

An Analysis of Bell Hooks Concept of Feminist Consciousness: An Imperative to Ending Gender War

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Abstract

Bell hooks has always challenged the age long tradition of what a true feminist ideology is all about in her works on feminism. Feminists are characterized as being loud, overbearing, controlling. They are seen as women that wants to have the same position as men. This has done nothing but widen the gender gaps that is existing in the society already. Recent feminist thoughts are looking for ways to close this gender gap and bring the society right on track. This paper using the philosophical method of analysis which has to do with (breaking down of concepts for easy understanding), tries to call us to reflect on the factors of oppression in the society where men and women are living together. And also to reflect on our cultural values and cultural impositions around us that will help to further good gender relation when we walk together to fight our common enemy.

Keywords: Feminism, Consciousness, Gender, Intersectionality, Sexism

Introduction

Feminism has no single definition but as a concept, it was initiated to address social inequalities and injustice done against women in the society. Tina Chanter (2006:8) was of the opinion that: “there are however a number of reasons to be wary of defining feminism as a movement to achieve equality”. She further explained that:

If we assume that feminism aims to accomplish the equality of women with men, the question arises which men? with whom do women want equality? Presumably feminists are not striving to be equals of oppressed disenfranchised or disadvantaged men’ (Chanter:9)

Gloria Jen Watkin writing under her pseudo name bell hooks (2000), also argued that “feminism should be defined as a struggle against oppression, one which acknowledges that oppression is not confined to sexism, but is also expressed in classism, racism and heterosexism”. By challenging oppression on multiple fronts, hooks avoids assuming that all women share a similar relationship to class, race and sexuality (Chanter P9). Feminist analytic philosophers have been working hard in trying to define and explain the meaning of ‘gender’, ‘race’ and ‘sexuality’, using the tools of analytic philosophy from different approaches. Many feminist philosophers for example, have been focused on the question of whether the concepts of ‘gender’, ‘race’ and ‘sexuality’ are natural terms or socially constructed ones. The reason for this is not farfetched as it has to do with the way gender construction influences gender relation.

Gender is a social and cultural phenomenon which is used to look at roles and behaviours of men and women in the society. Gender issues are centered on experiences of men and women as members of a given society and who also have specific roles to perform as members of that society. A general assumption is that gender issues are the issues affecting only women and as such the main focus was on the relationship between men and women. The emphasis was on the social, political and economic structure of the society and how women have always been the ones in a disadvantaged position. We cannot fully ascertain the claims on a full agreement on either the methods or the theories that inform gender relation but we can perhaps agree that the analysis of the relation between some of these categories helps us in ascertaining real gender relation in our society. As such when we are talking of women oppression, we are talking about multiple categories intersecting to form multiple oppressions militating against women’s growth in the society. This is the same society that men live as well. It will amount to an error in judgment that we are only looking at oppression from a woman’s angle while disregarding the experiences of men.

The harsh economic situation in Nigeria recently occasioned by ‘naira swap’ is enough evidence to show us that the structures that oppress people in the society does not single out whom to oppress. Based on this notion, it will amount to error in judgment for we to single out women alone as the oppressed because the same issue that oppress women in the society also oppress men. Having said this, it will be worthy to note that recent feminist scholars propounded a theory which shows that so many factors of oppression intersect to form a web of oppression and these factors was introduced by the capitalist system in our society. This capitalist system, introduced inequalities (poor and rich, strong and weak amongst us. This is the theory of intersection.

Intersectionality as a theory started from the foundation of dominance and oppression of black women in the society. The American system of then thrive by introducing inequalities amongst us. The argument was that “there is a simple accumulation of disadvantage, such that the Black woman is doubly disadvantaged compared to the Black man, the intersectionality framework emphasizes the qualitative differences among different intersectional positions”(Shield:303).. Intersectionality tries to understand how multiple forces of oppression come together to interact so as to reinforce conditions of inequality and social exclusion. It also looks into how factors including socio-economic status, race, class, gender, sexualities, status etc combine with historical and current systems of discrimination such as colonialism and capitalism. Intersectionality gave us a new tape with which oppression in the society should be measured and shield (304) outlined its main objectives as:

1. It promised a solution, or at least a language for the glaring fact that it is impossible to talk about gender without considering other dimensions of social structure/social identity that play a formative role in gender’s operation and meaning. In the U.S., the most obvious, pervasive, and seemingly unalterable are race and social class.
2. Intersectionality seemed a generally applicable descriptive solution to the multiplying features that create and define social identities. It is not race-class-gender, but also age, ableness, sexual orientation, to name the most salient.

It asks us to take a closer look at what informs gender relation amongst us. Gender war has become an issue of global concern and one that should be stopped at all cost if the society must thrive. Intersectional theory emerges as a necessary tool that will help us understand gender relation better. Risman (2004:442) in Shield(2008:304) said that: summing it up said that: intersectionality has had on feminist work: “there is now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone”. This school of thought draws attention to the way in which “combined systems of oppression create the conditions that make inequality possible, and also invites us to reflect on our own position: as such, it is not only a methodological but also a political perspective”¹ (Rosa Frasset Aira & Marta Ruiz Pascua. 2020). Stephanie A. Shields (2008) stated that” intersectionality, the mutually constitutive relations among social identities, have become a central tenet of feminist thoughts recently”. She went further to state that “Our goal is to offer a “best practices” resource that provides models for when and how intersectionality can inform theory and be incorporated into empirical research on psychological questions at individual, interpersonal, and social structural levels.” McCall 2005 was of the opinion that it “is the most important contribution of feminist theory to our present understanding of gender”. Intersectionality as a theory gained popularity because of its theory on inclusiveness which was rightly asserted by Knapp (2005:253) when he said that: “the rapidity with which ideas of intersectionality gained purchase was “the political and moral need for feminism to be inclusive in order to be able to keep up its own foundational premises”. Indeed, at the level of theory, intersectionality has transformed how gender is being discussed and practiced. Intersectionality as a concept interprets gender relation by taking close looks at the intersection of factors of oppression and how they affect individuals in our society. Gender relation is an important consideration in any nation’s development. It is a way of looking at how social norms and power structures impact on the lives and opportunities available to different groups of men and women as an individual and as a society.

In the introduction to her first book *Ain't I a Woman*, Gloria Jen Watkin writing under her pseudo name Bell Blair hooks (written in small caps always) (1981), showed so much contempt on the then common depiction of many feminists on the real situation of black women. As such she proposes a new definition of feminism:

In *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, hooks proposes a new definition of feminism, one that does not simply fight for the equality of women and men (of the same class) but of a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others. Each of these forms of oppression are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through interlocking webs of oppression (hooks 1984, 31)

This new definition of feminism was the core foundation of bell hooks feminist philosophies as she sought for a way to reconcile both genders. hooks aim was to develop an “all-encompassing, definition without neglecting the “other” members of society (Biana:3). Through her own version of intersectionality she was able to show the interrelatedness of various forms of oppression. As a result of this, she proposes a framework for evaluating culture, which starts off with the black working class experience and invites everyone to examine common representations and images through interrogation techniques such as oppositional gazing (hooks 1992,122) and border-crossing (hooks 2006, 6). All these, were ways of making sure women conforms to men’s dictates. Her notion of interlocking webs of oppression is connected to “intersectionality”, an important conceptualization in today’s feminist circles. When one refers to himself or herself as a feminist, he or she must not neglect discussing intersectionality (T. Biana: 14). ”True struggle for both men and women should recognize the fact that both men and women are victims of the capitalist society created by western imperialism. Bell explaining further said that:

Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. This was a definition of feminism I offered in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* more than 10 years ago. It was my hope at the time that it would become a common definition everyone would use. I liked this definition because it did not imply that men were the enemy. By naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition it is open-ended. To understand feminism it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism

Many people do not see other signs of oppression like sexism as a problem that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society and our culture. It is a pandemic that troubles both men and women. Any unjust treatment done to anyone as a result of the person’s sex is sexism. This is the case of turning the one time oppressor into an oppressed. Men and women should join hands together to fight sexism that introduces all the inequalities that exist within us. Murphy (2004) noting this said that:

The promise is that women and men might work together to create a system that provides equality to all and dominates no one. The Women’s liberation movement has stressed that women are looking for a better model for human behavior than has so far been created. Women are trying to become human, and men can do the same. Neither men nor women need be limited by sex-role stereotypes that define ‘appropriate’ behavior. The present models for men and women fail to furnish adequate opportunities for human development. That one-half of the human race should be dominant and the other half submissive is incompatible with a notion of freedom. Freedom requires that there not be dominance and submission but that all individuals be free to determine

their own lives as equals.

Hooks in 'feminism is for everybody :passionate politics' also noted that:

Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. Imagine living in a world where we can all be who we are, a world of peace and possibility. Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world; we need to end racism, class elitism, imperialism. But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all "created equal."

If such a world as envisioned by hooks will ever be achieved, it will help in fostering good gender relation and put an end to gender wars. Feminism on its own has problem from the onset. As a concept, it was initiated by the west and was meant to fight for the right of the white woman alone while the black woman was asked to endure her ordeals in the hands of her white master and black spouse. Hooks (1982:1) said that:

Contemporary black women could not join together to fight for women's rights because we did not see "womanhood" as an important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification". In other words, we were asked to deny a part of ourselves—and we did"

She argued that all women are White and all Blacks are men. That was one of the starting points of an analytical and political move by Black and other feminists and social scientists to construct the categories of women as 'black' and 'white' thereby initiating divisions on the basis of class, race and sex. White feminists were clearly drawing a line in the kind of treatment a white woman should receive which should be higher than the one a black woman should receive. T. Biana noted that "although several other feminist theorists have made the same criticisms, what sets hooks apart is her invitation to a revolutionary feminist outlook, which uses a pluralistic lens to recognize the absence of oppressed groups and the interrogation of cultural representations"⁵. But the problem does not really end with recognizing all these social categories breeding inequalities amongst the genders, the problem lies in catching and nipping the problem from the bud. Social categories introducing inequalities and social inequalities amongst us like we have noted are "race, class, gender". Women are not the only one living in the society where these divisions exist; men live in the same society too and as such can be oppressed and exploited too. Many women who have recognized this fact, no longer base equality of the sexes their main objective. Women like Cellestine Ware advocating for radical feminism noted that; "Radical feminism is working for the eradication of domination and elitism in all human relationships. This would make self- determination the ultimate good and require the downfall of society as we know it today". Hooks in feminism theory and margin was of the opinion that:

Women and the New World, make the point that many women active in women's liberation movement were far more comfortable with the notion of feminism as a reform that would help women attain social equality with men of their class than feminism defined as a radical movement that would eradicate domination and transform society

Our Nigerian feminist authors noting the lapses of the feminist agenda, decided to construct one that will not only be acceptable to all but one that suits the African culture as well. As a result of that, one of our foremost feminist author Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie wrote her own feminist theory based on the complementarity of both gender. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie' theory of Stiwanism was aimed at social transformation of the society including women ". Accordingly she explains:

I wanted to stress the fact that what we want in Africa is social transformation. It is not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest

Advocates of the feminist struggle are now in the know that the 'oppressor' can as well be the 'oppressed'. It cuts across both genders. Hooks in *FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY: Passionate Politics* (2000) also noted that:

As all advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism, or if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media.

On my own part, I am arguing that feminism problem does not begin and end in people not understanding its ideologies or some group of persons taking it to the extreme, I believe the problem lies in the very name which it was given. The name itself depicts everything woman. If we are to have a definition which will be all inclusive, then it is proper that we give the struggle for the freedom of all, a united front in fighting gender oppression an entirely new name. The name this time around should be all inclusive. I advocate for the concept feminism to be replaced with the concept of "*FEMANISM*". The name 'fem' which stands for a shortened version of 'female' and 'man' which stands for a shortened version of man. By combining both names together, we can now come up with a concept that will benefit all gender. Since revolutionary feminism calls for a radical change and revolution geared towards liberating everyone both men and women and quit making men the enemy all the time, it is pertinent that it will be replaced with 'radical *FEMANISM*'. In a society so entrenched in patriarchal traditions, taking such a stand does not amount to an impossible task but it is something that needs to be done.

Revolutionary feminism can make a difference. Through a necessary struggle and a fostering of a critical political consciousness, change is possible (Bianca: 4). Hooks (1984) put it in a more formal way when she said that:

The foundation of a future feminist struggle must be solidly based on a recognition of the need to eradicate the underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression. Without challenging and changing these philosophical structures, no feminist reforms will have a long-range impact.

Bianca (5) explaining further said that One must first start off though with the acceptance that everyone is guilty of perpetuating sexism. It "helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action". The solution is to "replace it with feminist thought and action" (hooks 2000, viii-ix). This has nothing to do with equality between men and women but an acknowledgement of a mutual ethos. More than just ending sexism, revolutionary feminism seeks to end racism, class elitism and imperialism as well. In order to do this, there should be a global revolution of sustained freedom, justice and peace anchored on a human's self-actualization (Bianca:4)

Gender relations are important for a growing society like us if we are to achieve anything. We have long and long-lasting codes of conduct, norms, traditions that also determine good gender relation. In our society as well, we economic, political, legal, social include political systems and labor markets that create degrees of inequalities among both gender. These are the factors that interact with local cultures to determine gender outcomes. Knowing how these factors interact and intersect to form

webs of oppression around us will go a long way in stopping the internal gender wars that is going on. hooks has been unrelenting in her call for a distinctly feminist method that will address the needs of women while not neglecting the needs of men. .

Conceptual Framework

Feminism

Feminism has no clear cut definition, though its initial agenda was to put an end to all forms of oppression against women. Bell hooks in her works 'feminism is for everybody' found the agenda lacking in so many things and that is 'segregation'. As a result of that she opted for a new definition that will remove all forms of segregation and unite both sex together to fight one common enemy which is capitalism. Hooks defined feminism as, "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression".¹⁴ This is an ideal definition of feminism that will cut across all boundaries. Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. Historically, feminism has evolved from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality. Feminist theory now aims to interrogate inequalities and inequities along the intersectional lines of ability, class, gender, race, sex, and sexuality, and feminists seek to effect change in areas where these intersectional ties create power inequity. Intellectual and academic discussion of these inequities allows our students to go into the world aware of injustices and to work toward changing unhealthy dynamics in any scenario. Feminist political activists campaign in areas such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, fairness, social justice, and workplace issues such as family medical leave, equal pay, and sexual harassment and discrimination. Anytime stereotyping, objectification, infringements of human rights, or intersectional oppression occurs, it's a feminist issue. Andrew Heywood (2006), noted that as a political term, "feminism" was a twentieth century invention and became a familiar subject in the 1960's". It was first used as a medical term to describe either the feminization of men or the masculinization of women. In modern usage, it is linked to massive women's movement and an attempt to improve on the lifestyle of women in general. Feminists ideology is anchored on the belief that women are disadvantaged in life because of their sex and also that this disadvantage should be put to a halt. Feminists are of the opinion that the relationships between the sexes are political in nature and this has led to men claiming superiority over women. This subjugation of women is seen virtually in all societies. A woman has respect in the society only if the man is there and when he is not there, she is nothing. Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer in feminist politics through choice and action. When women first organized in groups to talk together about the issue of sexism and male domination, they were clear that females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males, the difference being simply that males benefited from sexism more than females and were as a consequence less likely to want to surrender patriarchal privilege. Before women could change patriarchy we had to change ourselves; we had to raise our consciousness. Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed. Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation.

It has also been noted that feminist struggle is not meant for women alone but for both genders. Everyone is not born a feminist, being a feminist is a matter of taking a stand (choice) which propels you into action. Thomas Reid argued that "only human being endowed with will and understanding, who also have power over their will and actions and who are directed by motives and reasons are agents capable of acting freely thinking that feminism was meant for women alone is an error and such an error should not be entertained because instead of bridging gender gap. It has widened it. Women should not be positions to fight against men. This is not in a way an agenda to give men free reign to perpetuate monstrous acts against women. To end social inequalities occasioned by sexism,

we should all be participants (men and women). We all should not claim ignorance of being the perpetrators of sexism right our homes at the instant a child is born. Until there is that consciousness that this struggle irrespective of the name given to it, is meant for all out there will be no end to gender wars. It is high time we recognized the fact that we have all been culprits in fostering the growth of sexism which has done nothing but kept us afar from each other.

Consciousness

The problem of consciousness is the central issue currently when theorizing about the mind and its workings. Questions about the nature of conscious awareness has been a perennial problem and has been asked for as long as there have been humans. There are different opinions on what really constitute the nature of consciousness. Some see it as an aspect of the mind or an aspect of one's inner thoughts, ones imaginations, thoughts, feelings which will end up in a sudden awareness of one's current situation. The origin of the modern concept of consciousness could be attributed to Locke's Essays concerning human understanding (1690). Locke defined consciousness as "the perception of what passes in a man's own mind". Feminist consciousness can be perceived to be how women, both individually and collectively, sought to question and challenge their rights, roles, and status in pre-modern society. This feminist consciousness was described by hook when she said:

Revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination, how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained. Understanding the way male domination and sexism was expressed in everyday life created awareness in women of the ways we were victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed. Early on in contemporary feminist movement, consciousness-raising groups often became settings where women simply unleashed pent-up hostility and rage about being victimized, with little or no focus on strategies of intervention and transformation¹⁷

Feminism as a concept came to be, because women were angry about their current situation as regards to patriarchal domination. Revolutionary feminist consciousness that hook talked about is to find a way to document and make the experiences and insights of women available to the whole world and also for women to know more about themselves. The feminist consciousness in the late 20th century has been greatly influenced by the development of the so called "women liberation movement".

Recent developments on gender issues has stressed the importance of not limiting this notion of feminists consciousness to women alone. If we are to end sexist oppression, men will be involved too. Men have been trained to favor patriarchy because it is for their own advantage. There are also men who despite being trained to dominate women, still felt that women should not be oppressed by men and they are out there supporting women. It is this kind of men that should be well informed on what feminist consciousness is all about. Hooks tried to avoid what she refers to as the "separatist ideology" of some feminist critique that instead of bringing both sex together in a good gender relation, intensifies the already existing antagonisms between the sexes. Although hooks is unapologetically critical of patriarchal violence and oppression against women and in no way trying to support men, she tried to include in her writing an understanding of "man's" position in the overwhelmingly dehumanizing world order we know as capitalism. While changes and raising of awareness for feminists consciousness at the institutional level are essential for advancing women's rights, so are changes in the hearts and minds of our men. If anyone must be free, everyone must be free.

Gender

Andrew Heywood defines gender as a "cultural term it refers to the different roles that society ascribes to men and women". He went further to note that gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity'. Simone de Beauvoir pointed out that "one is not born but becomes a woman"²¹. It means that one's sex does not define who that person is but becomes that particular sex according to the role one plays in the society. Judith Butler argued

that 'gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering' (1990). One of Butler's innovations was to suggest that:

Gender is constituted by action and speech-by behavior in which general traits and dispositions are exhibited or acted out. In particular gender is not an underlying essence or nature of which gendered is the product ; it is a series of acts whose constant repetition creates the illusion that an underlying Nature exist; gender according to butler is per formatively constituted.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. The World Development Report (WDR) 2012 defines gender as, "a socially constructed norm and ideologies which determine the behavior and actions of men and women". Understanding these gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals' access to and distribution of resources, their ability to make decisions and the ways in which women and men, boys and girls are affected by political processes and social development. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society. Since gender is a performative phenomenon, it shows that intersection of identities will influence one's choice of gender. In Butler (2006) *Gender Trouble*, Butler emphasized that gender is "performatively constituted" (p. 34). This means that gender is an action which must be carried out. She went further to say that what constitutes gender is the "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 191). What one does over a long period of time and repeatedly. These are ways one is being recognized as "female" or "male". Thus over the years and as a result of repeated acts, male gender seem to exert influence and conspicuously dominate the female gender. This was what resulted in gender inequalities and feminist struggle.

Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination against people because of their sexes or sexual orientation. When people begin to differentiate between the types of treatments, rights etc that should be given to a male child and the one to be given to a female child, it is called sexism. It is the general belief amongst men generally that they are more superior to their female counterparts and as such should be regarded as a superior being. This should be seen as an unfair treatment and should be highly discouraged. One can easily trace this discrimination down to history and it should also be noted that it was a decision made by man himself and of which the female folks are still suffering the injustice till date. Sexism remains the earliest form of oppression. hooks (1982) noting this said:

In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism that is, patriarchy formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women.

Sexism was one of the leftovers by white colonial masters in African culture. They brought it with them when they started showing disparities between a male slave and a female slave. The disparities continued even when they were gone and it entrenched in our culture institutionalized patriarchy that has eaten deep. Men are seen as superior to women. This one of the reason why social inequalities exist in our culture till date. In *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, hooks asks for a new definition of feminism, one that does not only fight for the equality of women and men but a movement that fights to end sexist oppression and exploitation without neglecting other forms of oppression such as racism, classism, imperialism and others. Each of these forms of oppression are interrelated and inseparably connected to each other through interlocking webs of oppression (hooks 1984, 31). This shows that sexism as an instrument of oppression does not stand on its own but

introduce other categories of oppression like the ones aforementioned. T. Biana (2020) noted that through the interrelatedness of various oppressions, hooks proposes a framework for evaluating culture, which starts off with the black working class experience and invites everyone to examine common representations and images through interrogation techniques such as oppositional gazing (hooks 1992,122) and border-crossing (hooks 2006, 6). These representations are accordingly motivated, and they reinforce systems of domination. Hazel continued by saying that “Her notion of interlocking webs of oppression is connected to “intersectionality”, an important conceptualization in today’s feminist circles”. When one refers to himself or herself as a feminist, he or she must not neglect discussing intersectionality”.

Intersectionality

The theory of Intersectional oppression was first coined in 1989 by the African-American lawyer Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in her seminar papers titled “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color”. Crenshaw, collected and systematized black feminist critiques of feminist theory which focused on women as an undifferentiated social category, something which in reality represented the interests and needs of white, middle-class women. Feeling relegated by white feminists' lack of sensitivity to their specific oppression, the African-American feminist group Combahee River in their Collective Statement issued in (1977) drew attention early on to the need to address the differences between women. In their famous manifesto, the group defined intersectionality as a political position committed to the liberation of black women, defining it as the aim of their struggle.

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

Denying their obvious existence also connotes denying the daily oppression and subjugation they were being subjected to by their white colonial masters hooks noting this said :

No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group "women" in this culture. When black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgement of the interests of black women; when women are talked about racism militates against a recognition of black female interests. When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men* and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women.

Crenshaw in her paper “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color” (2005) continued to provide legal analysis of cases of discrimination against black women, was of the opinion that the term be used as a means of addressing the marginalization of African American women in both anti-discrimination legislation and feminist and anti-racist theory and policy. The notion of considering *race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis*, that is, to make use of analytical perspectives which do not reflect the interaction between the systems that generate oppression and privilege, results in making invincible those social positions marked by multiple oppressions. Adopting an intersectional view for Crenshaw is an imperative benchmark in the fight for human rights and social justice, given that we require frames that allow us to appreciate the social problems of all members of a given group (male and female). This is necessary where those who are least protected are also those who are most marginalized by the systems of oppression. Intersectionality makes sure that all receives fair justice and at equal margin. The bad experiences of the most privileged members in each social category is the one that tends to

be more visible, and discussed extensively while that of the minority doesn't seem to receive any attention at all. This was the case of the white women and the black women in America those days. Black women were excluded from feminist theory in cases of sexual discrimination, for example, in which the subject of reference is a white woman. The white woman receives privileges within the racial system and class structure in the society. . At the same time, when it comes to politics, the subject given much visibility is the black male. It was as if the female slave does not exist at all.

Crenshaw gave an example when she cited the case of Emma DeGraffenreid, one of five black women who in 1976 sued General Motors for discrimination, alleging that the company was excluding black women. Emma's case was dismissed by the Court, on the grounds that, as the company hired women (white, for administrative positions), the company did not discriminate on grounds of gender and, as it also hired black people (men, for industrial work), nor did it engage in racial discrimination. However, the real problem, which the judge was unwilling to acknowledge, was what Emma was actually trying to prove: that black women, as a group were affected by two systems of discrimination. Despite being doubly affected, however, she received no attention from either group: neither from the markedly masculine civil rights movement, nor from an American feminist movement led mostly by affluent white women. Crenshaw noted that

Such exclusion cannot be resolved by simply embedding black women within already-established analytical structures. Given that the intersectional experience is more than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis which does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the specific subordination of black women

Lucas Platero (2014) has developed the concept of intersectionality as “a critical pedagogy concerning social identities”. It is an approach that situates social categories such as gender, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation as social constructions which, far from being “natural” or “biological”, are contrived, and makes us aware of the mutual relations between the different sources of structural inequality (e.g. that capitalism is intrinsically racialized and *gendered*). It invites us to consider the processes through which certain attributes or identities may be considered deviant and the object of marginalization in certain contexts. It casts its gaze over the social construction of inequalities, and as such focuses on the laws, institutions and administrative bodies complicit in inequality. Davis, K (2008) noted that:

contemporary feminism – the long and painful legacy of its ‘Intersectionality’ addresses the most central theoretical and Normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women ... This is because it touches on the most pressing problem facing exclusions.³⁰

Davis continued further in showing intersectionality provides a theoretical consideration of the privileges and strategies (conscious or otherwise) of dominant groups, through which their position of supremacy is preserved, moving away from the traditional focus of the social sciences and social movements on oppression. As such, intersectional theory challenges us to be aware of ourselves as privileged subjects, that is, ones who have opportunities and advantages over others who do not benefit from the hierarchization of social identities ingrained in the capitalist, Eurocentric, colonial system that introduced the inequalities that produce oppression. Armed with the above structures, one can then join hands together and demand an end to sexism which is equally an end to gender wars. This is a call for liberation.

Feminists Consciousness

One is not born a feminist but becomes a feminist. Becoming a feminist has to do with reawakening of one's consciousness to the fact that there is so much ado about something. It is this notion about oppression in the society that made many African feminist writers tilt towards bridging the gap between both genders and advocating for positive and progressive traditional values, commitment and

understanding between men and women. Catherine Acholonu gave her own alternative to western feminism. In her book, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, Catherine Acholonu said that Africa's alternative to Western feminism is Motherism. Motherism to her is composed of motherhood, nature, and nurture. This attributes rightly defines the nature of a woman and everything she represents in African culture. When defined, Motherism is a multidimensional theory that involves the "dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother nature at all levels of human endeavor." A mother is someone who is committed to the survival and maintenance of Mother Earth and someone who embraces the human struggle. Acholonu makes it clear, though, that a mother' could be a woman or a man. This is her own way in uniting both sex together to fight their common enemy. Motherism has no sex barriers because at the core of motherism is partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding, and patience. In order for motherism to work, there must be a male-female complementarity that ensures the wholeness of human existence in a balanced ecosystem Feminist consciousness embodies self-awareness, a better perception of one's identity, a recognition of one's potentials, which leads to a better understanding of self and the issues that affect one's life physically and psychologically (Nutsukpo, Margaret Fafa:2017). Armed with the knowledge of the operational structure in the society affecting both men and women , there is need for everyone to reawaken our inner man. Victory for one means victory for all. hooks also outlined various ways of raising feminist consciousness and they are:

1. Communication.

Communication and dialogue were central agenda's at the consciousness-raising sessions. In many groups a policy was in place which honored everyone's voice. Women took turns speaking to make sure everyone would be heard. This attempt to create a non-hierarchical model for discussion positively gave every woman a chance to speak but often did not create a context for engaged dialogue. However, in most instances discussion and debate occurred, usually after everyone had spoken at least once. Argumentative discussion was common in CR groups as it was the way we sought to clarify our collective understanding of the nature of male domination. Only through discussion and disagreement could we begin to find a realistic standpoint on gender exploitation and oppression

2. Creation of academic outlets

The creation of women's studies as an academic discipline provided another setting where women could be informed about feminist thinking and feminist theory. Many of the women who spearheaded the introduction of women's studies classes into colleges and universities had been radical activists in civil rights struggles, gay rights, and early feminist movement. Many of them did not have doctorates, which meant that they entered academic institutions receiving lower pay and working longer hours than their colleagues in other disciplines. By the time younger graduate students joined the effort to legitimize feminist scholarship in the academy we knew that it was important to gain higher degrees. Most of us saw our commitment to women's studies as political action; we were prepared to sacrifice in order to create an academic base for feminist movement

3. Feminist literature.

Producing a body of feminist literature coupled with the demand for the recovery of women's history was one of the most powerful and successful interventions of contemporary feminism. In all spheres of literary writing and academic scholarship works by women had historically received little or no attention as a consequence of gender discrimination. Remarkably, when feminist movement exposed biases in curriculum, much of this forgotten and ignored work was rediscovered. The formation of women's studies and programs in colleges and universities provided institutional legitimization for academic focus on work by women. Following in the waken of black studies; women's studies became the place where one could learn about gender, about women, from a non-biased perspective. Contrary to popular stereotypes, professors in women's studies classes did not and do not trash work by men; we intervene on sexist thinking by showing that women's work is often just as good, as interesting, if not more so, as work by men. So-called great literature by men is critiqued only to show the biases present in the assessment of aesthetic value. I have never taken a women's studies course or heard about one where works by men were deemed unimportant or irrelevant. Feminist critiques of all-male canons of scholarship or literary work expose biases based on gender. Importantly, these exposures were central to making a place for the recovery of women's work and a contemporary place

for the production of new work by and about women. Feminist movement gained momentum when it found its way into the academy. In classrooms all over the nation young minds were able to learn about feminist thinking, read the theory, and use it

4. Recognizing the enemy within

That foundation rested on our critique of what we then called "the enemy within," referring to our internalized sexism. We all knew firsthand that we had been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon each other with jealousy, fear, and hatred. Sexist thinking made us judge each other without compassion and punish one another harshly. Feminist thinking helped us unlearn female self-hatred. It enabled us to break free of the hold patriarchal thinking had on our consciousness. Male bonding was an accepted and affirmed aspect of patriarchal culture. It was simply assumed that men in groups would stick together, one another, be team players, place the good of the group over individual gain and recognition. Female bonding was not possible within patriarchy; it was an act of treason. Feminist movement created the context for female bonding. We did not bond against men, we bonded to protect our interests as women. When we challenged professors who taught no books by women, it was not because we did not like those professors (we often did); rightly, we wanted an end to gender biases in the classroom and in the curriculum.

5. Feminist consciousness-raising for males is as essential to revolutionary movement as female groups

Had there been an emphasis on groups for males that taught boys and men about what sexism is and how it can be transformed, it would have been impossible for mass media to portray the movement as anti-male. It would also have preempted the formation of an anti-feminist men's movement. Often men's groups were formed in the wake of contemporary feminism that in no way addressed the issues of sexism and male domination. Like the lifestyle-based feminism aimed at women these groups often became therapeutic settings for men to confront their wounds without a critique of patriarchy or a platform of resistance to male domination. Future feminist movement will not make this mistake. Males of all ages need settings where their resistance to sexism is affirmed and valued. Without males as allies in struggle feminist movement will not progress.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Society has placed us in a precarious class positions that controls everything we do. As a result of this, we are in constant war with each other especially the war that exist between a man and a woman. There is every need that we end all forms of injustice by ending all forms of sexism, classism, ethnicism that is existing amongst us. These as we had earlier noted are the factors of oppression. Men and women should join hands together in stopping class exploitation, eliminating any form of oppression and actively work to challenge and change class elitism. The only way we can do this is if we love one another. Patriarchal structure has done nothing other than putting both gender at each other throat and in a constant war with each other. Hooks advocates for both genders coming together in fighting the structure that has introduced class system among them. They can only do so if they learn to love more instead of hating more. We should all long to live in a world without racism, sexism, homophobia, imperialism, and exploitation. Rather than dismiss this ideal condition as an unattainable dream, hooks lauds it as a necessary collective desire, because the "shared space and feeling" might function as a site of "common ground" and potential transformation. But, without love, this anticipated sociopolitical shift may prove elusive. Yancy (168) quoting hook said that:

If contemporary society were to genuinely embrace the love ethic, she writes, our culture's apathy toward domestic violence, unemployment, and homelessness would give way to compassionate attention. She further explains how the implementation of the love ethic could transform not only public policy, but also the lives of individuals whose realities are largely over determined by the dynamics of class, race, and gender. In short, love, the potential salve for our nation's yearning, could "affect the good of everyone.

Yancy continued that If, as hooks told us, “we cannot effectively resist domination if our efforts to create meaningful, lasting personal and social change are not grounded in a love ethic,” then people—across distinctions of colour, class, and gender—must embrace it to know true political freedom. Striking a prophetic note, hooks urgently argues that love is our salvation: the life raft that our society, mired in despair and discontent, must grab hold of and cling to. When love leads, people can unite together to confront a common enemy.

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