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Accommodation of Feminism in J. P Clark's Wives Revolt

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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, including J. P. Clark's* Wives Revolt*. 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 text chosen for the study being critically analysed using feminism as the guiding theory. The study concludes that all of the play chosen for the study is 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 this play is by connecting the various strands of feminism in their appreciation.

Keywords: Wives Revolt, John Clark, Feminism, Africa, Accommodation Feminism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism, or the women's movement, has become a subject of serious academic discussion in a variety of disciplines, including play. Feminism asserts that this imbalanced situation must be rectified because women are not regarded identically to men in politics, sexuality, intelligence, and economics. Due to their exclusion from political participation, property ownership, and education, women have been subjugated for centuries. In his "Symposium" (2020), Plato states 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 man due to the weakness of her nature, both in body and

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mind." Drama has evolved from a form of entertainment into a more refined, illuminating, and astounding form of art. Drama has evolved into a tool for disseminating information, conveying opinions, and providing guidance for educational purposes in order to bring about an urgently needed change in human society. Feminism is one of the ideologies that led to the development of multiple critical perspectives through which a dramatic work may be examined. Long before the 1960s, which began as a revolutionary movement, there existed the feminism movement. It adheres to the notion that men are accorded greater regard than women. Norbert Juma (2019), citing Ordu and Odukwu (2022), asserts that throughout history, women have fought against patriarchy and a predominantly misogynistic culture. Women have banded together to fight for issues including the abolition of rape culture and the right to vote. The struggle for gender equality has developed into a significant movement, led by aspirational feminists, despite their achievements. As the position of women changed during the eighteenth century, a concern with themes of femininity and female consciousness emerged. This year is 2022. Feminism is a significant philosophy that has attracted the interest of dramatists and literary scholars from all over the world, including Africa. Norbert Juma's statement demonstrates that feminist concerns have existed for a very long time. It is fascinating to observe how the feminist movement is advancing. Despite the fact that the patriarchy is tightening its grasp to support the further marginalization of women, there are still infantile issues that must be addressed. Feminism is an expansive field of study. Numerous facets of feminist discourse have been discovered and examined by both literary academics and creative authors. Through the analysis of literary works, scholars have researched and uncovered a variety of feminisms.

Theoretical Framework

The womanist theory is used in this research as it was presented by Nigerian literary critic Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in her work "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English." Ogunyemi notes that Alice Walker's use of the phrase "employs it to denote the metamorphosis that occurs in an adolescent girl when she comes to sense herself as a woman" (28). Her "notion of its meaning overlaps with Alice Walker's" (28). "The young girl inherits womanism," claims 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 is "a woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female," as she puts it (28). She contends that the aforementioned description of a womanist makes womanism a favorite ideology for all feminists due to its fair representation of women. "Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots and the ideals of black life while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom," the author adds. It is just as concerned with the global power system that oppresses blacks as it is with the sexual power struggle among black people (28). The author continues by claiming that the ultimate goal of womanism is to achieve "black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a "brother" or "sister" or a "father" or "mother" to the other" (28). The aforementioned description contrasts with the viewpoint of a typical radical feminist, who believes that patriarchal rule inevitably leads to women being oppressed and

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subjugated. But it's important to remember that womanism is only a subset of African feminism. Other feminisms exist, including Motherism, which Catherine Acholonu proposed; Nego-feminism, which Obioma Nnaemeka advanced; Snail Sense Feminism, which Ajkachi Ezeigbo advanced; Stiwanism, which Molara Ogundipe-Leslie advanced; and Feminism, which Chioma Opara advanced. However, as was previously mentioned in the work, each of these categories has some sort of issue, as noted by Naomi Nkealah (2007). She claims that one basic issue with African feminism is that it often focuses on one facet of the issues facing African women while ignoring the other. She puts it like this: Each brand is created for a certain sector of the gender-conscious human population to the exclusion of other parts, which is one of the inconsistencies of African feminism. Nkealah contends that African feminism frowns upon lesbianism and exclusively supports heterosexual partnerships since lesbians are also women. She says it like this: 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.

Nevertheless, despite Nkealah's critiques of Ogunyemi's womanist theory, womanism, as it was put forward by Ogunyemi, is very pertinent to this research since it supports the idea that men and women must coexist and emphasizes the idea of complementarity and cooperation. The wording that was chosen reflects these concepts.

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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.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

J.P. Clark, known for his indigenous tales and elegant theatrical language structure, whose work now guides this thesis to unveiling the dimensions of gender challenges in Nigeria and the diaspora, Clark's works address societal ills in areas such as politics, culture, traditional norms, myths, and gender revolution.Among his plays, The Wives Revolt pays tribute to feminist discourse and issues surrounding female marginalisation and oppression.

The Wives' Revolt narrows the feminist topic to the subjugation of Niger Delta women to patriarchal dominance and influence in a political atmosphere. The plays expose the Niger Delta men's myopic and degenerated reasoning in terms of their love of money and power, their complacency for community development, and their lack of concern for family stability.
Feminist issues in The Wives Revolt has been rumoured as a result of the distribution of oil company funds during Okoro's proclamation. From his announcement, it is understood that the oil company that explored on the land remitted a certain amount for compensation to the indigenous community members. This money is to be divided into three equal parts: the first part goes to the old men, the second to the young men, and the third to the women. This disbursement provoked the long-suppressed voices inside these women, waiting to exhale. In the voice of Koko, "have you come home after passing your obnoxious law"? The tenor in her voice was anger, but, of course, Okoro did not mind the twang in her voice. This act exemplifies male oppression, with men portraying women as unequal and insignificant due to their gender. Again, the confrontational dialogue with his wife on page 412 suggests women as marginalised beings in certain affairs of life, society, and family.

Okoro: A witch in the kitchen that is who you are. Why don't all women stay that way and leave affairs of the state to us men: life would be so much better for everyone.
To the men, by ancient custom, they were in their right to give the women one third of the proceeds. Koko knew it was not right, so she insisted on the fair share of half(equal share) from the oil money paid to the community as compensation for their land.
Koko: Oh, just repeal the law, and give us our fair share of the money.

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She assures him only then will men be able to find peace. Though he shuts her up and beckons on what he feels is her only responsibility. With the high level of oppression and deprivation, the women were not silent.

Okoro: Oh, go and get me some water to drink and stop nagging…

Koko: Oh, just repeal the law, and give us our fair share of the money.

Another feminist issue disclosed here is women's slavery. The play sensitises women as domestic and community chore attendants. The narrator informs us in the first scene that the community is piled high with debris because the women have withdrawn from cleaning up as an angry reaction to the one-third sharing.

"… they have refused for many a day now to perform their civic duties and responsibilities, as a consequence of which our streets, our public places, right to the market square, that is the own preserve are today filled with the rank of excrement of earthworms and goats, and roaming unchecked in our city…." (401-402).

As the story progresses, there are more revelations about the entangled responsibilities of domestic and community chores. Bell Hooks says feminism is a call for both genders. Here, Okoro does a good display of being an anti-feminist as he fails to acknowledge the sacrifices of these women and accord them their rightful entitlement. But Idama, on the other hand, is a feminist who recognises the values and efficiencies of these women and is ready to advocate for them.

Idama: …We need them badly at home

Okoro: For what!

Idama: Oh, there are so many things woman that we old that we cannot do.

Okoro: What can a woman do that a man cannot do better?

Idama: Cook for instance. They wash our clothes. Bear the children …, when it comes to running the house, we cannot rely on substitutes... (417-418).

Achonolu says the place of a mother cannot be overemphasized. Motherhood is the centre of creation. A woman is a mother; she is nature, and she nurtures (1996). There is always a struggle in the absence of a female human. This was the case with Idama and Okoro. Idama and Okoro struggle with virtually everything, from lighting the firewood through domestic chores to pacifying children. With all these, Okoro did not accept the importance of their absconding wives (419–423).

Domestically assaulting women is not an exception to the feminist theme in the selected text. The men of Erhuwaren assaulted their wives domestically; the women were beaten often for little or no reason at all. Koko's conversation with her husband shows that it was not an easy experience for a wife.:

The testimony of two three, idle men in town who spends all day bragging about their great ancestral past and then return home too drunk to see the women they beating. You don't expect the poor women would stand in one place or those drunks to give black eyes and broken limb … (404) Koko was also a victim of this feminist issue. She receives beatings from her husband too, with no aid in defending herself except for the interference of Idama (434, 435). The severity of the struggle for women's liberation from patriarchal dominance, as witnessed in the lives of the

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women of Erhuwaren, drove Idama to admit that a woman's life is a life of slavery (441). It is possible to speculate that these women, at some point in time, became used to serving their men as punching bags to exert and relieve their anger, drunkenness, or pain. Domestic violence has been accepted and considered as part of the African woman's responsibilities as mothers and housewives. Women's restriction to owning a child or property is also a feminist topic in the selected text. Women are classified as objects, properties owned by their husbands that can be disowned whenever they please. Okoro was characterised as arrogant, a bully, and self-centered. Despite everything she has been through with him in marriage, he sees no good in Koko. He emotionally and materially violated her with his non-appreciating and superior attitude, revealed in pages 440 and 411.

Okoro: Who will have her for a wife now?
Koko: Did you hear him? I'll no longer stay with a man who no longer wants me.
Idama: Of course, he wants you
Okoro: Do not hold her. If she takes a step outside that door than that it is this time.
Idama: Oh, shut up, will you!
Koko: he want what he wants, to drive me out into the street, that's what he wants.
Okoro: Oh, no I shall just ask your parent to give me back my dowry
Koko: shameless man, after all I've done for you, cooking, washing, bearing children...
Idama: there let's not name it, is a slave life for you women
Okoro: I say let her go! Here is your mortar and pestle, here are you baskets for cassava and you broom. Now out you go.
Idama: shame on you! Has a wife then no title to anything?
Okoro: None. All dressed up she comes and all worn out she goes.

Okoro was willing to let her go with nothing—not with her children nor with whatever she had laboured for in all the years of marriage. The subject of laws and constitutions and traditional and cultural norms that oppose the essence of female survival in a society cannot be ignored. The women were oppressed with no resolution. Okoro knew that, and that is why he is bold to say, "Women have no rights, no special rights that I know of" (416).

This was the situation surrounding the Erhuwaren women; their rights were constituted as those of the silent participants in the community. The laws were created for men, not for everyone. These laws have been passed down from generation to generation. Okoro's proclamation is evidence for this argument: "In pursuit of their claims, which we declare are not only preposterous but in complete violation of our ancient customs and laws" (401), Okoro continues his speech. On page 408 of Movement 2. He insinuates that the case would have been different if not for already passed-down traditions.

Okoro: It was in strict observance of tradition that we shared the money into three parts. And it is in the strictest interest of the community that the law of banning goats from the town (406).

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The decision of Okoro and his kinsmen was an imitation of their ancestors, which means women have been marginalised for ages. But Clark provided freedom of speech and opinion as a feminist weapon to fight for liberation through Koko's character:

Okoro: What is all, this woman? You made your point a hundred times today, when the council of elders meet, all will be resolved in general assembly.

Koko: Oh, yes, we did. But did your most respected president recognize our Individual right to speak?... then when nudged awake by his young attendant, how he nodded vigorously to everything you men said? (408).

Despite the poor response from the men and the council of elders, the women did not take to discouragement or silence.

Koko: I'll speak my mind in any place and any day. Anyways, I am talking in my own house and to my own husband(406).

Interestingly, Clark ignited the feminist weapon of fighting back dangerously and vigorously, what feminist scholars call radical feminism. According to Lewis Johnson (2005), radical feminism takes a more militant approach to achieving its goals. When petitions and confrontations failed, the women of Erhuwaren took more affirmative action, led by Koko. They moved out of their homes and journeyed on a protest to neighbouring communities, much to the husband's astonishment.

Idama: "She is gone, gone with the others; ...yes, our wives have walked out on us...in protest against our unjust law...all gone, handmaid, head wife, most favored wife, nursing mother, pregnant wife...look around you if you can find any single female in town except old unmarried girls and wives retired home from their husbands".

Okoro: but those are the witches we wanted out of town.

Idama: now we are stuck with them and they swear

The above dialogue from the play serves as a dependable backdrop for the reflection of womanism in our society today. Though there are Black feminists with different issues and approaches to resolving them, it is, however, relevant to pursue them as an entity rather than separately, bearing in mind that what affects one affects the other. The old ladies of Erhuwaren displayed feminist attributes, though they stayed at home. They were explicitly involved in the revolt by showing solidarity. Zoe Kaplan says a womanist always loves other women.

Accommodation feminism

The basic ideological standpoint of feminism in The Wives Revolt is accommodation feminism, which is sometimes referred to as gender balance or gender complementarity. In this form of feminist ideology, men and women are seen and treated as equal partners in progress at home. Although a major part of the play establishes the conflict between men and women, the playwright makes it clear at the end of the play that men and women are equal partners in progress. The men of Erhuwaren change their feelings, thinking, and attitudes about their relationship with women, their wives, and the need for both genders to be equally treated in the play. This is, frankly, a distinctive contribution to the question of gender balance in feminism.

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The men's acceptance of women as equal partners in the drama will bring peace and prosperity to the family and society.

4. CONCLUSION

Dimensions of Feminism examines the feminist conundrum as it affects Nigerian women and utilizes Clark's imaginative writing as a yardstick for tackling these crises from any angle. This research found that the effectiveness of counterarguments against feminist arguments depended on the quality of the feminist arguments themselves. Intersectional feminism is the solution to every feminist debate, regardless of how feminism has evolved or been reinterpreted. Intersectional feminism provides answers to a wide range of problems, including those involving accommodation, radicalism, motherism, womanism, and even funeral feminism.

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