

***Feminist African Philosophy: Women and the Politics of Difference* by Abosede Priscilla Ipadeola. Routledge Studies in African Philosophy. New York: Routledge, 2023.**

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Abosede Ipadeola's *Feminist African Philosophy* is a compact book which offers insights into a hitherto under-researched area of African Philosophy. It is presented as a text big enough to educate and small enough to be read for both leisure and research. The main focus of the book is decolonising African feminism within the field of African Philosophy. The author addresses the exclusion, defamation, degradation, and dehumanisation of African women occasioned by the "maleness" of African Philosophy. It is a careful compendium of well-researched literature, providing a comprehensive analysis of precedents to general readers and beginners. At the same time, it contains a set of critical reflections for established scholars.

Ipadeola's ability to read deeper meanings into texts affirms her depth as a philosopher. She questions several gaps left by ethnophilosophers, philosophical sages, nationalist ideological philosophers, and professional philosophers. She traces these to the ideas of "man of reason," "gender of power," "heroes," and "fathers" which undergirded Western Philosophy and spilled over into African Philosophy by virtue of colonialism. Indeed, the author attempts to fill in the gaps and write women into African Philosophy. She does this by discussing selected concepts and ideologies, calling out eminent philosophers for their omissions or commissions. Ipadeola responds to identified gaps by offering the missing link, which she describes as "Feminist African Philosophy" (FAP). For her, African feminist philosophers are saddled with three main tasks:

First, to look for biases against women in the cardinal branches of philosophy; second, to "draw on philosophical concepts and theories, to articulate different feminist claims and political position[s]" (70); and third, to find a home for feminist issues and concepts in philosophy. She describes feminism as

alienated from philosophy – an observation made by earlier scholars (although not so pronounced in African Philosophy). By spotlighting how both women and men experience “same disaster, but different societal demands” (65), the debate on whether Africa does gender or not continues among scholars. However, Ipadeola’s kernel of the discourse is to mandate feminist philosophers who are also Africans to take on the task of revealing where feminist philosophy has failed to address the challenges faced by African women and where African Philosophy has equally failed to take the same into cognisance.

Most fascinating is Ipadeola’s discussion of Chimakonam’s conversational philosophical method in Chapter One. Conversational philosophical method calls for epistemic agents to adopt the dialectical tool or debatement to examine philosophical issues that engender a “creative struggle” that births different positions, ideas, perspectives, and concepts. However, Chimakonam’s assertion that the outcome of conversational philosophical method must operate “above petty considerations like “gender, race, or indeed any form of clannish mindset”” (46) complicates its relevance. This should have been Ipadeola’s starting point, rather than postponing “the tincture of gender bias by each school of thought” to another chapter (46) and starting with unpacking conceptions of African Philosophy. Describing gender as “petty” suffices as justification for an African feminist philosophical discourse and should have been an entry point for Ipadeola, having herself later described Odera Oruka’s (1990) philosophical sagacity as one that maintains “the petty patriarchal culture” (81).

In Chapter Two, Ipadeola writes, “African feminists are therefore at the crossroads of either aligning their narratives and ideas with their ‘sisters’ in other parts of the world, or defining their unique kind of feminism showing what is ‘African’ in their narrative if it does not fall in line with the dominant narratives on the continent (and which are some of the ideas which undergird women’s exclusion from important social domains)” (52). I believe that this statement appears rather late in the book because African feminism itself is a decisive effort to unpack the intersectional nature of feminism. Consequently, I do not agree with her deduction that “African feminism(s) is faced with the dilemma of difference, similarity, and diversity – the question of identity” (52). In the first place, African feminist scholarship in the last three decades has done justice to the issue of identity. Therefore, anyone who identifies as an African feminist

has already traversed those crossroads of alignment or dealignment with global feminist discourses.

Chapter Three highlights various schools of thought and the inherent androcentrism within African proverbs, politics, and marriage among other systems. However, the author seems not to acknowledge fully African feminist scholarship on literary works: “African philosophy through African literature holds promise for women’s liberation if it critiques the image of the woman documented by the literary writers. . . . This way, African literature would be able to contribute to important discourses in African philosophy” (87). This assertion gives the wrong impression that African feminists have not been engaging with literary criticism. This unjustified conclusion ignores their numerous works of literary engagements, including the monumental four-volume project, *Women Writing Africa*.

The author proceeds in Chapter Four to discuss mainstreaming gender issues in African Philosophy. There, she presents a long stretch of about six pages discussing decolonisation before providing its definition. The latter part of the chapter then presents the core of the book, in a disappointingly paltry two-page analysis. Although the remaining chapters were written with the intention of situating FAP in each issue discussed, the author could have situated it more effectively by providing the theoretical foundations of the movement in a more comprehensive presentation, rather than infusing it into existing bodies of work. This strategy worked in earlier chapters. However, more should have been done in Chapter Five to simplify and clarify the concept and idea of FAP, as well as its nature, forms, challenges, and prospects.

With the author’s declaration that FAP does what African Philosophy does, and by extension encourages African philosophers to perform their tasks in a gender-sensitive fashion, I think the theory seeks better definitions, clarifications, and identity. What does FAP include and/or exclude? Who may use FAP in their theorising? What would FAP be doing differently from existing bodies of African feminist theorising? The answers sought to these questions would determine how FAP would be better engaged either as a feminist theoretical framework or as a feminist methodological tool.

Fundamental to decolonisation is the capacity and tenacity to name and shame. Ipadeola's effort with postulating FAP is quite commendable; I dare say that she has displayed the required courage for decolonisation by naming the concept and bringing it into the limelight. On this note, FAP should not be discussed in a future tense as one that "hopes to correct the deep-seated gender disparity..." (105). FAP seems to capture previous works of African feminist philosophers, of which the author is perhaps also unaware. Since books are written in relation to prior research, it is troubling that the author asserts that "no attention has been paid to the art of mothering as essential to the realization of decolonization in contemporary Africa" (100). Many key works related to Ipadeola's topics of discussion are not considered. For example, Sylvia Tamale's (2020) book, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* which extensively discusses issues of decolonisation/decoloniality of knowledge production, offering suggestions of ways that the philosophy of *Ubuntu* could be redeployed by African feminists to achieve gender justice, is not mentioned at all. Also, concepts such as "femocracy" (Mama 1995), "extractivism" in feminist African contexts (Pereira and Tsikata 2021), "STIWANISM" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994), "Womanism" (Ogunyemi 1985), "detrimental agency" (Omotoso and Ogbebor 2023), and "feminized corruption" (Omotoso 2023), among others, are evidence that FAP has been in existence in letter and spirit. Perhaps the omission is a result of the fact that these concepts emanate from literature not domiciled primarily in philosophy. In essence, one is also curious about the status that FAP would assume in relation to previous works of African feminism. How do we teach FAP? Is it only to be discussed within the confines of African Philosophy?

Ipadeola's consciousness of the need to provide a philosophical basis for every argument complicates each chapter. Her background in philosophy explains why she complicates the issues with details, making it difficult for general readers to grasp the subject at an initial glance. The power of feminist studies lies in its ability to transcend disciplinary boundaries. Socially robust knowledge should move beyond disciplinary boundaries, with emphasis on broader contextualisation and public accountability. While Ipadeola argues that African Philosophy must incorporate gender issues to be truly representative of the embodiment of African knowledge, she herself betrays a sense of protectiveness by assuming disciplinary integrity.

Overall, however, the book is well researched. The author's finesse for details provides sufficient scholarly information for beginners who might not know the origin of the conversations. Ipadeola succeeds in provoking the academic community to see androcentrism in African Philosophy as woven around the theme of the gender of power. She equally spotlights why feminism is maligned by unwary African philosophers. I therefore recommend the book, first to feminist African philosophers, then to students of African feminism for achieving more rigorous analyses to expound the subject and to provide it with the deserved identity both within African Philosophy and feminist philosophical studies.

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