

The Impact of Afro-Centric Perspective in Africana Womanism Exposed in the Works of Clenora Hudson Weems

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Abstract

This paper explores and analyses Africana womanism presented by Clenora Hudson weems. Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately prioritizes race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk. Africana womanism is a term coined in the late 1980s by Clenora Hudson-Weems intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women of the African diaspora. It distinguishes itself from feminism, or Alice Walker womanism. Africana womanism pays more attention to and focuses more on the realities and the injustices in society in regard to race. African men and women do not accept the ideology of feminism. Africana woman does not see the man as her primary enemy as does the white feminist, who is carrying out an age-old battle with her white male counterpart for subjugating her as his property. African men have never had the same institutionalized power to oppress African women as white men have had to oppress white women. Africana womanist ideology contributes to Afrocentric discourse. Africana womanism fundamental foundation is built on traditional Africana philosophy and values and on Afrocentric theories:

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Some of the traditional values forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the ancient Maatic principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness, order, and so forth. All this will be discussed in detail in the paper.

Keywords

Africana Womanism, Black feminism, Afro centrism, African descent.

Introduction

Africana Womanism is an authentic theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent. It is family centered, rather than female centered, and advocates race empowerment, rather than female empowerment. It, then, appropriately prioritizes race, class and gender, as Black men and women have the ultimate responsibility of securing family survival and thus, cannot afford the luxury of gender exclusivity when the whole race is at risk. The 18 distinct characteristics of Africana Womanism are: Self-Namer, Self-Definer, Family Centered, Genuine in Sisterhood, Strong, in Concert with Male in Struggle, Whole, Authentic, Flexible Role Player, Respected, Recognized, Spiritual, Male Compatible, Respectful of Elders, Adaptable, Ambitious, Mothering and Nurturing.

Africana womanism is a term coined in the late 1980s by Clenora Hudson-Weems. Intended as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women of the African diaspora. It distinguishes itself from feminism, or Alice Walker's womanism. Africana womanism pays more attention to and focuses more on the realities and the injustices in society in regard to race. Hudson-Weems sought to create an ideology specific to African women and women of African descent. Hudson-Weems believes that the creation of the ideology separates African women's accomplishments from African male scholars, feminism, and Black feminism. The Africana Womanism Society lists 18 characteristics of the *Africana womanist*, including being self-naming, self-defining, family-centered, flexible, and desiring positive male companionship.

Dating back to the inception of Africana Womanism in the mid-1980s, out of which the Africana Womanism Trilogy ("Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves", 1993; "Africana Womanist Literary Theory", 2004; "Africana Womanism & Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama", 2008-9), etc. have evolved, the concept has given voice to the call for Africana men and women to collectively and amicably work together, with God in

front, for ultimate human survival, beginning with the family. This subject continues to be a nucleus for serious debates relative to Black life globally, as it places up front our quest for workable solutions to problems confronting our current and future survival as a people.

This past October, the 1st International Council of Africana Womanism (ICAW) Conference convened at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, Zimbabwe, initiated and coordinated by Dr. Itai Muwati, Professor Zifiikile Gambahaya, Tavengwa Gwekwerere, and Ruby Magosvongwe. Supported by the entire university community, the conference was officially launched by the charismatic awe-inspiring University Choir and was witnessed by approximately 500 attendees. There were over 60 presenters representing faculty and administrators, such as deans from institutions in Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa and the United States. Other speakers included the Honorable Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Joice Mujuru, and the Honorable Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Dr. Olivia Muchena.

All of the topics on Africana Womanism were very engaging, provocative, compelling, and timely. The culminating awards ceremony recognized twelve honorees (6 from Zimbabwe; 6 from the United States). Africana Womanism evokes the concept of Afrocentricity, conceptualized by Dr. Molefe Kete Asante, professor and founding chair of the Department of African Studies at Temple U, and which places Africa at the center of all analysis for African life, history and culture. This echoes the seminal principles set forth by Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and former chair of Africana Studies at California State University-Long Beach, in his creation of Kwanzaa, the first African American holiday celebration. It was Dr. Karenga who first suggested in the 1990s the need for a national Africana Womanism Conference, which took some time, but which ultimately came to fruition. The list of international Africana Womanist supporters include Africana women scholars such as Dr. Barbara Wheeler, professor of Anthropology and former chair of Africana Studies at Kean University; Dr. Delores Aldridge, Grace T. Hamilton Professor of Sociology and Africana Studies at Emory University; and Dr. Pamela D. Reed, columnist for *Diverse Issues of Higher Education* and professor of English at Virginia State University.

Let's reclaim, reexamine and reincorporate our rich legacy of authentic collectivity, leadership, integrity and accountability for the success and survival of our people. We cannot afford the luxury of postponing our destiny. "Sankofa!" – Go back and fetch the lessons of our past. The poem "Africana Womanism: 'I Got Your Back, Boo' sums up the concept of Africana Womanism. *Don't you know by now, girl, we're all in it together?*

Family-Centrality—that's it; we're going nowhere without the other.

That means the men, the women, and children, too,

Truly collectively working—"I got your back, Boo."

Racism means the violation of our constitutional rights,

Which can create on-going legal and even physical fights;

This 1st priority for humankind is doing what it must do,

Echoing our 1st lady, Michelle—"I got your back, Boo."

Classism is the hoarding of financial privileges,

Privileges we must all have now in pursuit of happiness.

Without a piece of the financial pie, we're doomed to have a coup,

Remember, each must protect the other—"I got your back, Boo."

Sexism, the final abominable sin of female subjugation,

Is a battle we must wage right now to restore our family relations.

All forms of sin fall under one of these three (racism/classism/sexism) offenses;

Africana Womanism—"I got your back, Boo"—corrects our common senses.

The Africana womanist concept was best exemplified in Brenda Verner's (1994) article "The Power and Glory of Africana Womanism": Africana Womanism in essence says: We love men. We like being women. We love children. We like being mothers. We value life. We have faith in God and the Bible. We want families and harmonious relationships. We are not at war with our men seeking money, power and influence through confrontation. Our history is unique. We are the inheritors of African-American women's history, and as such we shall not redefine ourselves nor that history to meet some politically correct image of a popular culture movement, which demands the right to speak for and redefine the morals and mores of all racial, cultural and ethnic groups. Nor shall we allow the history to be "shanghied" to legitimize the "global political agenda" of others. We reject the status of victim. Indeed, we are victors, Sisters in Charge of our own destiny. We are Africana culture-keepers: Our primary obligation is to the progress of our cultural way of life through the stability of family and the commitment to community. The practice of cultural womanism is not limited to Africana women. Italian, Japanese, Hispanic, East Indian, Arab, Jewish women, etc., all utilize this approach to decision-making, and know the value of maintaining indigenous cultural autonomy. The rite of passing generation-to-generation knowledge free from outside

manipulation, coercion or intimidation insures traditional integrity, which fosters a climate of cultural security. Traditional cultures should not be obligated to bow to redefinitions foisted upon them by elitist entities that gain their authority via the drive of well-organized "media hype."

Conclusion

Drawing on the tenets of Africana womanism, Clenora Hudson-Weems extends the theoretical framework to literary analysis. Such an analysis of Africana literature emphasizes the family, complementarity between men and women, and commitment to the survival and liberation of the community as a whole. In her text, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*, Hudson-Weems explores select Africana novels in order to offer Africana womanist interpretations. Five Africana Womanist novels: Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Hudson-Weems states that the character Janie is a protagonists to name and define herself.

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