeated "compensation for their involvement." Cheryl is obviously disappointed in his response, and even when she insisted, he addressed the situation as though there is a Nigerian political doctrine that impinges on his will in promoting women's place in the country's politics:

Cheryl: I thought you said that men and women fought for your country's return to democracy, so why sideline the women?
Sota: … I am out here and can't speak for my country…

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Reggie: … but you need to champion the fight against the attitude of shutting women out…
Sota: I can't say much on this side of the country…. I will see what the situation of things is…
Reggie: and what if the situation is not favorable?
Sota: then there is nothing I can do
Cheryl: why can't you fight for equal participation to…?
Sota: Not in Nigeria. You will be called "woman wrapper". (10-11)

He is an anti-feminist whose will is to incarcerate the female gender. He consciously did not commit to fulfilling his pledge for women's empowerment and involvement in the political system. Sota's deceitfulness was not only recorded at Aisosa but also by Cheryl. Before the arrival of the invitation letter, Cheryl was expecting a baby. From the selected text, Sota's acceptance of the invitation did not report any hesitation on his part. It could be speculated that the summons came in time for him to avoid the parenting responsibility as he did with Aisosa, to whom he abandoned four children for the duration of eight years, which would have been much longer but for his summons to return to Nigeria (movement 3). Sota's personality conforms to Chisal's quotes from Rothman and Sibanda in Patriarchy and Resistance, saying:

A woman exists in connection to a masculine figure and is identified through that figure, thus patriarchy intersects with different kinds of oppression". "Religious and cultural misperceptions about human relationships intensify unequal relationships in society. (14)
He continues his repulsiveness over patriarchal power, dominance and influence as he quote Tamale and Sultana:

Patriarchy informs the world's political, legal, economic, social and religious structures- For decades patriarchy has been a stumbling block to women's freedom and success. It is an ideology that gives authority to men and legitimizes the oppression of women in all sectors of society- "It is an invisible source of power that is used by society to justify the authority of men over mainly women and property.(15)

The play also depicts feminist struggles with abortion, career, and dreams to support and raise a family.Aisosa, an established medical doctor, gives up her career to be a stay-at-home mom and support her husband in achieving his PhD. Cheryl also gives up her life in Britain and relocates to Abuja, Nigeria, to start a family with Sota, but of course, both women were utterly disappointed by his deceit. These women were guilty of Catherine Achonolu's motherist theory. Salami recaps a narration of the Democracy Revolution in the 1980s, where women are at the forefront of the battle. Afraid of the casualties, men pulled out and remained on the sidelines while encouraging them. Women are the forerunners of democratic dreams. They were probably motivated because of the increased fatality rates of their husbands and sons in the art of political war. Through it all, they received no appreciation or recognition. They, however, were compensated but remained marginalised. In Sota's words, "as soon as things are sorted out, they will be compensated" (10).
Salami reemphasized Motherists'discourse in this text. She reveals the high rate of discrimination as women are oppressed as mother:

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Sota: Aisosa, why are you sweating like a Christmas goat? Look at your body, you have developed folds everywhere. Your breasts are saggy, and you've put on weight. Your body does not appeal to me at all.
Sota: what is this you are wearing? You look 60 years for God's sake. Why can't you wear trouser?
Sota: Sosa I must be frank with you; you no longer excite me. You are too dull and drab. That spark that used to be in your life is no longer there. "When I married you, you were so full of life. What happened to you Aisosa?

The above speech demonstrates a clear dislike and rejection of motherhood. It is biologically and scientifically proven that when a woman gives birth, her body undergoes tremendous changes. There is also the traditional Nigerian dress that distinguishes girls from women: two wrappers, a blouse, and a head-tie. These attires differ based on the ethnic groups of the nation. Sota is guilty of despising and reproaching his wife for being an African woman by nature and fashion and also for the office of a stay-at-home mom16). Sota withheld support from his wife, Aisosa, which classifies him as an anti-motherist. Godono Elvira, quoting Acholonu, says:
Motherist is the man or woman committed to the survival of Mother Earth as a hologrammatic entity. The weapon of Motherism is love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation of the sexes. (65)

As a feminist discourse, "Sweet Revenge" also addresses political, socioeconomic, and physical deprivation and assault. Sota Ojo violated the women's rights and oppressed them with the position he obtained with their support. From the story, he downplayed and obstructed their entitlement. When the leaders of the political women's group located him at his residence in Abuja, he treated them in the most despicable manner.
Sota: what do I have to do with you, good for nothing women like you?
Power: Even if you don't have respect for us because we are women, won't you respect the grey hair on our heads? Don't forget you represent our interest at the National Assembly.
Sota: Must I lose my peace because I represent the national assembly?...
Executive: No but we worked hard for you. Anyway, we are here on behalf of the others...
Sota: Leave my house, or face the consequences. Call me the police, I will teach these women lessons they'll never forget in their lives...
This singular act brought about his downfall. The women found strength and courage in their humiliation. Their feminine radicalistic qualities are put to use in oneness by dethroning and replacing him with Aisosa. They acted in a godly manner, as the Psalmist says, "But God is the judge: he putteth down one and raiseth another" (Psalm 75:7, KJV). By doing so, Salami announces the authority possessed by women. Irene Salami theatrically applied the radicalist school of thought in addressing Sota's patriarchal dominance. The issues of women's discrimination, subjugation, oppression, and marginalisation were handled in the most militant and precise manner. There is an illustration in Cheryl's giving her daughter to Aisosa: she did not want a reminder of Sota's deception and her wasted six years. Another is planning an Aisosa'shonor award ceremony in London. The leaders of the Benin Women political group impeached Sota and voted in Aisosa to replace him.
Sweet Revenge explores the various angles of women's discrimination, subjugation, and marginalization. Irene Salami must be applauded for artistically applying feminist theories that

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solve the troubling feminist issues in the story. Benedict Binebai summarises "Sweet Revenge"...

In Sweet Revenge Salami's commitment is fundamental and outstanding. The play celebrates the African woman's capacity to rise above her problems and seek a new and profitable identity for her. The revolution of the wives and women in the play brings together black and white women in the fight against male command. The drama supplies stimulation, mental strength and ideas for the women to fight for their rights. It promotes women's integrity and capacity to carry their destiny in their hands. Sweet Revenge is one drama that unites women in the battle against male domination. (158)

Salami addressed several aspects of feminist ideology in order to reveal the African woman's suffering and strength. She uses the character of Aisosa, wife of Sota, to anchor her marginalised feminist ideological position. Firstly, Aisosa is portrayed as a woman who suffers under the theory of motherism as she endures humiliation and rejection from her husband for being a mother. Secondly, she secures a job and becomes a working-class woman; this symbolises the theory of womanism. Third, Sota is dethroned by the intervention of constituency political women leaders, while his wife, Aisosa, ascends and occupies the same senatorial seat with the help of the group of women. Sota desires and wants his rejected wife back as he becomes poorer, but she rejects him and severes all marital ties with him, just as Cheryl did. Irene Salami introduces another realm of radical feminism. It is an ideological position in which a woman deliberately refuses to have a man, her husband, in her life. Irene Salami, a female feminist dramatist, uses her art to redefine and empower African Nigerian women.

3. CONCLUSION

Dimensions of Feminism addresses the feminism crisis as it affects Nigerian women, using Salami's imaginative writing as a yardstick for resolving these crises from whatever angle they emerge. From this research, it can be conclusively said that the enormity of the feminist arguments is proportional to the methods and theories applied in tackling them. Regardless of feminism's deforms and reforms, intersectional feminism holds the key to all feminist struggle and resolution, whether it's accommodation, radicalism, motherism, womanism, or burial feminism, among other things; intersectional feminism holds the answer.

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