

POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND CATHERING ACHOLUNU'S MOTHERISM: A PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a philosophical evaluation of Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholunu's Motherism. It explores their theoretical convergences and divergences in redefining womanhood and gender relations. Postmodern feminism challenges the universal notions of "woman" constructed by modernist and Western ideologies. It emphasizes plurality, deconstruction, and the fluidity of identity. In contrast, Catherine Acholunu's Motherism advances an African-centered ideology that celebrates motherhood, nature, and communal harmony as the foundation of gender relations and social progress. This study critically examines how Motherism reclaims African womanhood from the dominance of Western feminist narratives, offering an alternative philosophy rooted in cultural, spiritual, and ecological consciousness. Through a comparative analysis, the paper argues that while both frameworks critique patriarchy and promote women's empowerment, they differ in their ontological and epistemological orientations: postmodern feminism thrives on relativism and fragmentation, whereas Motherism upholds unity and nurturing as metaphysical principles. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Motherism provides a more holistic and culturally grounded vision of gender complementarity, contributing significantly to the global discourse on feminism from an African philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, a subtle combination of both ideas under discussion can create a fair, peaceful, and balanced understanding of gender and equality in both Africa and the wider world.

Keywords: Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, Motherism, Catherine Acholunu's Motherism.

Introduction

The history of human civilization depicts man's attempt to dominate and conquer the universe. This quest to conquer the universe is manifested in his various spheres of life. In the area of science, for instance, man has recorded numerous discoveries and invention. From the social dimension, there are cases of superiority complex and domination of one nation, tribe, gender with the effects of oppression and degradation by another group. A more vivid instance of superiority complex is the sociological ideology of gender inequality. It is the assumption that men are naturally superior to women, hence in some societies, women are described as the weaker sex. However, the consequence being that "women are marginalized, oppressed, trampled upon, suppressed, derided, and often time overtly enslaved" (Acholonu 1).

Nevertheless, feminists like Catherine Acholonu, have challenged masculine-feminine dichotomy as it is defined in western thought. Acholonu in her book argues that "gender in Africa is not a biological concept but a social construct which changes as the individual progresses in life." She emerges as a response to Western feminist models that were seen as alien to African cultural realities. Acholonu introduced *Motherism* as an alternative form of feminism rooted in motherhood, nature, communal values and spirituality. The philosophical evaluation of postmodern feminism reveals a profound dialogue between Western and African feminist thought. While both challenge patriarchal structures and advocate for the empowerment of women, they diverge in their ontological foundations. Hence, this work aims to examine how both frameworks redefine womanhood, gender relations and the quest for liberation via their respective cultural and intellectual contexts. By doing so, the research contributes to ongoing discourse on decolonizing feminist thought and promoting an inclusive understanding of gender theory that reflects both global and African perspective.

Feminist thought has evolved through various stages, from liberal to radical feminism to postmodern and African feminist theories. However, these frameworks often emerge from different cultural and philosophical backgrounds. Postmodern feminism, which challenges universal notions of gender identity emphasizes diversification and womanhood, with the rejection of one single definition of womanhood, while Motherism builds womanhood around motherhood and African culture. This creates a philosophical question: Can the experiences of African women be explained through Postmodern Feminism, or does Motherism provide a more suitable and unique African perspective? Therefore, this study examines both theories in order to find where they agree, and where they disagree, and where they work together and where they are different from each other.

It also examines and evaluates the philosophical relationship between Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's concept of Motherism. It aims to explore how both theories respond to issues of womanhood, identity, and liberation within their distinct cultural and philosophical frameworks. Specifically, the study seeks to identify their points of convergence and divergence, assess their underlying

assumptions about gender and society, and highlight the relevance of Motherism as an African-centered alternative to Western feminist paradigms. The research intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of how feminist thought can be contextualized within African philosophy and culture.

This study focuses on a philosophical evaluation of Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's theory of Motherism. It examines the central ideas, principles, and objectives of both movements, particularly in their understanding of womanhood, identity, and social transformation. It also explores the points of convergence and divergence between Postmodern Feminism and Motherism in terms of their philosophical approaches to gender equality. The scope does not extend to empirical or sociological investigations of feminism but remains within the domain of philosophical and conceptual analysis.

Descriptive and analytical methods are employed to look at and compare the main ideas of Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism. The philosophical method of comparative analysis is also used to understand and discuss the main ideas of both theories. The significance of this research lies in its intent to help people understand how women are viewed in both Western and African ideas of feminism. It compares Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism to show their similarities and differences in promoting women's identity and value. The study also gives attention to African views that are often left out in discussions about feminism. It also intends to assist students and researchers in learning more about how African ideas like Motherism, can be used to solve gender problems in today's world.

Explication of Terms

Feminism and Postmodern Feminism

In view of Lardner Denise, Feminism in its most fundamental meaning is conviction and a movement opposed to discrimination on the basis of gender. It opposes, therefore, any ideology, belief, attitude or behavior that reinforces that belief (qtd. in Carmody 11). The ultimate aim of feminism is equality among all gender. Therefore, according to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, feminism is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. On another note, Postmodern feminism is a branch of feminist theory that rejects the idea of a single, universal experience of "woman." It argues that gender, identity, and power are shaped by social, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

Motherism

Motherism is a concept developed by a Nigerian scholar, Catherine Acholonu. It presents an African centered idea of womanhood. It celebrates motherhood, care, nature, and community as foundation of life. According to Acholonu, "Motherism is the Afrocentric alternative to feminism. It is anchored on the principles of mothering, nature, and nurture. It advocates love, understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation between the sexes in the process of building and healing the nation" (111).

Review of Relevant Literatures

This section of our study reviews other notable philosopher's conception of feminism, both the ones that existed prior to Catherine Acholonu and after her. The reason is to make our investigation clearer. It reviews the contributions of John Stuart Mill, Friedrich Engels, Judith Butler and Oyerunke Oyewumi.

On The Subjection of Women is the title of an essay written by John Stuart Mill, which offers detailed arguments on the oppression of women imposed by a patriarchal culture. At the time the book was published in 1869, it was a challenge to European conventional norms or view on the status of men and women. Mill believed that the main cause of women's inequality was not nature, but social customs and tradition. He argued that women were raised and trained to be submissive, not because they were naturally inferior, but because society forced them into that position. According to him, justice demanded that men and women should be given equal rights and opportunities. Here are his words: "All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should rebel against the established system of society" (Mill 5).

Mill also argues on women's suffrage. According to him women make up more than half of the population, thus they have the right to vote since political policies also affect women too. He theorizes that men would vote for people who will continue to support the subjection of women. Therefore, women must also be allowed to vote so as to protect their own right. He claims that under whatever condition, and within whatever limits, men are admitted to the suffrage, there is not a shadow of justification for not admitting women under the same (24). Mill redefined the meaning of marriage. He rejected the idea and claimed that marriage should be a partnership based on friendship, mutual respect and shared responsibility. He also advocated for the reforms of marriage laws whereby it is reduced to a business agreement, placing no restriction on either party.

Engels, a close friend of Karl Marx was one of the modern philosophers who condemned and seriously argued against women's oppression. Although, he did not use the modern term "feminism," but his writing gave the economic and historical foundation for what later became known as "Marxist Feminism." His main ideas about women and gender can be found in the book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Engels argued that women oppression did not naturally exist from the beginning, but changed when society changed from communal living to private property ownership.

In early societies, according to Engels, men and women worked together and shared resources together and equally. But when people started owning properties privately, men took control of wealth, land and inheritance. This change created a power imbalance, whereby men wanted to pass their properties to their sons, thereby controlling their sexuality and marriage. In line with this Engels says: "The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and mere instrument in the production of children"

(87).Engels believed that the family structure under capitalism was designed to support men's control of property.Men became heads of the family because they owned property and wanted their children to inherit them. In this system women became dependent on men economically and the home became a place for unpaid labor for women.

Engels believed that true freedom of women can only come when private property is abolished and women can participate equally in social production (work and economy). In a socialist society a man and a woman would share domestic duties, child care, and work outside the home. There would be no economic dependence between them. For Engels women's freedom was not a moral issue but an economic and social issue.

Judith Butler is one of the most influential philosophers in postmodern philosophy, particularly on matters concerning the understanding of womanhood in the late 20th century. Her famous works, such as *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* challenged traditional feminist ideas on what it means to be a woman. One of Butler's key ideas is gender performativity. She claims that gender is not a stable identity or a natural fact but a repeated performance, a set of actions, behaviors, and expressions that the society expects people to follow. For example; dressing, speaking, or acting in certain feminine or masculine ways are social performances, not expressions of the inner truth. She says that "Gender is not something that one is, it is something one does, an act ... a 'doing' rather than a 'being'" (Butler 25).

Butler also argues for essentialism, that is, the ideas that there is a fixed, natural essence of womanhood shared by all women. She believes that defining a woman by biology, sex, or nature, limits feminism, because it excludes those who do not fit traditional definitions of female. She believes that feminism should not only fight women's right but also challenge the entire system of gender norms that produces inequality and discrimination.

Oyerunke Oyewumi is a Nigerian sociologist and feminist philosopher, and is known for her Afrocentric critique on Western Feminism. Her main argument is that Western feminist ideas do not apply to African societies because they are based on Western cultural assumptions, especially about gender, the body and social organization. Oyewumi argues that Western Feminism is ethnocentric, i.e., it assumes that gender roles and male domination exist in the same way everywhere. She argues that western feminists often claim that all societies are patriarchal and women are oppressed everywhere by men. Oyewumi disagrees, claiming that this view projects Western gender categories onto societies where they did not originally exist. Oyewumi argues that gender is a Western cultural construct that was imported into Africa through colonialism. According to her, "before colonialism, many societies had complementary roles between men and women. The colonial system, along with Christianity and Western education, imposed rigid gender hierarchies and patriarchal structures" (123).

The above scholars agree that women are oppressed by the structure of the society, but each philosopher writes about his/her own general view of feminism based on his/her cultural and social background, without considering the fact that the concept of feminism differs based on different geographical areas and cultural backgrounds. They therefore, fail to give a universal solution to the problem of women's oppression thereby creating more questions on how equity can be achieved between both genders.

Postmodern Philosophy and Feminism

Postmodern Philosophy is a way of thinking that questions the ideas and values of modernity, such as reason, progress, science and universal truth. It argues that truth, meaning and knowledge are not fixed or universal, but constructed by people and cultures in specific times and places. This philosophy influenced many ideologies and thoughts during the middle and late 20th century, especially in the area of culture, post-colonialism, queer theory, theology, feminism, media theory, etc. Major philosopher during this period were Jean-François Lyotard, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, etc.

Postmodern Feminism is a branch of feminist theory that grew out of postmodern philosophy in the late 20th century. It challenges the idea that there is one universal understanding and experience of woman or a single definition of womanhood. Instead, it argues that gender, identity and power are socially constructed, fluid, and shaped by culture, language and history. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "one is not born, rather one becomes a woman" (28).

Historical Development of Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern feminism evolved from different eras of advocacy for women's liberation. The first wave of women liberation movement started in the context of bourgeoisie revolution, particularly, the American and French revolution of 1776 and 1789 respectively. But in the late 1960's, which was the period when the term "Second Wave" arose out of the civil right and the anti-war movement in which oppression and liberation became the key words for the political activists. These are the different eras of feminist theory which led to the rise of postmodern feminism:

In the era of Classical Feminism (18th–19th Century), Early Feminists like John Stuart Mill argued for women's equality based on reason and universal rights. They believed that if women had access to education and freedom, they could achieve the same as men. Similarly, Second-Wave Feminism (1960s–1980s) championed by the likes of Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949) and Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*, 1963) focused on women's liberation and social equality. They often spoke about women as a single group with shared oppression.

"Postmodern Feminism" came to limelight from 1980s till date. During this period, Feminists influenced by postmodernism, such as: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard began to question the idea of a universal female identity. They argued that not all women share the same experience. Thus,

postmodern feminism emerged to deconstruct those fixed categories and give space to difference, plurality, and diversity.

Core Ideas of Postmodern Feminism

Rejection of Universal Womanhood – Postmodern Feminists reject the idea that there is one single meaning of woman. They argue that the category, woman itself is a social construct created through language and culture. Women's experiences differ by race, class, sexuality, culture, and history. According to Julia Kristeva "one is not born a woman, one becomes one, but that varies infinitely; it is not a universal question but a process without guarantee" (191).

Genders as a Social Construction – Postmodern Feminists argue that gender is not natural, but something constructed through culture, language, and social practices. People learn what it means to be male or female through social norms, not biology. Gender is performed, people do gender through speech, dress, and behavior.

Plurality and Difference – Postmodern feminism celebrates difference in voices. It argues that feminism should include the experiences of non-Western women, black women, queer women, and poor women. This idea connects strongly to African feminist theories like *Motherism* (propounded by Catherine Acholonu) and *Stiwanism* (of Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie).

Critique of Essentialism – Essentialism is the belief that women have some natural or inherent qualities like nurturing or being too emotional. Postmodern feminism rejects this, arguing that such traits are cultural expectations, not biological facts.

Philosophical Foundation of Motherism

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu's concept of Motherism is rooted in an African philosophical worldview that values life, nature, community, and motherhood as the basis of human existence and social harmony. It emerged as a response to Western feminism, which Acholonu saw as alien to African cultural realities and values. In this worldview, life is seen as interconnected: humans, nature, and the spiritual world. The mother, as the giver and nurturer of life, symbolizes this unity. Thus, Motherism is founded on the philosophy of understanding, cooperation, and harmony rather than conflict between genders. Here are different ideas associated with the concept of Motherism:

Ontology of Life and Nature – Motherism sees motherhood not only as a biological function but as a way of being. It represents the life-giving, nurturing, and sustaining power of nature. Philosophically, this connects to the African idea that one becomes fully human only through relationships with others and with nature. "Motherism is the Afrocentric alternative to feminism. It is anchored on the principles of motherhood, nature, nurture, and the survival of the family and community. It is a philosophy of life that sees the mother as the symbol of tolerance, patience, love, and mutual coexistence" (Acholonu 111).

Ethics of Care and Complementarity – A major philosophical foundation of Motherism is its ethics of care. Unlike Western feminism that often emphasizes individual autonomy and struggle against patriarchy, Motherism emphasizes mutual respect, love, and co-operation between men and women. The complementary relationship between male and female is viewed as essential for peace and development.

Eco-Spiritual Philosophy – Motherism also has an eco-philosophical dimension. It regards the earth as a living mother deserving of care and respect. Acholonu connects the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, suggesting that true liberation involves restoring harmony between humanity and the natural world. Thus, Motherism stands as both a feminist and an eco-spiritual philosophy.

Cultural Nationalism – Philosophically, Acholonu's Motherism is also a project of cultural reclamation. It asserts African identity and values in the face of colonial and Western dominance. She insists that African women's liberation must grow from African traditions, not imported ideologies. Hence, Motherism becomes a way for Africans to interpret womanhood and social change through their own cultural lens.

Origin of Motherism

Motherism is an African feminist ideology developed by Dr. Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, a Nigerian scholar, writer, and philosopher. The concept was formally introduced in her 1995 book titled *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*. Acholonu proposed Motherism as an indigenous African alternative to Western feminism, which she believed did not fully reflect African cultural realities or values. She coined the term "Motherism" in response to what she saw as the Western feminist movement's focus on gender conflict and individualism. Instead, she rooted her philosophy in the African worldview that emphasizes communalism, motherhood, nature, and harmony between men and women.

Central Themes of Motherism

Motherhood as the Core of African Womanhood: Motherism centers the biological and spiritual role of the mother as the foundation of African society. Acholonu sees motherhood not just as childbearing, but as a symbol of creativity, nurture, and continuity of life and culture. She claims that motherhood is supreme among all virtues of a woman. Chinua Achebe illustrates the supremacy of motherhood symbolized by the popular Igbo name "Nneka," in his novel: *Things Fall Apart*, demonstrating how conflict with this primordial essence destroys the hero, Okonkwo.

Cooperation, not Competition: Unlike Western feminism that often emphasizes gender struggle, Motherism stresses cooperation between men and women. Both sexes are seen as partners in nation-building and custodians of life, not rivals.

Nature and Nurture: Motherism is deeply eco-conscious. It links women's nurturing role with care for the earth and environment, viewing nature as a mother that sustains all beings. The protection of nature parallels the protection of humanity.

Spirituality and African Cultural Values: Acholonu grounds her ideas in African cosmology and spirituality, where motherhood represents divine creativity and moral guidance. The African society, though patriarchal in socio-political organization, is indeed matriarchal in spiritual organizations. This can be found in different African societies ranging from the Ashanti in Ghana, who dedicated every Thursday to the worship of the earth goddess called the *Assae Yaa*, to the Igbos who worship the Earth goddess *Ala*, and the Uruan people of the Ibibio tribe who acknowledges the female goddess *AtakpoInyang* as their supreme deity. Parrinder views *Ala* as the "goddess of fertility and the guardian of justice, both other human and the spiritual world" (78).

Catherine Acholonu's Critique of Western Philosophy

Catherine Acholonu, in her book, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism*, criticizes Western philosophy for the way it has shaped people's thinking, culture, and gender roles. She believes that Western ideas do not fit African life and values. Through Motherism, Acholonu presents a new African way of thinking that values life, motherhood, and peace between men and women.

Acholonu says that Western philosophy focuses too much on individualism – the idea that people should live for themselves and seek personal success. She argues that this way of thinking makes people selfish and separates them from their communities. In African culture, people live and grow through their relationships with others. Community, care, and cooperation are more important than personal gain. Motherism supports this African belief that we exist through one another.

Another problem Acholonu sees in Western philosophy is its division between opposites, such as mind and body, man and woman, or humans and nature. Western thinkers often see one side as better — for example, men over women or reason over emotion. Acholonu rejects this idea. She believes everything in life is connected and must live in balance. In Motherism, motherhood means caring for life, nature, and humanity. It is both a physical and spiritual act that brings unity and peace.

Acholonu also criticizes the colonial roots of Western philosophy. She says that Western thinkers once described African traditions as backward or uncivilized. This made many Africans lose pride in their culture. Through Motherism, Acholonu wants Africans to value their own way of life and knowledge again. She rejects western feminist theories in their entirety arguing that "western feminism is anti-child, anti-nature, and anti-culture" (81).

Acholonu equally disagrees with Western feminism. She says it often sees men as enemies and focuses too much on conflict between the sexes. But in African culture, men and women are seen as partners who should work together. Motherism teaches cooperation, not competition. Acholonu believes that true progress comes from

harmony between men and women, not from fighting for power. Acholonu's philosophy is in line with Plato's view about how division of labour can be instrumental to the progress of a state. Plato notes that "no two of us are born exactly alike. We have different natural attitudes, which fits us for different jobs" (370).

Catherine Acholonu's Motherism, one can say, is a strong answer to Western philosophy. She rejects the focus of the latter on individualism, separation, and domination. Instead, she calls for an African-centered way of life that values unity, community, and care. For Acholonu, the heart of African philosophy is love, motherhood, and balance between all people and the earth.

Comparative Analysis of Postmodern Feminism and Motherism

This section presents the philosophical evaluation and comparative discussion of Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism. Both theories emerge as responses to patriarchal domination and the marginalization of women, but they differ in their cultural foundations, philosophical assumptions, and goals. Postmodern Feminism is primarily a Western concept that challenges women oppression. Motherism, on the other hand, is an African-centered theory that emphasizes motherhood, nature, and communal balance as the core of female identities. This section analyzes the points of convergence and divergence between the two movements, and evaluates the philosophical strengths and weaknesses of Motherism, while exploring possible grounds for synthesis between both frameworks.

Conceptual Similarities between Postmodern Feminism and Motherism

Though the both ideologies may originate from different culture and background, but they focus on one major aim, which is the liberation of women from patriarchal structures and societal degradation of women. Both Postmodern Feminism and Motherism critique the dominance of patriarchy in shaping social, political, and cultural institutions. They agree that patriarchal systems suppress women's voices and limit their participation in decision-making processes. Postmodern Feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler argue that patriarchy constructs gender hierarchies through language and culture. Similarly, Acholonu contends that patriarchy, introduced and reinforced by colonialism, has distorted African womanhood and eroded indigenous female authority.

Postmodern Feminism rejects fixed categories of "woman" and empowers individuals to define their own identities. Motherism also calls for active participation of women in social reconstruction through nurturing and reconciliation. Liberation, for both theories, involves reclaiming women's dignity and creative power.

A significant point of similarity lies in their embrace of diversity. Postmodern Feminism celebrates multiplicity and rejects the idea of a universal female experience. In a similar vein, Motherism acknowledges the diversity of African women's experiences based on cultural and ecological contexts. Both reject uniform definitions of womanhood.

Postmodern Feminists criticize biological determinism and argue that gender is socially constructed. Although Motherism celebrates motherhood, it does not reduce womanhood solely to biological capacity but presents motherhood as a metaphor for creativity and care. Thus, both theories oppose reductionist views of gender.

Ultimately, both aim at transforming society. Postmodern Feminism does so by deconstructing oppressive narratives, while Motherism seeks to reconstruct communal harmony through mutual respect between genders. Both are revolutionary in intention, envisioning a more inclusive and equitable social order.

Points of Divergence between Postmodern Feminism and Motherism

In as much as the both concepts agree on some points, they still disagree on many foundational ideas. Postmodern Feminism deconstructs identity, asserting that “woman” is not a stable category but a product of discourse. Motherism, conversely, affirms identity through motherhood and spirituality. For Acholonu, womanhood is rooted in nurturing, environmental care, and community building. This fundamental difference defines their contrasting ontologies.

Postmodern Feminism often emphasizes individual freedom and subjectivity, influenced by Western liberal thought. Motherism, being Afrocentric, is grounded in communalism – the belief that the self exists within relationships and obligations to others. It interprets liberation not as personal independence but as collective harmony.

Postmodern Feminism is predominantly secular, questioning all metaphysical foundations of truth. Motherism, however, integrates spirituality and reverence for nature as essential to womanhood. Motherism views spirituality as the moral compass guiding gender relations, a concept that is absent in postmodern thought.

Postmodern Feminism emerged from Western societies with different historical experiences, while Motherism arises from African realities shaped by colonialism, tradition, and ecological awareness. Thus, Motherism offers a context-specific alternative to Western feminist paradigms.

Philosophical Strengths of Motherism

African-Centered Ontology

Motherism’s greatest philosophical strength is its grounding in African cosmology. It restores the African woman as the center of creation, nurturing, and moral order. By doing so, it challenges the Eurocentric dominance of feminist theory and asserts cultural self-definition. Catherine Acholonu’s Motherism is rooted in the belief that the essence of life and existence is communal, spiritual, and deeply connected to nature. Unlike Western individualistic philosophy that sees human beings as separate and independent, African ontology views existence as a web of relationships – between humans, the environment, ancestors, and the divine. This worldview shapes the foundation of Motherism as both a philosophy and a social movement.

With Motherism, Acholonu presents motherhood as the central symbol of African identity and being. She argues that the mother represents creation, care, and continuity, the same principles that govern the African understanding of life. The African mother is not just a biological figure but a symbol of harmony, nurture, and moral responsibility. She claims that “Motherhood, nature and nurture, these three together define Motherism as opposed to Western feminism” (110). Again, Acholonu defines womanhood in connection with the community and nature, not in opposition to men. This reflects the African-centered idea that life is cooperative and interdependent.

Furthermore, African ontology emphasizes balance and unity rather than conflict. Motherism, therefore, promotes reconciliation between the sexes, insisting that both men and women must work together to rebuild society. It rejects the Western feminist tendency toward confrontation and instead embraces complementarity – the idea that both genders have distinct but equally valuable roles in sustaining life. This reflects traditional African cosmology, where harmony between all beings ensures peace and progress.

Communal and Ecological Vision

Motherism expands the scope of feminism beyond gender to include environmental and social harmony. Acholonu links the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, suggesting that true liberation must involve ecological balance. Motherism, in the light of Acholonu, is built on a deep sense of community and ecological harmony. It presents an African-centered philosophy that sees the survival and progress of society as rooted in communal relationships and a respectful connection with nature. In Motherism, Acholonu emphasizes that true development cannot occur when people live in isolation or when the environment is destroyed. Rather, growth must be built on cooperation, care, and balance – values that are central to African culture and motherhood.

The communal vision in Motherism reflects the African belief that individuals exist within a network of relationships. Every person is part of a family, a village, and a wider community. Acholonu uses the figure of the mother as a symbol of this unity and cooperation. The mother does not live for herself alone but for her children and her people. In the same way, Motherism teaches that both men and women should work together for the well-being of the entire community. It rejects the idea of competition between genders and promotes reconciliation and partnership instead.

This communal spirit also supports peace and social harmony. Motherism encourages people to value empathy, mutual support, and collective responsibility. It challenges the Western idea of individualism, which often separates people and prioritizes personal goals over group welfare. By restoring communal ethics, Acholonu believes that African societies can achieve a more humane and inclusive form of progress. Motherism agrees with the popular Ubuntu philosophy: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Tutu 31).

Alongside this communal vision, Motherism has a strong ecological dimension. Acholonu views the earth as a living mother who nourishes all creatures. She teaches that harming nature is equal to harming one's own mother. This ecological awareness calls for respect for the environment, sustainable use of resources, and the protection of the earth's fertility. In African traditions, the land is sacred – it gives life, food, and identity. Therefore, caring for the earth is a moral and spiritual duty.

Rejection of Western Domination

Catherine Acholonu's Motherism stands as a powerful African response to the dominance of Western feminist thought. Acholonu created Motherism to challenge the way Western feminism presents itself as a universal theory that should apply to all women, regardless of their cultural background. She argues that the experiences, values, and social realities of African women are very different from those of Western women. Therefore, African women need an approach that grows from their own history, culture, and environment. This idea represents a clear rejection of Western intellectual and cultural dominance.

Western feminism, according to Acholonu, often focuses on individual freedom and confrontation with men as a way to achieve gender equality. However, in traditional African societies, men and women are seen as complementary partners who work together for the good of the community. Motherism, therefore, rejects the Western feminist tendency to separate men and women into opposing camps. Instead, it promotes unity, cooperation, and reconciliation between genders. This shows that African women can define their own path toward empowerment without copying Western models.

Motherism also rejects Western dominance by returning to African spiritual and ecological values. It emphasizes motherhood, nurturing, and care for the environment as sources of strength and wisdom. In African thought, motherhood is not only a biological role but a symbol of creativity, life, and continuity. Western feminism sometimes views motherhood as a form of oppression, but Motherism reclaims it as a sacred and empowering role. By doing this, Acholonu challenges the Western idea that liberation means rejecting traditional roles. Instead, she presents motherhood as central to the moral and social balance of society.

Furthermore, the rejection of Western dominance in Motherism is also seen in its focus on communal life. While Western thought is often based on individualism, African philosophy values community, harmony, and interdependence. Motherism insists that progress and equality can only be achieved through collective effort, not through individual struggle alone. This vision resists the Western model of feminism that prioritizes personal success over communal welfare. Acholonu claims that motherism is "against the jacket nature of western feminism" (112).

In essence, Motherism is not anti-Western but anti-domination. It calls for the recognition of African women's voices and experiences in shaping their own destiny. It seeks to decolonize African womanhood by freeing it from Western cultural and

intellectual control. Through Motherism, Acholonu encourages African women to embrace their identity, culture, and spirituality as sources of empowerment and to contribute to global feminist discourse on their own terms.

Philosophical Weaknesses of Motherism

Essentializing Womanhood

In Catherine Acholonu's idea of Motherism, womanhood is celebrated as a symbol of care, love, and nature. She believes that women have a special gift for nurturing life and maintaining peace in the community. However, scholars see a problem with this idea. They argue that Motherism essentializes womanhood, that is, it limits women to one fixed identity, that of mothers and caregivers. This can make womanhood look weak instead of strong.

By focusing only on women as mothers, Motherism suggests that a woman's main value comes from her ability to give birth and take care of others. This view ignores women who cannot or choose not to have children. It also reduces women's identity to only their biological and emotional roles, instead of recognizing them as full individuals who can lead, create, and make decisions beyond the home. In this way, womanhood becomes tied to softness, emotion, and dependence, which are often seen as signs of weakness in society.

Furthermore, essentializing womanhood in Motherism can strengthen gender stereotypes. It places men as protectors and women as nurturers, which impairs equality between genders. Instead of freeing women, it may keep them under traditional roles that limit their freedom and power.

While Acholonu wanted to celebrate the strength of African mothers, the overemphasis on motherhood can unintentionally turn womanhood into a weakness. It makes it seem like women are valuable only when they perform maternal duties. A better approach would be to honor motherhood without reducing womanhood to it.

In other words, essentializing womanhood in Motherism creates a narrow picture of what it means to be a woman. It risks turning a woman's natural gift for care into a limitation. For Motherism to truly empower women, it must allow them to be seen not just as mothers, but as full human beings with many identities, choices, and strengths.

Cultural Limitations

One of the main weaknesses of Motherism is its strong tie to African cultural traditions. While Motherism tries to promote peace, love, and cooperation between men and women, it often depends too much on traditional African values that may not always support women's freedom. These cultural roots can sometimes limit the progress of women in modern society.

Motherism, as explained by Catherine Acholonu, is based on motherhood, nurturing, and caring for the community. However, in many African cultures, these ideas are linked to traditional gender roles where women are expected to serve, obey, and sacrifice for others. This means that instead of empowering women, Motherism can sometimes keep them in the same position that culture has already placed them – as caretakers and not leaders.

Another cultural limitation is that Motherism focuses too much on motherhood as the main identity of a woman. In many African societies, women who do not have children or choose not to marry are often judged or seen as incomplete. This limits the idea of womanhood and does not include all women's experiences. It also makes it difficult for women to define themselves outside of family and motherhood.

Also, because Motherism is built on traditional African values, it may not fully accept new changes brought by modernization or global feminism. Some cultural beliefs, such as male dominance and women's silence, may still influence the practice of Motherism. This can make it hard for Motherism to challenge patriarchy or to give women equal power in decision-making.

Comparative Evaluation

Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism are two important ideas that talk about the place of women in society. Both aim to improve the lives of women and challenge systems that limit them, but they do so in different ways. While Postmodern Feminism focuses on breaking down fixed ideas about womanhood, Motherism builds on African values of motherhood, community, and nature.

Postmodern Feminism argues that there is no single way to define what it means to be a woman. It rejects the idea of a "universal woman" and believes that women's experiences are shaped by many things such as race, class, culture, and history. Postmodern Feminists believe that power works through language and culture, so they try to question all systems that create inequality. They support diversity and encourage women to define themselves freely without being forced into traditional roles.

On the other hand, Catherine Acholonu's Motherism is an African-centered theory that focuses on motherhood, care, and harmony between men and women. Acholonu believes that African feminism should reflect African culture and values, not just copy Western feminist ideas. Motherism sees the woman, especially the mother, as a nurturer who helps build peace, unity, and development in the community. It emphasizes cooperation between men and women, not conflict. According to Acholonu, both genders should work together like a family to solve social problems.

In comparing the two, Postmodern Feminism focuses on difference and individual freedom, while Motherism focuses on community and togetherness. Postmodern Feminists often question traditional roles like motherhood, while Acholonu celebrates motherhood as a source of strength. Postmodern feminism is more critical of gender roles, whereas Motherism tries to redefine those roles in an African way.

However, both share some similarities. They both reject patriarchy and challenge systems that oppress women. Both want women to have voices and power in shaping society. They also value cultural identity and seek to empower women through knowledge and social change.

In short, Postmodern Feminism and Acholonu's Motherism are different but complementary ideas. Postmodern Feminism promotes freedom from fixed identities, while Motherism promotes African cultural identity and unity. Together, they show that women's liberation can take many forms depending on history, culture, and society.

Conclusion

This study has compared Postmodern Feminism and Catherine Acholonu's Motherism to understand how both ideas explain womanhood and liberation. Both theories were created to challenge the oppression of women, but they do so in different ways. Postmodern Feminism started in the West and focuses on breaking down fixed ideas about women and gender. It teaches that there is no single way to be a woman because women have different experiences and cultures. Motherism, on the other hand, is based on African culture. It teaches that womanhood is built around motherhood, love, care, nature, and peace between men and women.

Postmodern Feminism is strong because it gives women freedom to define themselves. It supports diversity and respects different life experiences. However, it can be too open and unclear about what is right or wrong, which makes it difficult to create unity among women. On the other hand, Motherism is also strong because it values African culture, family, and community. It promotes peace, cooperation, and respect between men and women. It also connects womanhood to caring for nature and life. However, it can sometimes limit women by focusing too much on motherhood, and it may not fit well with modern ideas about personal freedom and equality.

When both ideas are combined, they can balance each other. Postmodern Feminism helps women question oppression and think freely, while Motherism gives moral guidance and cultural direction. Together, they offer a complete way of understanding women's identity and freedom.

In conclusion, both Postmodern Feminism and Motherism seek to improve the lives of women and fight against patriarchy. Both philosophies value women's dignity and role in society. Postmodern Feminism teaches freedom and diversity, while Motherism teaches care, motherhood, and harmony. Catherine Acholonu's Motherism is very important because it brings African values into feminist thought. It shows that African women can define womanhood in their own cultural way. As Aristotle would remind us that "The female is by nature fitted to nurture and sustain life as part of the natural order of the household and society" (1252). Finally, a good approach to feminism should combine the openness of Postmodern Feminism with the cultural and

moral wisdom of Motherism. This combination can help create a fair, peaceful, and balanced understanding of gender and equality in both Africa and the wider world.

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