
Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family

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Abstract

"Africana Womanism and African Feminism: A Philosophical, Literary, and Cosmological Dialectic on Family" examines the emerging perspectives of many of today's leading African women writers and scholars regarding the life conditions of the Africana woman and, more specifically, pertaining to African family forms. This will allow for comparisons of the divergent, global viewpoints of the Africana Womanist as espoused by Clenora Hudson-Weems, African Feminists like the legendary Nigerian activist Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and African scholars and writers like Filomena Chimona Steady and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, who, amongst others, have all staked out ideological and philosophical positions on the matter of the overall condition of the Diasporan African female and the African family. At the heart of the piece is the question of relevancy and efficacy.

The present treatment will examine, generally, the emerging perspectives of many of today's leading African women writers and scholars regarding the life conditions of the Africana woman and, specifically, pertaining to the institution of so-called "polygamy." This will allow for comparisons of the divergent viewpoints of the Africana Womanist espoused by Dr. Clenora Hudson Weems, African Feminists like the legendary Nigerian activist Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and African writers like Glo Chukukere, who, amongst others, have all staked out ideological and philosophical positions on the matter of the overall condition of the African female and the African family.

Let us first begin to define the terminology and concepts of "Africana Womanism" and "African Feminism." In "Africana Womanism: A Historical, Global Perspective for Women of African Descent," Hudson-Weems makes it clear that her theory is not just an idea, but a *method*—with uniquely African considerations and sensibilities.

Africana Womanism as a theoretical concept and methodology defines a new paradigm, which offers an alternative to all forms of feminism. It is a terminology and a concept that consider both ethnicity (Africana) and gender (Womanism), which I coined and defined in the mid-1980's...It was later established

that the concept is neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism...Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace...It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana Womanist. (Hudson-Weems "Global", 1814)

In her seminal work, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, Hudson-Weems, the innovative theorist/scholar/activist identifies eighteen "descriptors," which should serve to guide informed analysis of the Africana woman's existence. The Africana womanist is 1) a self-namer; 2) a self-definer; 3) family-centered; 4) genuine in sisterhood; 5) strong; 6) in concert with the Africana man in struggle; 7) whole; 8) authentic; 9) a flexible role player; 10) respected; 11) recognized; 12) spiritual; 13) male compatible; 14) respectful of elders; 15) adaptable; 16) ambitious; 17) mothering; and 18) nurturing. As she simply states, "Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women" (154-155).

Accordingly, interspersed throughout this work is much about the African worldview and its philosophical bedrock, which reveal much about the cosmological, epistemological, and



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axiological elements which Molefi Asante names as the fundamental components of Afrocentric inquiry in Afrocentricity, Kemet, and Knowledge (8). For according to the perspective espoused by Nah in "African Womanism: An Afrocentric Theory," analysis of the clash of European and Africanological, epistemological, and axiological elements which Molefi Asante names as the fundamental components of Afrocentric inquiry in c (8). For according to the perspective espoused by Nah in "African Womanism: An Afrocentric Theory," analysis of the Nah Dove, having been exposed to Africana Womanism, having taught from my book for several years—I don't really know what the difference is, as she sees it. I really don't. I just know that with Africana womanism, I tried to look at us, and who we really are, and what we really do" (Reed "Portrait").

This matter of terminology is one of the first issues I raised with Hudson-Weems during the personal interview she so graciously granted to me. More specifically, I posed the following interrogatories, among others: 1) What is "Africana Womanism"? 2) How does it differ from "Feminism"? and 3) Why "Africana" as opposed to "African" Womanism? She listened patiently to my questions, then she informed me that her dear departed friend 'Zulu Sofola, who had become a leading proponent of Africana Womanism on the African continent—and who wrote the foreword to *Reclaiming*—had essentially asked her the very same questions on the occasion of their first meeting, in 1992 at the International Conference on Women in Africa and The African Diaspora (WAAD), at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

I said "because 'Africana' acknowledges the Diasporic presence." So, not "Afrikaner"—*Africana*, in the same sense as you say "Africana Studies." Africana Womanism means that we deal with the Continental African, as well as the Diasporic African. From the African Caribbeans, African Americans, African Europeans, African Canadians—wherever we are, *that's* Africana. And in naming, I tried to be reflective of two things, and that is ethnicity, or a cultural connection with Africa, and that's "Africana" and "Womanism" to deal with the gender that is being developed here. Not to say that we are anything separate from the male, because we're in the struggle together. That's the whole thing. What makes Africana womanism different from any other female-based theory is that we are inseparable and one—as the other, I should say the other side of the coin from the Africana man—collectively struggling, as we've always done as Africans: A people collectively working. We come from a communal past. "It takes a village to raise a child," as the old African adage goes. Well, it takes a village to do *everything*, because we work *together*. (Reed "Portrait")

In one of her more recent articles, "Africana Womanism: An Overview," she elaborates on her choice

of the word "womanism" for her theoretical perspective. Really, she maintains, it is a matter of specificity.

The term "woman," and by extension "womanism," is far more appropriate than the term "female" (feminism), as only a female of the human race can be a woman. "Female," on the other hand, can refer to a member of the animal or plant kingdom, as well as to a member of the human race. Finally, in electronic and mechanical terminology, there is a female counterbalance to the male correlative. Hence, terminology derived from the word "woman" is more suitable and more specific when naming a group of the human race. (Hudson-Weems Overview, 205-17)

And what of Alice's Walker's "womanist" position? Is this the same thing or are they competing theoretical perspectives? These were questions that Hudson-Weems has heard before, and she even addresses the matter in *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. She reiterates her take of Walker's concept-vis-a-vis Africana Womanism to me during our meeting.

Alice Walker is a creative writer. She is a novelist and a poet. She's no theorist. Like you say, she was disenchanted with feminism—but not that disenchanted [as suggested] in her description is in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*. And it's all just in the "Introduction." It was never developed. There was never a theoretical basis for womanism. She said a womanist is "a Black feminist or a feminist of color." So what's the point? Then she says "who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, [and who] sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or nonsexually. [Walker continues] "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female." Now that part I like, but then she goes back and says that "Womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender."...I'm not talking about a shade differentiation. I'm talking about an entirely different agenda. Therefore, [Walker's] "womanist" has nothing to do with Africana Womanism. I'm not giving up the term Africana Womanism, because at the same time she was developing (really writing, not developing) or introducing the womanist concept, I was developing Africana womanism. It was called "Black Womanism" then. (Reed "Portrait")

She deals with the question of feminism just as clearly and forcefully. As she explains in the following passage, the power to define is basically sacrosanct.

We talk about naming and defining ourselves. Why? [Toni] Morrison says it well in *Beloved*: "Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined," historically. So, it is up to us to define ourselves. If we don't someone else will, and they will do it miserably. You know, we've been given all kinds of stereotypical names. We have to name ourselves. In the African cosmology, the word *nommo* is critical to existence. It is through the proper naming of a thing that it gains its existence, its essence. So, there it is. We have to name ourselves properly. (Reed "Portrait")

It is for this reason she feels that the Africana woman cannot afford to just settle for labels and definitions that really have nothing to do with the African experience—or perhaps more accurately, that do not acknowledge the African experience. She points to Feminism as a prime example.

I can't piggyback and name myself after somebody else. In fact, it's ludicrous. To name myself after a theory that came after me,

that actually used me as a blueprint. That's what Black women do, when they call themselves Black Feminists. They named themselves after feminists, when actually, we were the blueprint for the feminists. When they saw us speaking out, verbalizing and acting, they go "Hmmm"....[and] Working! Yes. "Hmmm, I want to move from the homeplace to the workplace." We've always been in the workplace. "Hmmm, I want to branch out and find a voice. I never knew..." They can name themselves after us, but it's stupid for us to name ourselves after them. (Reed "Portrait")

Of course, the proponents of African or Black Feminism feel just as strongly about the ideological positions they have advanced and invested in philosophically. While some use "Black" and "African" interchangeably, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, a prominent African feminist critic, in this context, stresses the necessity of exercising caution with the notion of *Black* women in "African Feminism: A Theoretical Approach to the History of Women in the African Diaspora." In her view "before applying the African feminist theory to Black women's past, it is important to look at the term *Black*, because not all women of African descent identify with this term." She cites the examples of many parts of the Caribbean and South America. Essentially, she feels that "*Black* symbolizes a cultural milieu, more than it does a color" (50). This, to me, indicates a preference for the term *African* feminism over *Black* feminism.

The Sierre Leonean feminist scholar and critic Filomena Steady is perhaps the foremost proponent of African Feminism, and her edited volume *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* has achieved watershed status. She also expounded on African Feminism, as she sees it, in "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective."

African feminism combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings. It can be defined as that ideology which encompasses freedom from oppression based on the political, economic, social, and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual, and class biases. It is more inclusive than other forms of feminist ideologies and is largely a product of polarizations and conflicts that represent some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering...It can be argued that this type of feminism has the potential of emphasizing the totality of human experience, portraying the strength and resilience of the human spirit and resounding with optimism for the total liberation of humanity. African feminism is, in short, humanistic feminism...intrinsically a moral and political statement for human survival and well being. (Steady "Feminism", 4-5)

Clearly, she distinguishes between mainstream feminism and what she and many others call African Feminism. Her contention that it is "more inclusive" indicates a recognition on her part that garden-variety feminism deals exclusively with the issues of the European-descended woman, as *Africana* womanism (Feminism, 8)

Steady's referral to "forms" of feminism also speaks to the many variations of the theoretical perspective. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, herself a Marxist Feminist, treats this matter extensively. Asserting, as do many feminists, that any African woman who rejects the label "feminist" is weak, mindless and attempting to curry favor with men, she is blunt in her criticism of such females. In her words, "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. The embarrassment springs from being described by a word which encodes women (in 'femina') so directly. So effective are the years of phallocratic socialization" (Ogundipe-Leslie *Re-Creating*, 229).

She takes an etymological approach to defining the word "feminism," while at the same time answering the critics—males or, as she sees it, women under male influence—of feminist theory relative to the African woman.

*Femina is "woman" in Latin. Feminism [is] an ideology of women; any body of social philosophy about women...So, one question could be, "What is feminism for you."...Generally, feminism, however, must always have a political and activist spine to its form...Are these opponents able to support the idea that African women or cultures did not have ideologies which propounded or theorized woman's being and provided avenues and channels for women's oppositions and resistance to injustice within their societies...Nationalism and race pride, I know, will make our men beat a retreat at this question and they had better beat that retreat. The issue is that there were indigenous feminisms. There were indigenous patterns within traditional African societies for addressing the oppressions and injustices to women. (Ogundipe-Leslie *Re-Creating*, 222-3)*

Hudson-Weems argues that *Africana* Womanism does not deny that there is room for improvement in the life conditions of the *Africana* woman. However, in her mind, that does not necessarily mean that feminism is the answer.

*It doesn't matter what type of feminist you are. You can be a cultural feminist, a mainstream feminist, a radical feminist, a separatist, or a lesbian feminist. You can be any kind of feminist in the world, you're still about the business of female empowerment as the number one priority. The number one priority. How can you afford that luxury in a race that is so oppressed—men, women, and children equally? ...That's all I'm asking, that we prioritize. I didn't say that we don't talk about gender. The feminists have no exclusive on gender issues. Whenever you talk about gender, you've got to be a feminist? Excuse me? I am a full-blown *Africana* Womanist, dealing with gender any time I want to—because we're all trapped in a patriarchal system, but it's the way in which we deal with those gender issues that makes us different. I deal with it authentically. I am not anti-male. My daddy was a male. My husband is a male. My brother is [was] a male. I have cousins, friends, whatever, who are male...I'd be the last one to exclude a male from a discussion because he's a male. That's what they want to do...They should be welcomed instead of excluded from the meetings or discussions on gender*

issues. I think the feminists have missed it...and Black women are piggybacking off of it. You can't be anti. (Reed "Portrait")

Even Ogundipe-Leslie is not unmindful of the polarity of the experiences of the African- and European-descended woman—and of the racism that permeates mainstream feminism. She admits that the African feminist must “be careful that she is not buying into this kind of racist discourse.” Consequently, even she is now advancing an alternative to the word “feminist.” “I have since advocated the word ‘Stiwanism,’ instead of feminism, to bypass these concerns and to bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa” (*Re-Creating*, 229).

“Stiwa” is my acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. This new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, white Euro-American feminisms which are unfortunately, under siege by everyone... “STIWA” is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformations of Africa. (Ogundipe-Leslie Re-Creating, 229-30)

She, nonetheless, believes that “Black men and women cannot unite around conflicting interests and across antagonistic classes” (*Re-Creating*, 207). This last statement of hers would seem to indicate that she does see gender as superseding race. Filomena Steady is of the opposite opinion in this instance, as is evidenced in the following passage, where she sounds much like the Africana Womanist.

For the Black woman in a racist society, racial factors, rather than sexual ones operate more consistently in making her a target for discrimination and marginalization...Regardless of differential access to resources by both men and women, white males and females, as members of family groups, share a proportionately higher quantity of the resources than do Black males and females. (Steady Cross-Culturally, 27-28)

The late Nigerian nationalist and feminist icon Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (FRK) advanced the notion of “gender solidarity before political party allegiances. This, of course, is a universal feminist ideal that is—equally universally—seldom achieved in reality” (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 102). FRK was not one, however, to categorically advocate the “gender before race” brand of feminism.

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a nationalist who neither exhibited nor tolerated ethnocentrism in her personal or public life, and she discouraged it in all the organizations she headed or was affiliated with...Her feminism included a nationalistic element. (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 99)

Her pointed comments on the authorship of Nigeria's national anthem, composed by (Lady) Flora Lugard (Shaw), wife of the notorious former British colonial governor of Nigeria, (Lord) Frederick Lugard,

confirm her nationalistic leaning. Ransome Kuti declared:

It is most surprising that it was not possible to find a person within 30,000,000 people capable enough to compose our national anthem. We as women are proud to see that the anthem had been composed by a woman. But we would have wished her to be a Nigerian woman. We hope she will pardon us for this expression. It is only natural that we should feel that.” (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 99)

This daughter of Africa, widely known as a pioneer woman's activist in her homeland, was the president of the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU), which, not surprisingly “propounded a feminist consciousness and ideology” (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 101-103). Hudson-Weems, I daresay, would not be so quick to cede FRK to the African Feminist camp—even if her status is self-proclaimed—and would declare her one of the earliest Africana Womanists, even if the name had not been formulated during her lifetime. Indeed, she could very easily point to Ransome-Kuti's name change in the latter days of her life (and in her youth) as a clear indication of her Africana Womanist instinct to self-name and self-define.

Though she never changed her name legally, in the early 1970's she had dropped Ransome and substituted Anikulapo, a Yoruba word meaning “warrior who carries strong protection” or alternatively “hunter who carries death in a pouch.” She had done this at least partially at the suggestion of Fela [her son, the critically-acclaimed, legendary Nigerian drummer and musical genius] who had previously changed his own name to symbolize his disparagement of the neocolonial mentality he attached to the adoption of European names. As early as the 1920s she had dropped her European given names, Frances Abigail, and used only Funmilayo and...also insisted that pupils at her schools use their African rather than European names. (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 68)

Still, FRK enunciated many views consistent with Western feminism. During another of her NWU speeches, she fiercely denounced “polygyny” and the bridewealth, in keeping with the ideology of the NWU.

They smile while their wives weep. Women...were created with blood and flesh like men. I wonder how a man could tolerate any of his wives should have a male friend...I think this attitude of disrespect to women's feelings was caused by the fact that the purchase price had been paid on the women. (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 102)

This abhorrence of “polygamy” expressed by Ransome-Kuti is echoed by many other so-called African feminists. The African feminist writer, Awa Thiam, takes a similar stance. In fact she argues that African women should not rest until they have “equal” status to that of their European counterparts. In “Black Sisters, Speak Out” she forcefully writes that polygamy is “rampant” in Africa. She points to the Western example of divorce, which is always an option when the husband practices “semi-condoned polygamy” or mari-

tal infidelity within a so-called monogamous marriage. Thiam laments the fact that this option is not available to the Muslim woman who lives in a society with "a system of institutionalized polygamy" and where divorce is not permitted. What she sees, as even more troubling is the fact that many in Africa consider divorce "aberrant" in a context "where marriage is generally religious, not civil" (778-9).

Many Africana womanist writers (Chukukere; Reed "Composite"; Steady "Polygamy"; Sofola) take a more culturally- and historically-sensitive position. Indeed, while they too acknowledge the different environmental and cultural circumstances of Black and White women, they reject the idea that African women should make the European marriage model the ideal. The American-born and raised Hudson-Weems says that, while composite marriage is not for her personally, she has no problem with those who choose to lead such a life.

You know, it doesn't bother me. I know people who are married to multiple partners...And if they're happy, I'm happy. I just know I'll never do it. That's just not me. But it doesn't mean that it's not something I can respect, appreciate, or accept. I have no problem with it. (Reed "Portrait")

A literary example of this difference in perception is found in the work of Mariama B., which has "polygamy" as a major theme. She is often said to have authored the first "truly feminist African novel" (Ojo-Ade, 48) *Une si longue Lettre (So Long a Letter)*. Hudson-Weems, however, takes issue with Ojo-Ade's characterization of B.'s highly acclaimed debut novel as a "feminist" work. Her antithetical perspective reveals yet another glimpse of the dialectic of "African Feminism" and "Africana Womanism." She is quick to remind one that "the Africana womanist, too, is interested in the welfare and position of the woman; however, her treatment of those issues are different."

B.'s attack on polygamous society that subjugates women, and her interest in the rights of Africana women in So Long a Letter does not justify categorizing it as a feminist novel. To begin with, the author dedicates the book "To all women and men of good will," thereby demonstrating her natural inclination to include men as a very important part of women's lives. Moreover, it is not so much the subject itself of female subjugation in the novel, but rather the way in which the protagonist treats the problem that distinguishes the novel from typical feminist writings. According to Acholonu, feminist fiction "aims essentially at establishing a feminist kingdom which spurns compromise between the sexes." However, instead of attacking the male directly, the author attacks the patriarchal system, one to which the male, too, becomes subject. (Hudson-Weems Reclaiming, 94)

"Zulu Sofola, the famed Nigerian playwright, gives a poignant explanation of the "womanist" perspective, as opposed to the "feminist" approach in "Glo Chukukere addresses the concept of shared resources

as she cautions the African feminist against the categorical rejection of what this writer calls composite conjugality, while at the same time challenging the sometime sexist stereotypes women in Africa are often subjected to. In "An Appraisal" Glo Chukukere addresses the concept of shared resources as she cautions the African feminist against the categorical rejection of what this writer calls composite conjugality, while at the same time challenging the sometime sexist stereotypes women in Africa are often subjected to.

Along the same lines, another Nigerian researcher, Wambui Wa Karanja, collected data among the market women in Lagos in "'Outside Wives' and 'Inside Wives' in Nigeria: A Study of Changing Perceptions in Marriage" and found that so-called monogamy is—far too often—only an illusion, which can also lead to oppressive unions. Moreover, Sofola believes that the more the man becomes an openly shared commodity, the less central he becomes in the woman's life, and the mother/child dynamic becomes the primary one. Further, she contends that the educated African woman spends far too much time and energy worrying that her husband will reject her for another woman, making every single woman a prospective threat to her security, which makes it impossible for women to "close ranks and fight a common enemy," and for educated men to exploit these fears (pp. 62-63).

Personally, I am of the mindset that there must have been some reasoning behind the practice of this form of marriage by our African ancestors. This is what fueled my dissertation research on the subject of so-called polygyny (Reed "Composite"). My first step was to begin to study the actual word itself. I would soon learn that, in short, "polygamy" is a Greek term, with absolutely no African input. Indeed, I have not found one Continental African whose language has a comparable term, including the Kenyan, Professor Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, and Thophile Obenga, the noted Congolese linguist, Egyptologist and protege of Cheikh Anta Diop. Ngugi identified the closest semblance, "muccii," a Gikuyu term which means "home" or "family," used to describe any family or homestead—regardless of the number of wives involved (Reed "Ngugi").

As I began to consistently preface the term with "so-called" or "what is commonly known as," and similar qualifiers, my doctoral advisor, Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, warned me: "This can only work if you come up with a new term." Professor Chinua Achebe expressed the same sentiment when I asked him about the use of "polygamy," a word which has been imposed on African culture (Reed "Achebe").

And so the naming process began in earnest. Thus, convinced that I must don the raiment of the self-defining Africana womanist, I set about the monumental and critical task of appropriately naming and clearly defining this grossly misunderstood genre of African family systems. Clarity is badly needed.

Of course, there are those who will not understand the perceived need for alternative terminology to aptly describe what is commonly called "polygamy" or "polygyny" in Africa. Notwithstanding, armed only with the desire for conceptual purity and cultural liberation, this investigator searched for months for a workable hypothesis. The term "composite conjugality" was settled upon.

"Composite" seems a natural choice, once one takes an extended look at markings and rationales of the institution found in the existing literature. As part one of this term, it is meant to capture the fundamentally wholistic nature of the traditional African and his/her social institutions, including—but not limited to—the marital system denoted herein as composite conjugality. It is a circular approach, unlike the linear and discrete Western constructs of "polygamy" or "plural marriage." It is the quintessential African notion, I submit. Another way of saying it is this: Everything is everything.

"Conjugality" simply refers to those dealings between a man/men and his wife/wives. It does not solely denote sexual activity, as most believe. The major end of marriage in traditional African society was the production of offspring to keep the cycle of life unbroken. Another major consideration is the fact that these marriages were not just contracted between the spouses, but between all involved families—and clans, even. This is further evidence of the wholism that undergirds the African existence. This is clearly a totally different animal from what we know as "polygamy" (Reed "Composite").

It soon becomes clear that any paradigm for understanding so-called "polygamy," or any other phenomena in Africa, must be grounded in the divine: In the ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) concept of justice. As T'Shaka declares: "The value of the vision of the just society, is that it allows us to look at ancient and traditional African family, village and national systems of governance from a new, holistic, balanced angle" (51).

Within T'Shaka's perspective are found three fundamental assumptions of composite conjugality, which is intended to be (1) wholistic, (2) balanced and (3) just. This is another way of saying that it is grounded in the timeless African principle of *Maat*, "established

by Ra (God) at the time of creation" (Karenga *Coming*, 23). Oba T'Shaka attempts to capture the profound and sacred thrust of this, arguably the oldest known divine concept.

[It is] the cosmic, earthly, ethical and social law that invisibly guides the heavens and the earth. The ancients of Kemet (Egypt) who conceived the law of Maat, defined it as the "rudder of heaven and the beam of earth." Since the rudder provides direction to the ship, Maat provides invisible direction to the universe. Since the beam is the central foundation of a house Maat is the foundation of the earth. Maat is the way of harmony, truth, justice, balance and right order. Human beings were expected to think Maat, speak Maat and live Maat. (T'Shaka x)

Hence it (*Maat*) is the centerpiece and anchor of my theory of composite marriage in Africa. The idea being that all resources, human and otherwise, are intended to be shared in a Godly, balanced, fair, wholistic and just way—and truthfully. This must surely be what motivated the Africans of days gone by to adopt marital systems which insured that all could "live Maat," for, their spiritual nature stood as a beacon to guide them through the storms of life.

This is echoed in Odu 10:2 of the Yoreb sacred text *Ode If: The Ethical Teachings—Translation and Commentary, A Kawaidda Interpretation* by Maulana Karenga. It is the "cooperative" creation myth of the Yoreb people, which firmly establishes the traditional, God-granted, non-negotiable power of both man and woman. It is said to be the "teaching of Ifa for Odu, Obarisa and Ogun"—three divinities sent "to complete the work of creation." As they travel from heaven to earth, Odu asks Olodumare, the "Lord of Heaven" and Supreme Being what they can expect upon their arrival. The response is as follows: "To make the world so that...[it] will be good" (Karenga *Odu*, 72-81).

The Lord also assures her that they will be given "the *ase*, power and authority, to accomplish it, so that it will be done well." Odu inquires of her powers, since she knows that "Ogun has the power to wage war, and Obarisa has the *ase* to do anything he wishes to do."

Olodumare said: "You will be their mother forever.

And you also sustain the world."

Olodumare, then, gave the power.

And when he gave her power, he gave her the spirit power of the bird.

It was then that he gave women the power and authority so that anything men wished to do,

They could not dare to do it successfully without women.

Odu said that everything that people would want to do, If they do not include women,

*It will not be possible. (Karenga *Odu*, 72-81)*

As Karenga points out in his commentary on the verse, "two major roles are assigned to the woman—*mother of the world and sustainer of the world*." As he observes, if there is a "mother," then there must be a father as well to complete the joint task of insuring human continuity by reproducing, nurturing, caring for, and teaching the children of the world. Karenga goes on to suggest that this is "reaffirmed by the fact in the Ode 248:1, the embodiment of culture, learning and human flourishing, who accompanies the male divine powers to make the world good" (*Odu*, 78).

As Deidre Badejo beautifully states in "*sun*": *The Elegant Deity of Wealth, Power and Femininity*, Oshun ("*sun*") is the wife of *Sing* (Shango) "the god of thunder and lightning ... Together they illustrate the cycle of fertility that occurs during the rainy season "in the Yoruba pantheon" (76).

"*sun's* mythology maintains that matriarchy operates well with and within the patriarchy forming a sisterhood that is defined in organizational terms as *egbe*, or association.... This concept of sisterhood defines the art of mothering itself in Yoreb culture where co-wives are also co-mothers in polygynous households, in extended families, and communal locales... The term *Iywo* exemplifies the all-encompassing view of the central familial roles of mother and wife. The coordination of familial communal activities at marriage, birth, naming ceremonies, festivals, and funerals embodies the principles of social cohesion and the primacy of female organizational expertise. Like "*sun*", these women leaders organize large numbers of females and males around specific tasks and special interests." (Badejo, 180-181)

The feminist thinker, Badejo, contends that there are many life lessons to be gleaned in the "*sun*" Festival Drama with regard to the Yoreb social vision. Primarily, it demonstrates the "parallel structure, roles, and voice" of the man and woman in the Yoreb view of the world.

During the preparatory stages and reenactment, the "*sun*" and At-Uja coadminister both the spiritual and political needs of the festival and the township. Together, they symbolize the balance and complementary functions within the sociocultural and political order. As a unit, they represent the balance between the male and female mores as well as the complementary responsibilities of both... Their reciprocal roles in the realm of spiritual and political leadership are exchanged and interchanged, indicating a wholeness that acknowledges sex-specificity merely as a component of the social order. (Badejo, 180)

This is as Clenora Hudson-Weems asserts it should be in her theory of Africana Womanism: Man and woman working in concert to make the world a better and more humane place. Badejo, however, maintains that it offers "one example of a cultural-historical foundation for African feminist theory... at once, wholistic and exclusive"; furthermore, she sees this as evidence of what Steady calls the humanistic aspect of African Feminism (177).

While these divergent analyses points out one of the areas where the two gender-based theories almost coincide, the question of terminology just will not go away. Julia Hare is right, I believe, when she says that "women who are calling themselves Black Feminists need another word that describes what their concerns are. Black Feminism is not a word that describes the plight of Black women." Hudson-Weems theorizes that "Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism, and moreover, to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism" (Hudson-Weems *Reclaiming*, 24).

Not to be missed in the heat of the dialectic over theoretical terminology is the striking similarity—indeed, the *connectivity*—between the ancient Yoreb and Kemetic philosophical principles. They are both grounded in the wholistic Maatic principles of balance, order, reciprocity, and complementarity. Man and woman exist in a spirit of *cooperation*; however, the woman is *revered* in both. Ode 10:2 establishes the absolute respect that should be afforded woman at all time. After all, she is the giver of life.

One thing is certain: This is a debate which is sure to continue for the foreseeable future, and it will not be resolved in the present study. Really, the fundamental difference in the philosophical positions of African Feminism, Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism" and Clenora Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanism can best be gleaned, I believe, in the titles of their respective books expounding their ideas. There is Hudson-Weems' *Reclaiming Ourselves* and Ogundipe-Leslie's *Re-Creating Ourselves*.

While some African Feminists differ more in naming than agenda or priorities from the Africana Womanist, others maintain that the African woman must somehow *re-fashion* herself—preferably along Western feminist lines—in order to reach the promised land of so-called male-female equality. Conversely, the Africana Womanist is consistent with Oba T'Shaka's theory of *returning to the African Mother Principle of Male and Female Equality*. Thus there is no need to *re-create* anything in this arena, but rather a matter of "reclaiming ourselves" as reflected in Hudson-Weems' *Reclaiming*.

Africana Womanism, as far as I'm concerned, does it all. It says it all. There's no need for anything else, because I didn't create Africana womanism, in and of itself. I gave it name and refined or actually created or shaped a paradigm relative to who we are. I didn't say "This is what you gotta be."

Essentially the Africana Womanist position is that the framework for a world free of patriarchal oppression already exists within the traditional African philosophical worldview—if only the Africana woman will *claim* it. It should be as Diop describes traditional African matriarchy in *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*:

[It] is not an absolute and cynical triumph of woman over man; it is a harmonious dualism, an association accepted by both sexes, the better to build a sedentary society where each and

everyone could fully develop by following the activity best suited to his physiological nature. (Diop, 108).

Perhaps better still is Oba T'Shaka's "Twinlineal" framework—which he feels is preferable to matriarchy, patriarchy, matrilineal or patrilineal in describing how the African family is governed—because it “describes African family systems where the husband and wife are co-rulers, with each playing a complementary role in shaping the family and lineage consensus” (228) and which, I submit, brings us full-circle to the two-sided coin of Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanism (Reed “Portrait”).

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