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### Constructing the Subject, Deconstructing the Text: The Feminist Other in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper begins with a reminder of early criticism on traditional feminism and then traces the beginnings of occasional opposition leading to provocative positions through representative works and criticisms of some writers and critics. The paper, therefore, identifies a trilogy and moves to uphold the last of the trilogy which might startle the revolutionary feminist because it is more accommodating in its gender approach than the revolutionist would aspire to in dismantling the hegemonic phallus. It submits that there is certainly revelation in deconstructing, transforming, re-inscribing and negotiating "male patriarchy" as this leads to a conversation that empowers its readers to soft-pedal on both anti-masculinity and anti-femininity, an argument towards policy reform on gender. In doing this, it uses nego-feminist theory to locate and critique Chinua Achebe's sudden change from anti-thesis of feminism to gender justice through his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. However, it hypothetically praises Achebe's stand for being feminist and then questions it for being improperly feminist.

*Keywords:* Anti-femininity, anti-masculinity, conflict management, feminism, nego-feminism

#### INTRODUCTION

*As subject for history woman  
always occurs simultaneously in  
several places.*

"The Laugh of the Medusa",  
Helene Cixous (1980)

The ends of centuries have always been eventful. One issue at the end of the 19th century, beginning with Kipling and

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Conrad's fiction in English (with Kipling on Indians and Conrad on Africans and Malays) centred on the ethics of imperial expansion and was seriously debated by social scientists, liberal humanitarians, missionaries, colonial administrators and planters, each group constructing the subject peoples in its own way. Conversely, a strong consensus emerged from the constructed people: the West holds all peoples of other races to be inferior to white Europeans. Another issue that was seriously contested, this time at the end of the 20th century, was the status of the woman. The subjection of the female body was being (re)presented and constructed variously by interest groups namely, postmodernists, psychoanalysts, socialists, racist fighters, the Black arts movement of the 60s, literary historians and African feminists, among others. Towards the end of the 20th century, Chinua Achebe wrote his new novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, hereinafter *Anthills*, in 1987, a novel whose theme departed completely from his known 'anti-woman' project.

It follows that earlier feminist criticism was chiefly read in the parlance of history, information and recuperation, and thus mostly not contentious. Certainly, history is, and will always be, subjected to subjectivity, but it is pointless to deny that these first moments of feminist criticism were concerned more with discovery and celebration than analysis. Today, however, the sheer quantity, diversity and continuity of aspects of feminism have produced key warring groups with a strong consensus running through them:

feminism as a cultural form is less fragile and less vulnerable to negative criticism. In exploiting this further, the objective of this paper to show that any moment of masculinity and femininity may not be unconnected with aspects of extremism. It, therefore, presupposes that without further research, since all feminist writings are one vast genealogical effort that attempts to restore continuity of dignity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of 'male patriarchy', both the female and male ego, which have stimulated incautious observations from the opposite sexes, need reconciliation. This is an exercise that is capable of reconciling the two opposite groups and which stands to advance policy reform on gender, among others.

Towards gender reform, in 1975, the United Nations on a global perspective gave birth to energetic gender equity. It declared the year as International Women's Year. Following this, 1976-1985 was declared the *Decade for Women*, during which international agencies and also some governments beamed their light on 'women's issues', as it came to be popularly known. Then there was the Nairobi Conference in 1985, the Cairo Conference in 1994 and the Beijing do of 1995. It was in Beijing more than anywhere else that the issue of empowerment received adequate world attention to the point of becoming a condition for world progress and development. For instance, in Nigeria, female empowerment is fast becoming a matter for policy reform. There have been bills in some State Houses of Assembly that

seek gender equity. Governor Udenwa's wife (Udenwa, one-time Governor of Imo State) visited the Imo State House of Assembly and squarely asserted that "the issue of allocating percentage to women less than men was no longer acceptable" (The Guardian, 2006, Oct 9, p. 6).

In itself, the word 'empowerment' is not of distant etymology. It became widely used and popularised by the 'Draft Platform of Action' of the Beijing Declaration of 1995. Though the etymology appears recent, the morphology betrays a deep root in the psyche of a civilisation born out of conflict and which remains riddled with conflict. For empowerment suggests the giving of power to someone who has been deprived of it, someone who will remain vulnerable without that power, someone whose hope for justice and fairness seems hinged only on the possession of that power. This power has to be wrested from a despot, in this case, man. This power also promises to be a panacea for all sexual problems: inequality between the sexes, under-representation, positions hitherto inaccessible to women (managerial and executive posts), sexual assault etc. All these features underscore the origin of sexual conflict embedded in the psyche. This conflict that began during the Renaissance and continues to date seems to be the one thread that runs through the intellect of the social development of the West. First, it was a conflict between man and God, then between the state and Church, then science and nature, then the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie and now women and men, young and old. But are

these types of assertiveness and/or offensive empowerment the *only* solution? Is there not the fear that empowerment conceived in this context *may* only succeed in aggravating this perceived conflict rather than solve it in the same way that the empowerment of the Proletariat over the Bourgeoisie led to the crumbling of the communist edifice, leaving hardly any track for its followers to follow? Will this not lead to division in the house? Is this not what has already caused division among writers and critics of feminism? We can distinguish a trilogy in the divided group of writers and critics on feminism.

## THE TRILOGY SPACE

### *The Oedipal logic*

Early male writers in Africa, for example, mercilessly streamlined the woman. In their gender injustice, they refused to accurately project the African woman. Conversely, proponents of masculinity in their heightened defence argue that woman was merely represented as society presents her, stressing that literature is all about (re) presenting presence. To support this claim, people have recourse to their wrongly understood statements like, "Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated" (Derida, 1978, p. 249). And we thought that the general thrust of Africa's Achebe is that African people, which precludes women,

*...had dignity. (And) It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period*

*and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost.* (Achebe, 1964, p. 8; Emphasis added).

Achebe sees his mission in fiction as being “to help (his) society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (Achebe, 1965, p. 3). With this strong position, is it not surprising that Achebe failed in the best work to construct the woman accurately when the opportunity presented itself? As one peruses journals decade after decade and attends conferences and meetings, one sees an eclectic approach to activism against the male ego i.e. the phallus culture that ridicules those who do not put men first. Particularly for Achebe, it has been severally noted that feminists feel uneasy about his projection of woman. Olaluwoye (2004, p. 145) unapologetically slams the drift of woman to second position in Achebe's novels. Ojo-Ade (1983, p. 158) incriminates male chauvinism in Achebe and his generation while Solomon Iyasere (1978, p. 92-110) frowns at Achebe's Oedipal logic. Achebe, like Ekwensi, Aluko, Amadi and other first-generation writers in Africa, has consistently created the woman in the ‘subject position’ in his tetralogy that brought him world fame. Or perhaps, the African woman did not lose that dignity

that Achebe talks so much about with the arrival of the colonial master on his colonial mission for colonial injustices? Perhaps, too, dignity for woman is not worth regaining? This group will not be missed.

#### *Oppositional feminism*

Then, there are those who take pride in the protection of ‘the protected sex’. It must be admitted that somehow they have their hearts in the right place. Gender insensitivity needs to be analysed and addressed squarely. Many women novelists and activists now have written in the protection of the female sex. For example, Okpecole's biting criticism against patriarchal system is that

*I think we have had a situation of extremes. First, the silence about women and not saying enough about them ... no full blooded image of African women by male writers.* (Okpecole, 1986)

This expectation is squarely matched by critical novels like Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Nwampa's *Efuru* (1966). One critic, Helen Chukwuma, believes that with these novels, the picture of the full-blooded image of African woman has emerged (Chukwuma, 1989, p. 2-3). This vindictive group of writers and critics are noted for their wit in a showdown with the phallogocentric, which desires to reconstruct the construction of the underdog, igniting incidents of a hateful patriarchal oppression of the woman. As a result, these writers and critics make no pretence of

challenging not only man but God (see, for example, Emecheta, 1979, p. 209). In her hatred, Emecheta, a novelist, directly challenges God for creating the female as a weakling, the underdog who has the usual concerns with domestic themes in fiction and in reality. She challenges, "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" This unguardedness, this challenge directed at God repudiates faith in the valency of God, often reason for people to renounce their religion, as did Ngugi wa Thiong'o (a writer and critic) who, though not a feminist, renounced his Christian faith and consequently changed his name from *James* Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, owing to questioning the valency of God. Emecheta was not and will not be the last to confront God either. August Wilson's three plays also unapologetically register his disaffection with God. In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), Levee says, "If he's a man of God, then where the hell was God when all of this was going on? Why wasn't God looking out for him?" (p. 81) In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1984), Loomis speaks out, "You all sitting up here singing about the Holy Ghost. What's so holy about the Holy Ghost?"

Can we imagine these writers so utterly ignorant, perhaps, as to make a seemingly barbarous plea against God? Alabi (2010) discusses such unguarded statements by some writers and critics, especially those concerning women. The theological angst in women usually derives, he says, from the scriptural reasoning in Genesis 2:21-22. He

adds that "Going through our ... religious sectors, it is evident that it is patriarchal in context" (p. 134), stressing that society's development is with attendant negation of the original plans of God in the relationship between the man and the woman until it becomes a maxim.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta starts, not with an investigation into the lead female character, Nnu Ego's intentions, but with her two prejudices (against God and man), so that her view of a failed woman and/or childlessness is Emecheta's rather than Nnu Ego's. We could never perceive any fitness which Emecheta possessed for the assumption of one of the finest parts that was ever imagined for womanhood, except, indeed, that she could play it in her own creative hue. Her disposition is unpleasantly, and we would say unacceptably, foreign to African feminism, her manner generally drawling and unimpressive. When, by chance (for chance it is and not judgement), Emecheta's novels rise to a higher strain over Flora Nwapa's, it can rest squarely as a transition from mere complaint of the injustices against woman to the elevation of antagonism, harshly demanding equity and equality from the patriarchal world. Such writers and critics rave and rant about the injustices, often classified across the world as "arrant feminism" (Alkali, 2010a, p. 23; Woolf, 1929).

Or, has she unlearned what she learned from the maker of fiction in Africa, Chinua Achebe, who says that African novelists are torch bearers pointing the way? In his "The Novelist as Teacher" (1965), Achebe

cautions writers to ensure that their words are weighted in order to regenerate the people.

This angler of feminism, a radical claim, theorises a trans-historical subjection of women to men in the patriarchy as the central problem and fact of reality. This view encouraged socialists to abandon alliances with men, even for purposes of class struggle; men, in what appears as eternal misery, were seen as the fundamental enemy, regardless of class affiliation, regardless of their sympathy for, and commitment to, the woman project. Modleski (1986, p.123) strongly advises real female feminists to be wary of men's support for women's cause, asserting that they should not underestimate "the most crucial factor in men's traditional disregard and contempt for women's writings and women's modes of existence: the reality of male power". But can we begrudge these women this 'bole kaja' (Come down, let's fight) position? In feminism, we have a lesson to learn, and that is, if we are not prepared to allow equity, then we should be prepared to live with anarchy. This notion of feminism smacks of rebelliousness, fearlessness and political awareness in women as it injects fear in men while it thrills women.

In nego-feminist assumption, however, a better position would simply have been a 'guided' role reversal, not oppositional feminism. This reversal should rather smack of female assignment in a multi-levelled libidinal energy, in a feminine unconscious shaped by female bodily

drives (not male drives) which make their way in the style of feminist writings. But sadly, it has become regularly irregular to whip men to silence and disgrace. Thus, the objective of true feminism is imperfectly perfected here as this socialism informs and challenges the basic understanding of gender and identity so very deeply that fragments of their thinking have become unfixed from their origins. It has created deep disagreements in the feminist camp itself as it introduces splintering populism. This splintering anti-masculinity fulfils, by extension, Raymond Williams' vision of a new tragic consciousness. He calls such a setback "a struggle against suffering learned in suffering" and "a total exposure which is also a total involvement" (Williams, 1966, p. 54).

*The nego-feminist assumption and its implication for Anthills*

Some women, like Loren Kruger (1996, p. 50) three years before the birth of nego-feminist theory, observe that any call for what some people call 'female method' or 'a feminine morphology' only heightens a splintering populism. Division in the house needs to be avoided. Everything needs to be done to tone down the heat of both inter and intra crises in feminism. Nego-feminism, we believe, is up to that task as it stresses that masculinity and femininity are simply moments of madness. On her part, Ann Rosalind Jones (1985, p. 106) warns not to over-represent the female because such a celebration would be fixated within the



framework that it attempts to correct.

Writing on instability of all human identity and in particular, of gender identity, Barbara Freedman (1996), asks if the notion of feminism in itself is not a contradiction in terms since one is at once caught in a web that pushes forward phallogentrism. Her position stems from her critique of Lacan's notion of the 'gaze', which displaces the gazer. Lacan's psychoanalytic theory critiques Freud's theory of the regretting girl-child for her lack of a penis, what 'the male point of view' ungenerously terms "a woman's hysteria". Lacan re-reads Freud by replacing the girl with a boy. Freedman re-reads Lacan that there is complexity in Lacan's ideology arguing that if the 'gaze' as control of language and symbol is unalterably male, and if language itself is phallogentric, then even the sentences or dramas which appear to oppose the hegemony of patriarchy are still inevitably speaking from the ideology of the dominant male culture. In effect then, the displaced 'gaze' becomes the 'disruptive gaze'. By the same token, *Anthills*, which is Achebe's fifth novel and seen as a welcome diversion from his usual anti-femininity (Olatuwoye, 2004, p. 149), is classifiable as a displaced 'gaze' and it becomes questionable if it is a 'disruptive gaze' as well for its improper aspects of anti-masculinity. The world can tell that the sum essence of these positions is that feminism is not only suffering from counter-intuitive steps in its opposition to male patriarchy but is also deeply lost in in-house fighting, and we can now tell that

the spirit is giving way to something else. Therefore, for causing division in the camp, this group of exaggerated aggressiveness will not be missed either.

Fortunately, ever since Helene Cixous (1980) stated that woman continually takes place in several places, there has been an emergent third group, nego-feminists, who claim they are fully conscious of the efforts of the other groups that have sadly occasioned in in-house setbacks, and they are bent on restoring sense to the spirit of feminism. This is a step that should be articulated towards policy reform on gender. This is a group that believes, and rightly so, that, at least, sense can be made from both positions. This is a group that believes that feminism can only succeed at the cost of a thorough complementation of the sexes.

Nego-feminism or negotiation-feminism is defined by the theorist herself, "the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism" (Nnaemeka, 1999, p. 360). The cornerstone of this spirit is that it apparently contains no known injurious critique of a male supremacist system, and yet strongly rejects the domination theme. It recognises a more rewarding equal partnering that breeds acceptable peace in conflict management and resolution. It exploits negotiation, collaboration, complementarity, give-and-take, bargaining, mediation, arbitration, love and understanding between the sexes. In nego-feminism, both sexes respectfully stand shoulder to shoulder, stripped of all kinds of worldly barriers, be they of wealth, geography, class, education or others. All

of these suggest the notion of solidarity, which is highly embedded in building relationships.

Scholarship holds that the knowledge of literature, for example, Achebe's *Anthills*, can reward gender efforts when accurately analysed. Achebe's gender exposition, Erritouni (2006) states, sidesteps political ideologies that are readily loud with the reading of the novel. Thus, Achebe's usual anti-female stance has taken a 'U-turn'. The contradiction is more readily noticeable in his gender expose outside of what critics generally refer to as "usual patriarchal rudeness" against the female sex. Adding to the newness of Achebe's *Anthills*, Olaluwoye recognises what she says is for the very first time in the literary life of Achebe, a new woman (2004, p. 145-9). He "has finally joined the group of writers promoting the image of the female" (p.149). The gender exposition, Jaggi (2000) believes, has "revived his reputation in Britain". For him, Achebe's *Anthills* is the "most important novel to come out of Africa in the [1980s]".

This enduring image of nego-feminism becomes a hallmark of the people of the world: unity in its diversity. It answers the questions of how the world can retain this culture of unity, how the bonds of brother/sisterhood can be kept intact to fulfil the goals that bring people to respect one another, more particularly between the sexes (Gray, 1992, p. xiv). It has since birth been an unyielding capacity in wielding together varying fragile interests of sexism. Nothing is required except a little, a very little clear thinking in containing sexual injuries such

as exercised and vitalised in Jimoh's several linkages to the "importance of stability to the evolution of social institution, especially marriage" (2014, p. 203-204); Joseph's "deeper level of perceptiveness and power (that enables women) to negotiate their lives within any given context" (2014, p. 153); and 'Dunmade's "penis-envy" versus "clitoral-envy" (2013, p. 145-7). Below are some deducible practical ways that nego-feminist novels and communities can successfully revolve around unity as signified by 'Dunmade, Jimoh and Joseph.

### **1. Understand that human unity is not an option**

"We hold these truths self-evident, that all men *and women* are created equal", wrote 68 women and 34 men on July 20, 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, site of the world's first women's rights conference. The world must know that human beings are but a single brotherhood, and so it must endeavour to make peace and reconciliation between two contending sexes so that the world may receive mercy. Also the world needs to hold fast the rope which stretches out for it so as not to be divided, remembering with gratitude the grace of joined hearts in love, who see one another as brothers and sisters who were on the brink of the pit of disrespect for one another, now saved from it. In other words, in their love, kindness and compassion for each other, the sexes are like a human body: when one part of it is hurt, the rest sympathise with it in wakefulness and fever. In fact, it moves beyond sympathy to *commitment* as shown



in the 1998 publicity pamphlet for *The Journal of Women's History*,

*Feminism is an assertion that women as a group have been historically disadvantaged relative to men of their race, class, ethnicity, or sexual identity; and a commitment to changing the structures that systemically privilege men over women.*

## **2. Reflect on nego-feminism as a time for unity among the sexes**

Nego-feminist novels and the world at large should not only exploit nego-feminism as a time for cooperation and solidarity between the sexes on a personal basis for each person but also automatically stretch within the family and community to remind one another of how life is a unifying factor for the sexes. Nego-feminism particularly holds the family in great esteem for its multiplier effect, since everyone shoots from family, thus, if the family gets it right, the world gets it right as well. In this discourse of unity, family and community discussions are centred on how the spirit of nego-feminism is a beautiful symbol of cooperation. To people who profess religion, they are encouraged to conduct prayer for unity as prayer is the hallmark of livelihood.

## **3. Learn tolerance towards other points of view**

Tolerance in nego-feminist spirit is a hallmark for livelihood among mankind. Ernest Emenyonu's *African Literature Today*

as an unparalleled laboratory dedicated its 25th volume in 2006 to new issues at the turn of the century. The volume's theme, 'New Directions in African Literature' exploits, among others, 'New Trends in Female Writings in Africa', one of which is tolerance, a nego-feminist value point. Characteristics of nego-feminist novels which describe tolerance are realisable of the man who turns over a new leaf to sexual tension. If this alternative way of life is not opened up to the protagonist, it is at least accessible to (wo)men readers on the whole. Within this group, texts which thematise the gender question alone as well as texts which additionally illuminate one or several other mechanisms of oppression can be found but not exploited to advantage the radical stretch. Above all, these texts imply that men and patriarchal women are (at least potential) allies in the fight against forms of gender discrimination. Therefore, the need for such alternative revision (of tolerance and other possible types in both men and women) makes it necessary for them to be taken before the teachers of literature who will inculcate these to the readership for fuller opportunities. Thus, this signification agrees completely with the chosen strategy now known as nego-feminism theory and explored in this paper on tolerance. Bringing teachers of literature together for better opportunities of nego-feminism since they are closest to students is a serious advantage. The multiplier effect of teacher/students cannot be over-emphasised, thus, Nego-feminism should be determined to be heard in classrooms and work places for leisure

readings. Bringing writers and their writings together for better opportunities of nego-feminism provides teachers and the reading public with necessary reading materials.

The authors synthesised that as an answer to all sexual challenges, if concerted efforts are not made by feminists, critics and teachers of literature to advocate nego-feminism, the world may continue to be clouded over by visions of disharmony between the sexes. Thus, since it is practicable that people attend classes at college or speak with colleagues from work and discuss issues while being willing to disagree with them, then it is not an impossibility to make them step into the understanding of mutuality where all tolerance rules in spite of our gender differences. In nego-feminism, the sexes exploit tolerance where participants are encouraged to extend views, debate issues and offer different points of view for richer harvest.

#### **4. Learn to criticise without hurting**

Ignorant behaviour is a sure way to create anger, hurt and dissension. It is no route towards unity; it is no characteristic of nego-feminism. Both sexes must learn the nego-feminist etiquette of criticism, whether it is towards an individual or leaders. Knowing and implementing this will not only help solve problems in a practical manner, it will also lead to a greater sense of brother and sisterhood in domestic and institutional domains. If one feels that one's criticism of someone in the past was rude or hurtful, it is not impossible to revert through apology.

#### **5. Avoid taking a strong position on smaller points**

Knowing priorities helps the world to avoid making secondary issues as factors of division in communities. Both sexes must not only understand this but implement it in their homes and communities so that differences do not affect unity.

#### **6. Reaching out across ethnic, geographic boundaries**

The practice of allowing division through ethnocentrism, racism etc. is recognised as injurious to the spirit of oneness as exemplified in *Anthills* through the good relationships of Elewa who is of the Yoruba tribe and Nkem Oshodi and Beatrice Nwanyibuife, who are Igbos. All institutions, functions and communities in general would more likely become more ethnically, religiously and geographically aware and open to the needs and concerns of peoples of all backgrounds as the reading public access *Anthills*. Leaders and individual members who advocate nego-feminism have a duty of ensuring that no one feels shut out of the community, ignored or neglected. This can only be done by leaders and individuals taking the first step and reaching out to those who may have been traditionally isolated because of sectionalism. It is not enough to just open the door to all. A direct effort has to be made to solicit feedback, advice and support from all so that they feel part of a unipolar project where the world speaks with one voice.

By implication, then, nego-feminists are enjoined to invite communities of diverse

backgrounds to programmes of nego-feminism, where people are encouraged to heed the advice found in the woman gathering in *Anthills* where the novel ends with women survivors shouldering the responsibilities of men. Achebe makes it quite clear that women too can take control of situations appropriately, if not more effectively. In study circles and classes for young and old, therefore, the world, by reading this novel, is encouraged to avoid mockery, defamation and suspicion. These only serve to divide and create hatred, hurt and dissension. The study circles and classes share these tips with a wider audience not only in the novel industry but also in activism. This has consistently been the message of nego-feminists. This is a group, then, that anyone can hold dialogue with, a group that we can use, along this line, in analysing Achebe's *Anthills*.

*Anthills* is widely believed to begin a discussion of feminism from chapter six with Beatrice or BB as she is called. BB is one of the three lead characters and witnesses in the book. Using the technique for the first time in his novel-writing experience, Achebe's point of view in the narration is not the usual communal perspective that injects a communal sense in his storyline but a multiple or fragmentary perspective that invites readers to consider more than one or two points of view. In this instance, anyone's understanding of the novel is strongly subjected to constructs of witnesses who speak very freely and who pass the narrative back and forth to one another, seen here among Nkem Oshodi, Chris Oriko

and Beatrice Nwanyibuife. This use of the fragmentary point of view is also richly used, for instance, in Conrad's *Nostromo*, Okpewhore's *The Last Duty*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and Armah's *Fragments*.

*Anthills* briefly retold is louder with political ideologies where, in the imaginary West African military-ruled country, Kangan, Sam is the Head of State. The political situation is seen within the bearing of witness by three friends: Chris Oriko, who is the Commissioner for Information; Beatrice Okoh, who is a staff of the Ministry of Finance and girlfriend of Chris; and Ikem Osodi, who is a newspaper editor critical of the regime. Tensions escalate in the novel, and Ikem is assassinated by the regime, Sam is toppled, and Chris is murdered. The novel ends with the women survivors of the coup as they perform a non-traditional naming ceremony for Elewa and Ikem's one month-old daughter, organised by Beatrice.

Why does Achebe deem it fit to construct one of the fragmentary witnesses, BB, with a female point of view, a seismic shift from his usual woman complacency? The paper shall deconstruct this. But the question is not only on the thesis of this shift but more particularly the potential of a feminist other in the novel. Given feminist rethinking of the female point of view, we come to the question of how feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalytic theories (though different in themselves) have combined in their attempts to figure difference in this novel, between BB, the feminist and Elewa, the feminist other (the side-lined girl). At issue is the problem of the frame and framing

behaviour. Are Achebe and his BB (if you watch them working without imposing any assumptions) subjects of, or insurrectionists against, feminism? Achebe projects BB with the notion of the 'aware' woman who, in our opinion, is deviant, demonstrating that the radical feminist analysis, though widely shared by men and women, is truly, genuinely incomprehensible to the larger humanity who seek to demonstrate the 'live and let live' propulsion. BB treads the path of excesses of feminism discussed earlier which would be radical at any venue — sustaining a tension between the personal and the political that refutes a coherent, unitary concept of identity and recast in a political context.

To go back to our question, why the sudden change from anti-thesis of feminism noticed in Achebe's tetralogy, *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* to markers of gender performatives in *Anthills of the Savannah*? It is not difficult to see how Achebe severally has been accosted with his fiction failings on womanhood. Signifiers have earlier been pointed (see, Obiajulu, 2004, p. 276; Olaluwoye, 2004, p. 145); Iyasere 1978, p. 92-110; Ojo-Ade, 1983, p. 158). Observations like these are what make Palmer to pronounce the absence of the female point of view in novels of Achebe's generation (Palmer, 1983, p. 34). Achebe had earlier retorted for the repressive and repressing world which kept attacking him on his tactlessness on womanhood to leave him alone as what he considered to be the "fundamental theme", which in his opinion

had priority over feminism at that time, should be addressed first (Achebe, 1964).

But with the emergence of Achebe's *Anthills* in 1987, quite a lot of things against him from the feminist world have been re-written. In his usual literary tweak, Achebe has found voice for women's subjugation. It is like an apology to the world for not having done the right thing. It was a welcome relief to the feminist world to read his new novel. Achebe gives the dialectic of sex, that is, the woman question, a space in his novel. And only a little less than two decades ago, Achebe adds more ably to the cause of womanhood. Achebe (1995, p. 2) called to the phallic world to recognise the spirit of motherhood while extolling the feminist efforts of both Egyptian Alifa Rifaat and Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo. It is observed that these female writers have "their stories north and south of the Sahara" woven around how a true and distinctive African mother feels for her daughter during trying times of unwavering patriarchy.

Important for this review is the fact that it was successively taken with the sense of political discussions that the novel is ordinarily loud with, but it is to feminism and importantly, nego-feminism that the paper is most indebted. Doubtless, Achebe's construction of BB as a witness in the text is with the objective of restoring "dignity and self-respect" to the woman (feminism) but Achebe appears to take it to the point where either he or the characters themselves seem

at times to be oblivious of the 'story' that they are supposed to be in. In deconstructing the text, the character, Elewa, has an ontological significance in this thinking. In fact, Catherine Belsey (1991, p. 593) is justified in her conviction that "fiction too plays a part in the process of constructing subjectivity" as Achebe's feminist other, Elewa, has been greatly side-lined in the novel. Achebe has succeeded to present her as such. Firstly, she is not even seen fit as witness in Achebe's fragmentary perspective probably because she is illiterate, yet, she is the focus of this analysis. Thus, in her peculiarly unimportant feature is the full proof for deconstructive techniques, which function to unsteady, if not dismantle such oppositions. To briefly provide further backup, the slip of the tongue, the cough, the careless buttoning have a turning point in deconstructive techniques. It is its major discovery that by incidents like these, a novelist, dramatist, poet or critic can cause the displaced gazer to become conscious of a new revelation outside of an established perception, even though it is not the preoccupation of a literary piece. For deconstruction, therefore, a minor incident becomes the staple point of an imaginative piece in its androgeneity while a seeming major concentration is given less focus by a thinking readership. Achebe's BB and Elewa fit precisely into this; the latter being treated as unlettered and therefore, illiterate among her equals.

In this androgeneity, then, Achebe constructs for his readership BB as his feminist subject, the lead female character

in the novel, but she is deconstructed in this paper to lose that privilege to be a seemingly unimportant figure: Elewa, the unlettered, the other. In this framing behaviour too, the search light is on, for example, careless buttoning, unnamed passages, lifeless pages which all surprisingly are not there by chance but by choice; they have a turning point in the novel either by the novelist or critic. In this framing, Elewa was not to put in an appearance until chapter three, and Achebe dismissed her without a word. She was talked about rather in passing by Nkem, her boyfriend. And this may be the principal reason why some people see feminist lines only from chapter six with BB, not our three with Elewa. We want to show how and why, given two women with similar projects, one is demeaning and threatening and the other is feminist and admirable to women first, but ultimately to all human beings.

Elewa is the new subject and the new subject is Elewa. She is not given to excesses of feminism; she would appear to bring more respect to the dignity of the woman. Needless to stress is the fact that over-exaggeration encourages a splintering populism and division does not lead to achievement. The spirit of this third group in the trilogy is that "male patriarchy" is certainly conservative in its assumptions about sexual hierarchy but it should not be taken to the extent of causing hostility among the fraternity of critics. Like Jane Gallop proposes,

*if the penis is what the men have  
and women do not; the phallus  
is the attribute of power which*



*neither men nor women have. But as long as the attribute of power is a phallus which refers to, and can be confused ... with a penis, this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not. And as long as psychoanalysts maintain the separability of "phallus" from "penis", they can hold on to their "phallus" in the belief that their discourse has no relation to sexual inequality, no relation to politics.* (Gallop, 1982, p. 97)

Gallop resolves the conflict here as war on anti-femininity and anti-masculinity finds relief in this proposition. In fact, all swords can be sheathed, should be sheathed. It is along this line that *Anthills* emerges better in restoring the so-much sought after "dignity and self-respect" of Achebe, particularly to the cause of woman with Elewa the side-lined 'illiterate', not BB. Our view of Elewa's role suggests true feminist transformation in that it is not an extreme position, yet it would deny relegation of the woman. It incites harmless argument, giving lines that serve to titillate readers with a display of a concern for gender, a seductive presentation which serves to displace material difference with the display of a feminist line. It engages the reader in a way that is not injuriously political and materially critical.

BB, who is leading a worthwhile cause in the text should know better than anyone

else that it is outplaced to reduce the integrity of another woman. Condescendingly, she describes Elewa, who is her boyfriend's friend's girlfriend as "...so young. [a]nd so illiterate" girl (p. 65). In the first place, she is not that young deserving of partnership with Nkem, her socialist boyfriend, and it is not over-simplification to claim that better still, socialists know better the kind of girls to date. It is puzzling to incriminate Elewa as an illiterate, for just how illiterate would she be, even with her unletteredness, to find expression on the vexed issues of the 'second sex', "But woman don chop sand for dis world-o" (p. 34). This terse line in pidgin English is given to be swallowed and digested. Then she goes ahead to hit yet another point in confronting her boyfriend. She observes that in the woman's cause, before one can appropriately blame the male, a thorough homework might show that the blame lies with the woman for taking the first wrong step. Hear the 'illiterate' on the toing and froing of a woman like 'football' to her boyfriend's house,

*"...But na we de causam; na we own fault. If I no kuku bring my nyash come dump for your bedroom you for de kick me about like I be football? I no blame you. At all."*

*"I don't know what you are talking about."*

*"How you go know? You no fit know."* (p. 34)



Illiterate indeed, you might say. But our emphasis is not even on her first observation. It is on the second, the last line, the last sentence, "You no fit know", meaning, 'You can't understand'. It goes to posit, in our opinion, that men cannot understand a woman's disposition well enough because they are simply not women. Spencer's essay on the play, *'night Mother*, stems precisely from the psycho-drama of female identity. She incites pleasurable thinking, for example, in arguing that the female sex sees the play differently from men. She posits that the catharsis felt by men for the sufferings of the woman in the play is not to the degree of women's (Spencer, 1996, p. 364-75) exactly as stressed by Elewa in *Anthills*: "How you go know? You no fit know" (p. 34). This is true in that no one else can experience exactly what another person is experiencing. We can recall the judgment of educational psychologists like Yardley (1979, p. 55-62), and Plum (1981, p. 3-19) on experience in social skills. They argue that social skills are unique in that only the people involved in interpersonal interaction understand the real meaning of that interaction. We can also tell that this argument may be true because of what everyone sees in, for example, a sports commentary or what may be called motor skill operators. Television commentators as we see them frequently ask sports men following a competition, 'What were you trying to do at this point?' or 'What was going through your mind here?' as they watch a video-replay of the action. This is to gain some further insight into the event, *and*

*how it was perceived by the participants*. However, we have not forgotten that while such personal evaluations are important, so too are those of others even if the former take priority.

While the 'illiterate' Elewa is making remarkable observations on the woman's lot, a high-handed literate who occupies herself with envy and disgust, realises her mistake and regrets her superiority on the envy. BB asks herself, "Was it the disappointment of the gambler or the born fighter charted out of the intoxication of contest and chancy victory?" (p. 89). BB is certainly a born fighter on the woman project and for it, the attendant achievements may be limited. In her extremism, she would rave on permissive sex that it is not at the insistence of the woman (p. 68); she would continue to support single motherhood/husbandlessness (p. 88) even if it offended the received African religions and culture; she would ever regret her father's insistence that she, "Sit like a female" (p. 87) – should she sit carelessly revealing her inner twin jewels? BB's positions, we have explained, may only succeed in strengthening discord between the groups and sexes. It forces men to come to terms with women instead of a discourse that will carry both parties along on balanced collaboration, where, perhaps, there will be no victor nor vanquished as stressed by Virginia Woolf (1929, p. 102), one of the leading world feminists. Woolf discovers and concludes that, in fact, it is incorrect and dangerous for writers to write in defence of their sex. In a ground-breaking confession, she concedes her attack on men,

*All I can tell you is that I discovered when I came to write that a woman — it sounds so simple, but I should be ashamed to tell you how it took me time to realize this for myself—is not a man. (Woolf, 1929, p. 102 cited in Leaska 1977, p. xxxiii)*

The world, we believe, will be a better place for all of us if we could recant our positions from this tragedy of feminism. It is not difficult to understand that men and women are simply equal and that the noise on the superiority of men may only be in a matter of responsibility to the family. Certainly, the penis that men have and women do not, does not and cannot signify superiority. No book of received African religions, which we pride ourselves on, empowers men because of the penis. No. The sooner men concede this point the better for humanity. The statement of the Holy Qur'an may be added to support a one-world project, the spirit of oneness for humanity,

*O Mankind, We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things. (Qur'an 49, verse 13)*

It is instructive that the verse starts with gender sensitivity. Men and women are, thus, equal in the sight of their Creator, and the only way one can be better than the other is by being more righteous. It is instructive, then, that people should rather harp on the understanding of the complementarity of the sexes and not assertiveness from any of the sexes. So far, it seems only the UN has the power of implementation over nation states. The UN and its member states undoubtedly have immense coercive power but can coercive power alone impose a code of behaviour between such intimate partners as husband and wife, brother and sister, boyfriend and girlfriend etc.? Quite bluntly, do the UN and others in the business of empowerment believe that people will abandon their cultural and religious dictates in favour of some resolution from Beijing? The UN may have immense (or coercive) power but it has no heaven or hell to punish or reward people after death. This, in our submission, should be the weapon to use against the sexes. Assertiveness may cause further discord. Complementarity of sexes offers better hope such as demonstrated by Elewa.

Tactlessness and/or a wrongful empowerment culture encourage (hidden) non-co-operation between the sexes. It is caused by the air of 'aware' woman in feminism; it disintegrates into (hidden) hatred between the sexes. If you consider Beatrice with her lover boy, Chris Oriko, Beatrice subjects the night to non-tolerance of bodily sex between them. The night was thus tied to that conditional understanding

between the lovers. Happily, as she is about to dictate her conditions, the Commissioner quickly understands his powerful-feminist girlfriend,

“...Don't tell me, I know.”

“What is it?”

“That I don't make love to you.”

(p. 68)

Their discussion notes with Oriko trailing after her that in feminism, any demand for physical love by man constitutes rape and as such, permissible sex between lovers must always be at the signal of the woman. The menfolk should then be ready to face rape charges for the offence, the radical feminist seems to assert. But it can be noted that the subject for the demand for physical love coming at the invitation of the woman only will succeed in generating tensions between the personal and the political that refutes a coherent, unitary conception of identity and recasts it in a political context. This should be avoided.

The same notion of 'aware' woman guides BB on marriage issues, among which is single motherhood or what is better termed as husbandlessness in Africa. In Africa and everywhere else it always remains a controversial matter. Critics assert that the spirit of single motherhood/husbandlessness spells distinct social and economic disaster for womanhood as it has offensive morality which insults even ordinary common sense, much less religion and scholarship (see Alkali, 2010b). Conversely, *Anthills* appears

to be championing this brand of feminism as Achebe can be appropriated as such,

...you hear all kinds of nonsense talk from girls: Better to marry a rascal than grow moustache in your father's compound; better an unhappy marriage than an unhappy spinsterhood; better marry Mr. Wrong in this world than wait for Mr. Right in heaven; all marriage is how-for-do; all men are the same, and a whole of other foolishnesses like that. (p. 88) (Italics added)

BB would prefer to stay single than marry. Achebe may have suggested single motherhood/husbandlessness in these lines. He may have acted as such in response to the world's call to him to reconsider the tendency in his writing towards gender injustice. While not doing anything for women earlier in his tetralogy, Achebe would appear to have now overdone the woman project in *Anthills*. Perhaps, then, this is another reason why only about two decades ago, Achebe more ably exploited feminist aspects. They (Achebe and Innes as editors) called on the phallic world to recognise the spirit of motherhood as a concept. Extolling the feminist efforts of both Alifa Rifaat of Egypt and Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, they observed that these female writers have “their stories north and south of the Sahara” woven around how a true and distinctive African mother feels for her daughter during trying times of unwavering patriarchy (Achebe &

Innes, 1995, p. 2). This welcome diversion contradicts the workings of his tetralogy, particularly, in his *Things Fall Apart*.

## CONCLUSION

This essay manages to be both cautious and inspiring on the need to get the sexes wholly organised, an approach accurate to the culture it describes but also exemplary for all of us writing about gender. It incites woman projects to re-examine their own motives and restraints since the economy that nego-feminism drives is remarkable; it cannot fail, in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly all systems of sexual exchange based on masculine thrift. Reaction to this thrift is traced to its historical and legal network through a trilogy: an evolution firstly from subjugation to opposition and to lively partnership. Thus, subjugation paid its price for the emergence of oppositional feminism forcefully brought in through Achebe's tetralogy, now countered by his *Anthills*, which Ehling (1991, p. 1) states is the "most important novel to come out of Africa in the [1980s]" but which, it is believed, in treating Elewa as the 'other' in the text has engendered mediatory peace lovers through the theory of nego-feminism. This 'other' gives nego-feminist readers the ability to re-read Achebe's attempted concern for gender. It is an example of the intersection of what is said in public and proved and what is said in private and believed. As such, if womanhood must make headway in the 21st century, the feminist world needs to explore

the privacy of its belief through the nego-feminist spirit.

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