

In Defense of African Male Writers' Feminist Philosophy: Alternative Reading of Sembene Ousmane— “the Feminist Macho”

Prof. Hellen Roselyne L. Shigali
Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya

Gender sensitivity and feminist perspective in fiction is stereotypically associated with female writers based on stereotypical dichotomies that define patriarchy categorizing humanity into aggressive male oppressor versus passive female oppressor. The concepts are relatively new in African developmental discourse and scholarship. Gender is gradually gaining acceptance but feminism remains a dirty word in general public perception. It is replete with misconceptions and controversies. It is associated with the female rebel who is anti-African culture. In this context, African culture is presumed to be ideal and static. Its sexist practices against both men and women are erroneously misrepresented as African traditional values. Attempts to challenge the status quo in any sphere of life are attributed to disruptive foreign influence, on the assumption that all African peoples cherish their variants of patriarchy. Existence of indigenous egalitarian worldview and emancipatory ideologies is silenced. This scenario extends into African literature and criticism, so much so that many female writers disclaim the term because to acclaim it is to subject oneself to curious scrutiny. Therefore, to attach the label to an African, male writer requires justification. Fortunately, the label “feminist macho” was constructed by Sembene Ousmane’s friend and authorized biographer Samba Gadjigo who probably has a deeper understanding of the concept particularly in reference to Ousmane’s novel *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960). However, it is essential to clarify that African feminism exemplified by the text is not synonymous with Western feminisms that emerge from a capitalist, individualist, and seemingly secular worldview. Analysis of Ousmane’s vision on gender issues in this paper is guided by African feminist social theories formulated by Nigerian poet and critic, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and Siera Leonian, as well as an anthropologist Filomina Chioma Steady. To constitute a framework for literary analysis, tenets of the social theories are combined with literary stylistics. Reference is made to scholars in the Diaspora who espouse Afrocentric feminist worldview and other African male writers who exhibit gender sensitivity. The underpinning philosophy of African gender sensitivity views male and female as two complementary parts of a whole defined as human. This is an unchanging truth that makes scientific sense considering that all humans originate from an intricate combination of male and female seed in procreation. The concept of otherness is a latter day invention. By inference, when one part of the human whole presumes dominance against the other, it shares the resultant ramifications. Secondly, humans are social beings, which implies whatever every individual does requires an audience or accomplice. This presupposition unsettles the dichotomous paradigm that defines human relations particularly gender relations. The third undisputable truth that distinguishes African gender perspectives is the

recognition of multiple forms of oppressions to which both African men and women are subjected, the root cause of which is the idealization of the concept of power over others. The very concept of dominance is destabilized by the fact that the dominated is an indicator of its very existence. This in turn unsettles patriarchal idealization of male dominance over female subordination. When the greatness of the Okonkwos of this world has woman as an essential component, it becomes obvious that the dichotomous constructions fall short of defining the intricate reality of gender relations. Dominance versus subordination in conjugal relations forms archetypal template for subsequent discriminations in similar illogical dichotomies in human relations whether they gender, caste, class, racial, and attendant inter-cum-intra category variants. Attempt to address the complex ramifications engendered by the illogical dichotomizing and polarizing of gender relations that would otherwise be harmonious albeit binary requires a gender-based worldview, as distinct from a feminist one that is essentially woman-centred. To capture such complexity is to transcend feminism without invalidating its philosophy and transformative aims. In Gadjigo's words, it means being more feminist than narrow feminisms. Ousmane probably earns the broader title from his friend because he captures these essences of gender discrimination as archetype of other discriminations that delimit human relations. He may indeed be a "feminist macho" even in a Western sense because he addresses all oppressions of humanity and yet succeeds in foregrounding oppression of women. He criticizes definitive assumptions and basic features of patriarchal ideology and practice notably gendered division of labour, space, and the resultant stereotypes. He ennoble this deconstruction-cum-reconstruction project by contextualizing it in a historical novel. My paper grapples with this unique historisation of the struggle for gender equity that predates the 1960s women's liberation movements in the Western world. In a context where African male writers have been condemned for gender insensitivity en masse or mentioned en passant in supposedly gender sensitive critical texts, one hopes that another view might still get audience. Stereotypically, to be a feminist is to be pro-all-oppressed women versus all male oppressors. African feminist concept of complementarity demonstrated by Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* calls for re-examination of gender sensitivity in literary art.

Keywords: patriarchy, feminism, feminist macho, gender, dichotomies, complementarity, historization

Introduction

In conventional African contexts, the term, *feminism*, is viewed with anathema mainly because it is associated with some woman-centered, anti-men ideologies and theories in the Western world. And all the myriad schools of thought on the subject are assumed to be to a single worldview called "feminism". The idea of indigenous African gender-based emancipatory philosophy and theory is yet to find acceptance. In literature and literary studies, many feminisms advocate creation of art and critical practice for political purpose. Applied to African literature, such criticism achieve (mis)readings that dismiss all male writers as gender-blind or insensitive and female writers as proponents of woman-centered feminisms respectively (Frank, 1987; Andrade, 1990; Stratton, 1994). Both constructions of meaning emanate from contestable premises that over politicize literary art. But sadly, they are detrimental to African literature because they demonize and trivialize the complex gender perspectives therein. In effect, they silence the unique contributions that African literary artists make to global liberation discourses (Nnameka, 1995; Zongo, 1996; Shigali, 2010; 2012; 2013). In this scenario, it becomes necessary to justify application of the questionable term to an African male artist of Sembene Ousmane's stature. Fortunately, for the purpose of this paper, the task has been dispensed with by Samba Gadjigo, the author's long-term friend and authorized biographer who describes Sembene as a "feminist macho"

whose vision of positive change is “deeply rooted in African culture” (Gadjigo, 2007). Ousmane’s creative works tend to affirm his friend’s evaluation because they all defy simplistic dichotomous categorization displayed in the so-called feminist criticism of African literature. Stratton (1994) exempted Ousmane from her classification of gender insensitive male writers en passant. That does disservice to the writer’s colossal contribution that seems to predate and even diminish the effects of the 1960s women’s liberation movements in the West.

The philosophy and attendant theoretical frameworks that underpin the version of criticism above contradict commonsense view of authorial vision which shapes characterization in the literary text. Characters in literary art are mainly defined by the virtues and or vices they embody rather than gender per se—patriarchal ideology notwithstanding. There are many texts by both male and female authors that cannot succumb to “positive male versus negative female stereotype” interpretation unless they are manipulated by dishonest critics. For example, African male writers’ protest writing condemns the male powers-that-be. The writers speak for the oppressed irrespective of gender. Admittedly, many of them do not focus on specifics of women’s oppression—but that is a detail. Many African male artists have suffered victimization, exile, and even death for writing against the male powers in their countries. This reality negates some woman-centered critics’ claims against them. Conversely, female writers acknowledge the reality of multiple oppressions to which all African peoples are subjected. They are honest enough to see through the fallacy of “all evil male oppressors versus all good oppressed women” dictum that underpins universalist feminisms. They are also aware of intra-female and intra-male gender forms of oppression originating in racial, caste, and class exploitation that is conveniently erased by Western feminists. For their art to remain true to life, female writers must inevitably have their share of female ogres.

In this context, interrogation of all African writers’ gender sensitivity calls for fresh analytical tools commensurate with the non-conventional visions and versions of rendering the woman question. Jack Mapanje’s (1986) argument speaks for many men and women because both feminism and gender remain generally vague terms in African scholarship. “A lot of men do not know what feminism is, they don’t even understand the principles” (Petersen, 1988, p. 181). This remains as true in most of the 21st century Africa as it was since the 1960s. In the Western world, this is an outdated debate. In Africa, it remains contemporary for various reasons. Therefore, the point of departure as Mapanje rightly suggests is correct definition. “If we started with a discussion of the principles of feminism, we could perhaps develop a concept of literary criticism out of that” (Petersen, 1988, p. 181). The scope of this paper presumes definitions of the myriad documented feminisms, but focuses on African feminist social theory as formulated by the Sierra Leonean anthropologist Filomina Chioma Steady (1998). Analysis of Ousmane’s gender sensitivity which is best demonstrated by the historical novel, *God’s Bits of Wood* (1960/62), is based on tenets of Steady’s formulation which include: a humanistic view of society, gender complementarity, cooperation, compromise, and interdependence. To date, there is no documented African literary theory that incorporates African feminisms in the same way that tenets of Western feminisms permeate Universalist feminist criticism that has hitherto been applied to African literature. To constitute a theoretical framework for literary analysis, tenets of the social theories are combined with literary stylistics. Failure to foreground, the latter, constricts literary criticism and relegates the literary artifact to a social document. This is the major weakness in Western feminist criticism on African literature. Yet, it is in the literariness of the literary texts that the nuances of gender perspectives in African literature lie hidden.

A favorite rhyme for Western feminist critique is the “mother Africa trope”. In *Contemporary African Literature and Politics of Gender* (1994), Florence Stratton posits that “the trope is deeply entrenched in the

male tradition” (p. 39). She argues that all major male writers portray the African woman as:

Pure physicality, always beautiful and often naked. He is constituted as a writing subject, a producer of art and of socio-political visions: her status is that of aesthetic/sexual object. She takes the form either of a young girl, nubile and erotic, or a fecund nurturing mother. The poetry celebrates his intellect at the same time as it pays tribute to her body, which is frequently associated with the African landscape that is his to explore and discover. As embodying mother she gives the trope a name; the mother Africa trope. (Stratton, 1994, p. 41)

According to this critic, the male writer's portrait of society fits neatly into static dichotomies: male/female, domination/subordination, mind/body, subject/object, self/other. The hypothesis may be valid in reference to one-dimensional reading of some negritude poetry, but transposing it into a general critical theory distorts the complexity of African texts. It also silences progressive gender-sensitive male voices which transcend patriarchal ideology. But Western critics' worldview is usually stated with such intellectual authority and finality that makes it almost impossible for one to contemplate any exceptions to the rule. Yet, there are exceptions that deserve conscious scrutiny for all the light they shade on the subject.

Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is the quintessential antonym of the hypothesis above. Authorial vision in this text suggests distinctive principles of African feminism which include gender complementarity, interdependence, and humanistic view of society. For some predictable reasons, these principles are not dominant in global gender discourses. Steady (1998) argued that inter gender relations in African worldview are binary but not polar. “Sexual differences and similarities as well as sex roles, enhance sexual autonomy and cooperation between men and women, rather than promote polarization and fragmentation” (Steady, 1998, p. 8). This view of society is demonstrated in *God's Bits of Wood*.

African Feminism in *God's Bits of Wood*

The story of *God's Bits of Wood* is based on 1947-48 Dakar-Niger railway workers' strike. The strike begins as industrial action but culminates into a national event. Typical of colonial economy, paid employment was a “men's only” affair except for domestic labor in a few cases. However, due to realistic multiple identities of the workers, the strike in this novel eventually involves the whole community. Inevitably, a historical novelist has to bear part of the professional historian's burden regarding facts, but the attitude, perspective, and vision with which he imbues the story are his own prerogative. Where patriarchal ideology prevails, a male author might be expected to represent an historical event and personalities from a masculine point of view. But Ousmane opts to imbue this historical fiction with a balanced gender perspective. The strike is portrayed as communal warfare in which complementary pro-active participation of among men, women, and children is decisive in the victory achieved. In this sense, the novel is progressive considering that it was first published in French in 1960 and translated into English in 1962. The historic strike itself (1947-8) predates the 1960s women's liberation movements in the West.

A gender-sensitive perspective permeates the story of *God's Bits of Wood*. Authorial statement emphasizes complementarity of “men, women and children” in the struggle against capitalist employers of Dakar-Niger French Railway Company. Complementarity and interdependence of male and female defines the humanistic orientation of African variant of feminism. As Steady contends: “In the African worldview male and female constitute a whole. For women, the male is not ‘the other’ but part of the human same...” (p. 8). The idea of otherness must be a latter day individualist and in fact anti-biological invention.

In the racial and class struggle that ensues in *God's Bits of Wood*, African male and female characters

complement one another in every way. Their complementarity and interdependence is interwoven in the setting, plot, characterization, and themes captured in style. The strike is a public affair originating in the male dominated public space of paid employment, but the author interrogates its impact on the private sphere of marriage, family, and home. The setting captures multiple identities of men, women, and children in the community. The trio “men, women and children” is monotonously repeated to emphasize their participation and cooperation in the racial-cum-class struggle which culminates in victory for the African workers and entire community. In the course of the strike, many stereotypical gender dichotomies are negated as the binary oppositions are fused into complements of the same feature. In particular, subject/object, mind/body, and self/other dichotomies which have been associated with many male writers' portrait of both genders are deconstructed. Both men and women share the subject space. Women are portrayed as conscious introspective thinkers, strategists, organizers, and brave fighters in conjunction with men (not through men). They constitute the women's league of the strikers' movement. Black men, women, and children are pitted against the other's camp which comprises of white male employers of the Dakar-Niger railway, their wives, and black petty bourgeoisie. Inter-gender conflict in conjugal relations that dominates Western woman-centered feminist discourses is integrated in a more encompassing view of society that acknowledges multiple forms of exploitation and subordination to which all African men, women, and children are subjected. This is done without downplaying gender discrimination.

The novel begins with the story of Ad'jibid'ji—a nine-year-old girl child who is bestowed with extraordinary innate attributes for her age in that setting in time. She is a critical thinker and curious observer who is credited with more formal education than many of the male adults she interacts with. She is respected by her traditionalist grandfather Fa Keita and trusted by her foster father Bakayoko. This character echoes African women writers' characterization of the girl child, notably Ogbanje Ojebeta in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl* (1977) and Akoko in Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source* (1994). In *God's Bits of Wood* (1960/62), the development of the girl-child character demonstrates the writer's recognition of women as human beings in their own right who are entitled to human rights. He emancipates Ad'jibid'ji from oppressive domesticity at an early age. He depicts her traversing both public and domestic spaces with remarkable ease. At home she is allowed time to do her “schoolwork”. She is allowed to attend the strikers' meetings including Diara's trial. After the trial, she even remains behind to evaluate the event! Niakoro, her grandmother, disapproves of this structural change, but old Fa Keita approves and even facilitates it by sending Ad'jibid'ji to take messages to the men at the meetings. Exploring stylistic organizational techniques, Ousmane foregrounds the girl child to such a degree that his novel which bears the title of children euphemistically named “bits of wood” can verifiably be summarized as “her-story” and yet it is the rendition of the history of a social-political event that signifies Senegalese labor movement which would have been basically a men's only business. The entry point into any narrative is highly suggestive. That a nationalist labor movement in the 1940s should begin with a first chapter about a nine-year old girl child exemplifies the author's conscious effort to challenge sexism. Ad'jibid'ji story is essentially a subtext in the novel.

Apart from Ad'jibid'ji's story, the writer foregrounds the stories of women by allocating individual chapters to female characters: Maimouna, the blind mother of twin boys, Houdia M'Baye, Ramatoulaye, Mame Sofi, and Penda. He also foregrounds episodes in which women play a leading role, such as “The march of the women”. This march of the women to Dakar is the climax of gender complementarity. In the episode, women are recognized as co-fighters in the struggle. They make the decision to march from Thies to Dakar to protest

against the mistreatment of their men. During the march, the men only provide escort. It is made very clear that this is a women's activity. They are received at Dakar in traditional African style. Grandmother Fatou Wade brings out a traditional piece of cloth for the purpose. This symbolizes acceptance of structural change and authorial recognition of African culture as dynamic as opposed to negritude view of the same as static. The women are thereby recognized as warriors and received with the male ritual performed for male warriors.

During the march, Maimouna, the blind woman, takes her surviving twin along—having lost the other one in a stampede in the course of the struggle. Using the experience of this character, Ousmane shows that maternal roles can be combined with women's participation in public affairs. He even ennoble it further by combining it with visual disability. In this case, both gendered construction of labor based biological determinism, separation of public and domestic space, as well as discrimination against disability are effectively deconstructed. The birth of baby "Strike" whose mother is actively involved in the struggle reinforces the view that the two spaces are intricately intertwined. Ironically, Samba N'Doulouguou—the secret father of Maimouna's twins is felled by police bullets minutes after the blind woman rejects his offer to carry the child to ensure its security. In this episode, the male character is justifiably portrayed as a stereotypical sex predator. He presumes Maimouna's powerlessness and inability but fate proves him wrong. After the march to Dakar, men publicly acknowledge and commend women's contribution. Both parties know without mention that consultation in decision making has become mandatory. But conflicts of interest soon emerge as the community begins to grasp the nature and level of liberation that has occurred. Lahbib, the worker's secretary, informs Bakayoko of the change and simultaneously facilitates change in his addressee:

The women got a big welcome when they came back, of course, but we are having all sorts of trouble with them. At first they pounced on me like tigresses—they wanted to start running everything! But things are calmer now—the children have not come back yet, and the women go out to the lake everyday. In future though, we will have to reckon with them in whatever we do...

And now, come home...

Your family needs you, so come home soon. (pp. 225-226)

Ousmane's reconstruction of gendered construction of labor entails a major structural change. Patriarchal ideology and practice rests on this particular structure, which conflates physiology with capability or inability. The result is socially constructed, but logically unverifiable gender roles, which the author describes as "old feudal customs". The strike crisis shocks the entire community into a new awareness of the fallacies underlying sexual division of work. Men begin to realize that paid employment in the public sphere is dispensable but domestic work is an essence and most importantly, it is unisex. When piped water is disconnected, men create alternative paid employment by commercializing water collection. They are shocked and infuriated when women take the water on credit or refuse to pay. On the other hand, the women cannot comprehend the urgency in remunerating a service which they themselves have hitherto provided free of charge for years. This conflict of interest is stylistically resolved when this particular work activity is reconstructed and becomes gender neutral. It is even ennobled. It becomes a therapy for the strikers:

Alioune had succeeded in persuading a considerable number of men that their old feudal customs had no place in a situation like this. Now husbands, sons and even fathers could be seen every morning, leaving their homes in search of water and returning at night triumphantly pushing a barrel or carrying a sack full of bottles. At last the men had found something to do, which not only occupied the long empty hours but also helped to relieve the scarcity of food and thereby made it possible to carry on with the strike. (p. 203)

Ironically, the only couple that still fits the stereotypical dichotomies discussed earlier is that of Ibrahim Bakayoko, the ipso facto nationalist leader of the labor movement, and his inherited wife, Assitan. Widow inheritance is one of the practices that are hotly contested in contemporary feminist discourses. It became a conspicuous issue in the 1980s, 30 years after the publication of *God's Bits of Wood*. In this novel, Ousmane negates the practice by delineating the attendant emotional constraints and probable incompatibility in such a union. But most significantly, he recreates the marriage into an emancipatory site for the nationalist leader. This portrait captures three controversies surrounding contemporary struggle for gender equity in Africa. The movement has been attributed to Western influence and therefore presumed to be anti-African traditional cultures. But the simultaneous struggle for gender equity that occurs in this novel is indigenous. In fact, the Africans are pitted against both white men and women in the racial and class struggle. It is also assumed that the fight for gender equity in Africa is basically anti-men and that it diverts nationalist goals. In *God's Bits of Wood*, the realization of gender equity takes place simultaneously with the nationalist struggle against foreign employers. Evidently, gender equity becomes an essence in the struggle against colonialism.

Anabella Rodrigues who participated in Mozambican liberation struggle sums up the problem thus: "It is easier to eliminate colonial bourgeois influences that were imposed on us and identified with the enemy than to eliminate generations of tradition within our society" (qtd. in Davies, 1986, p. 8). Implicitly, the nationalist struggle is multifaceted. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993) affirmed this view in *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*:

Within nearly all nations today the centre is located in the dominant social stratum, a male bourgeois minority. But since many of the male bourgeois minorities in the world are still dominated by the west we are talking about domination of the world, including the west, by a Eurocentric bourgeois, male racial minority. Hence the need to move the centre from all minority class establishments within nations to the real creative centres among the working people in conditions of gender, racial and religious equality. Moving the centre in the two senses—between nations and within nations—will contribute to the freeing of world cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender. (WaThiong'o, 1993, p. xvii)

Ousmane combines emancipatory struggles and attempts to resolve inherent issues by interweaving Bakayoko's liberation from racism, capitalism, and sexism. His transformation originates in unconscious conscientization that underpins the industrial crisis in the novel. Bakayoko suddenly becomes aware of the need to extend the theories and convictions he confesses in public affairs to his private life in marriage, family, and home:

Assitan had been brought up according to all ancient rules and customs. She lived on the margin of her husband's existence: a life of work, of silence, and of patience. It would have been hard to know whether Bakayoko ever felt remorse for his infidelities to her, for this man's thoughts were secrets from the world. But it was possible that the moral and material distress he had seen on every hand in the days of the strike had affected him more than he knew - had altered and matured him. (p. 235)

Maturity indeed! Bakayoko becomes aware of his wife's health needs. He wants her to learn French and even plans to take literary gender awareness campaign, making it urgent and credible (no foreign elite/feminists involved). The woman silently recognizes the empowerment but consciously avoid verbalizing it in public. Read from whatever vantage point, the novel affirms emancipation of all African people from shared forms of oppression and particularly women. The author achieves consensus on the issue through diverse and representative characterization of all categories of people in the community. Recognition of women's active

and decisive participation is voiced by major characters, such as male traditionalists and reputable trade union leaders. However, the author is realistic in noting dissenting patriarchal views but he negates them through attribution to anonymous voices:

“If you ask me, the strike is a matter for the men to settle themselves”.

You're right there, brother-this is nothing but politics. These women are all communists”.

“But they aren't doing anything except trying to help their husbands” (Ousmane, 1995, p. 209).

Women are so visible in this novel that one is taken back by any critic who mentions their role en passant. Craig V. Smith is one such critic. His article: “The Stereography of Class, Race and Nation in *God's Bits of Wood*” (1993) is virtually the story of male strikers versus their employers. This erasure of women and children is most pronounced in the account of the same event by professional historian's James Jones' *Industrial Labor in the Colonial World* (2002) which similarly silences the role of women and children in 1947-8 strike. It is therefore commendable that Ousmane represents a much more holistic portrait of the event throughout the novel. Like the first chapter which celebrates “A'djibid'ji”, the last one “Epilogue” set in the town of Thies is a celebration of women's complementary contribution to the victorious struggle of African workers. It is the march of the women against the “Vatican”—the residence of white employers. Analogous to the climatic epic march to Dakar, the former marks the official end of the strike. Women's presence forces the company directors to evict Isnard, consequently driving his wife to suicide. She is the epitome female oppressor and the only female character that dies in vain. When she dies, the crowd of women and men reckon that “they had written a brutal ending to a long, long story whose climax, until then, had been unknown” (p. 244). And Maimouna, the blind mother, sings the conclusive moral lesson of the story: “But happy is the man who does battle without hatred” (p. 245). Even so-defined feminist novels written expressly for political purpose to expose male oppression and portray female strength (Minogue, 1990) would fall short of Ousmane's achievement in *God's Bits of Wood*. It is Sam Kahiga's *Dedan Kimathi: The Real Story* (1990) that comes close to Ousmane's feminist philosophical feat. In this novel, Kahiga concurs with professional historian's Tabitha Kanogo's view of Mau Mau as a women's war as much as men's (Kanogo, 1987). But that is another debate.

Indeed “feminist macho” (African) is a fitting tribute to Ousmane's homegrown gender sensitivity. Without alluding to any foreign isms, this author succeeds in unsettling essential fallacies that underpin the concept of gender with their attendant unverifiable dichotomous character traits: male supremacy versus female subordination, male oppressor versus female oppressor, independent male versus dependent female, public space versus domestic, and so on. His resultant vision is an artistic affirmation of tenets of African feminism as propounded much later by African social theorists who have researched on and delineated African Feminism.

Conclusion

The interpretation in the current paper is based on broad basic tenets of African feminism. There are three other possible readings of the gender perspective in *God's Bits of Wood*, which could be pursued independently as further research. In her paper “African Women Culture and Another Development”, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1993) has formulated a viable gender analysis framework that could constitute a critical paradigm for content analysis in this particular novel. The framework addresses six metaphorical mountains in African women's struggle for gender equity. They include: “Oppression from outside (Colonialism and neo-colonialism?): The

second is from traditional structures, feudal, slave-based, communal, etc.; the third is her backwardness...; the fourth is man; the fifth is her color, her race, and the sixth is herself" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993, p. 108). One could examine the extent to which these mountains are inadvertently addressed in this novel which was published 15 years prior to Ogundipe-Leslie's formulation. The second possible reading could examine the author's conceptualization of power based on Afro-centric gender analysis framework formulated by Joanna Rowlands (1997). The framework categorizes power into four distinct forms: "power over others", "power with others", "power to", and "power within". Divine power could be added to the list. Spiritually it is an essence in both Rowlands's framework and African feminism, therefore Supreme Power is implied. One could examine Ousmane's portrait of the various forms of power and discover his verdict on each one of them. The third alternative reading is cross-cultural. *God's Bits of Wood* can also be interpreted as an experiment in socialist realism. Socialist ideology encapsulates socialist feminism. One could begin by identifying implicit principles of socialist feminism in the text and then proceed to do a comparative study between African and Socialist feminisms.

Each of the four frameworks has its own set of congruent tenets but all of them can facilitate only thematic analyses. Therefore, they should be combined with literary stylistics in order to constitute literary critical paradigms as distinct from purely ideological theories. Literary stylistics is fundamentally gender neutral until a creative writer imbues the various stylistic devices with attitude and perspective. It is also possible to formulate a fifth eclectic conceptual framework by combining specific tenets from all the four frameworks. Alternative interpretations of a single text based on these multiple gender analysis frameworks can expand pedagogical space in feminist literary criticism. In this sense, literary approaches based on Afro-centric humanistic feminist principles are more realistic and have a higher explanatory capacity than those based on woman-centered Euro-American feminisms that are fixated on static gender dichotomies and monolithic concept of power as dominance. The explanatory capacity of an adequate feminist literary theory should extend beyond stereotypical feminist fault-finding critique of male authors' works and in-house gyno-criticism of female writers' works to examining the non-stereotypical perspectives advanced by the literary artists. In my view, it is Sembene Ousmane—the male writer who exemplifies gender balanced representation of the woman question amidst other questions on discrimination in a specific context of the historical Dakar-Niger Railway strike of 1947-8. In that sense, he is much more of a connoisseur of gender sensitivity which encapsulates, but extends far beyond the connotation "feminist macho".

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