

Herstoricity as Intellectual Gender Politics: An African Philosophical Perspective

¹Dr. Gregory Emeka Chinweuba



²Dr. Uchenna Azubuike Ezeogu



General Studies Division (Philosophy Unit), Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu.
Associate Professor, Nigerian Maritime University, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper interrogates the concept of herstorcity in African philosophy and conceptualises it as an intellectual gender politics emerging in response to the masculine dominance of philosophical knowledge production. It examines how conventional African philosophical historiography has privileged masculine perspectives while marginalising feminine experiences, rationality, subjectivity, and intellectual contributions. The study argues that herstorcity functions as a critical and emancipatory philosophical current through which African women challenge their exclusion and assert intellectual recognition, equality, and epistemic agency. Drawing on philosophical perspectives on human nature, recognition, politics, and knowledge production, the paper explores the relationship between feminine consciousness and the emergence of herstorical thought. It further examines the non-neutral and oppositional character of herstorical perspectives, demonstrating how they contest established masculine epistemic structures and seek to reconstruct African philosophical discourse through complementary perspectives. The study highlights the relevance of herstorcity as a comparative and decolonising force capable of expanding African philosophical thought, correcting epistemic imbalance, and incorporating previously marginalised feminine voices and experiences. It concludes that herstorcity represents an important intellectual transformation within African philosophy, not merely by challenging masculine dominance but by promoting a more balanced, pluralistic, and holistic philosophical tradition grounded in the recognition of diverse rational perspectives.

Keywords: Herstorcity; African Philosophy; Intellectual Gender Politics; Feminine Consciousness; Decolonisation.

Introduction

We argue in this study that herstorcity in African philosophy is an intellectual gender politics. This is because herstorcity is a struggle to counter historicity towards achieving recognition of feminine intellectual equivalence and subjectivity in African philosophy. Herstorcity as intellectual gender politics also predicates on the ground that historical perspectives dominantly prevalent in African philosophy is not just a comic, but quite pregnant with implications and consequences for philosophy, and broadly the academia; where concepts are fundamental and everything. Part of this implication and consequence is the consistent African philosophical construction of the masculine

gender as the ‘man of reason’; man as the thinker, thinking being, walking mind, or the subject, and the feminine gender as ‘woman of the body’ (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. 6). The feminine intellectual gender politics represented by herstorcity is then evident in the criticism of this masculine construction in African philosophy, African philosophical neutrality or exclusion of feminine intellectual consciousness, rationality, personhood and being. This masculine dominated African philosophical outcomes indeed, seem to have been induced by Aristotle and Plato’s literal portrayal of man as ‘a rational animal’ and implicit exclusion of women from societal arrangements, respectively, deepened by western philosophical coloniality (Stumpf 1994). Little did African thinkers know that this

western incorporated epistemic notion of ‘man of reason’ that implicitly excludes the woman paves room for feminine gender politics (struggle for reason) that is consciously emerging in African philosophical space.

The masculine inclined epistemic constructions in African philosophy indeed astound the rational mind leading to the interrogation of the feminine subjectivity, rational potentials and feminine related issues confronting Africa. This feminine rational response emanates from the operation of human nature and notion of politics theorised by Francis Fukuyama (1992) and Harold Lasswell (1951), respectively. The human nature in context is catalysed by Plato’s tripartite mode of existence; reason, spirit and appetite. Plato in his *Phaedo* taught reason as the catalyst of human awareness of an interest, value or goal, spirit (*thymos*) as propeller of human drive towards an interest; and appetite as the forceful drive behind human desires. Fukuyama (1992, pp.182-190) elaborates that these tripartite modes of existence propel mankind’s desire for honour and respect; a desire that develops to *isothymia* (urge to be recognised as equal of others), and *megalothymia* (desire to subdue, dominate, dictate to others or assert self-superiority). These natural tendencies unfold through the auspices of politics theorised by Lasswell (1951) as game of who gets what, when and how. Consequently, ‘herstoricity’ in political fashion affirms and asserts the rationality of the feminine gender, its equal status and equivalence that is relational to other realities. Ramose (2002, p.1) argues that this “claim to reason or rationality is the ultimate validation

of the affirmation and assertion of the humanity of the woman”. This claim, then, not only make herstoricity a ‘self-defense’ but a feminine liberation philosophy that engages in deconstructing the male-female bodily differences as bases of rationality and inequality in African society. Achebe (2003, p. 8) praised this feminine philosophical stride, maintaining its importance in asserting the humanness of the woman, refining the sense of this humanness and establishing her as a thinking being.

Apart from these bases, parochial account is unfashionable in philosophy. Highly preferable are varied accounts or equivalence that avail one a “clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgment, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them and a force in arguing them” (Newman, 1915, p.172). Varied or equivalent accounts equip people with enough knowledge and skill “to form opinions; make moral judgment concerning what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’” (Ekei, 2007, p. 82). Hence, in a world with gender demarcation, holistic contributions from intellectually sound minds remain fervent answers to the questions of social progress and sustainable development. Among these required varied accounts in African philosophy is now the herstorical perspective that places premium on feminine critical voices and viewpoints. The imperative of herstoricity then premises on the understanding that at this juncture, where all factual knowledge (that are in essence historical in place, space and time) provide no satisfactory answers to African problems, the women go on philosophising.

In the foregoing, herstorcity redefines intellectual politics through rational outputs that politically address issues pertinent to feminine gender but are neglected in the realm of African philosophical tradition. In accordance with this effort, herstorical perspective has been repleting with expression and projection of feminine intellectual identities that culminate in rational perspectives marking and making the female difference. This makes herstorcity an intellectual politicking projecting feminine intellectual equality, equivalence, rationality and African philosophical knowledge. This intellectual politics is even more glaring in the herstorical perspectives assuming to be more rational equivalence and questing for intellectual recognition in the African philosophical circle. No wonder, Alutulu and Ajakor (2011, pp. 705-706) insinuate that herstorical perspectives aim to accomplish the intellectual equality of women with men and to dominate African philosophical space. This move then depicts herstorcity as predicating on the age-long maxim; ‘what a man can do, a woman can do even better’. As such, the epistemology of African philosophy as stated by Ramose (2002, p. 7), is “no more that unilateral universalisation of the subjective male experience of the world”.

In this philosophical unfolding, herstorcity cannot be considered short of intellectual politics based on the philosophical principle of the “impossibility of position-less position” (Odimegwu, 2008, p.21). For herstorcity is evidently a philosophical position projecting and defending feminine philosophical subjectivity and rational

equivalence. This then means that to hold a position that posits something, defends something, projects or justifies something is a logical alignment underlain by intellectual politics. Hence, herstorical perspectives being an alignment; holding and asserting a rational position stands as an intellectual gender politics. This herstorical intellectual gender politics is again visible in the academic differentiation of female gender scholarships that is rooted in human nature and spurred by desire for recognition. Because of the necessary critical value herstorcity holds for African philosophical tradition, this study opts for African philosophical constructions to equally tow critical herstorical path to achieve a necessary academic equivalence and balance in the expansion of African philosophical thought.

Conceptualising herstorcity as intellectual politics in African philosophy

The concept of herstorcity expresses and asserts feminine philosophical perspectives with convincing intellectual aesthetic power and politics. Herstorcity is thus an African philosophical current displaying feminine African philosophical consciousness, rationality and philosophical experiences. This is why Bull (2004, p. 19) describes herstorcity as “women’s experiences from women’s own perspective”. Being so, it implies that herstorcity vies for alteration of existent intellectual conditions and boundaries in African philosophy towards incorporating feminine perspectives. Herstorcity could thus be viewed as an intellectual call for feminine rational

participation in the unfolding of African philosophical thoughts. This then portrays herstorcity as an African feminine intellectual liberation philosophy.

Herstorcity is also understood as the academic outputs that set to defend and sustain the truth that women are capable of producing philosophical knowledge. This makes herstorcity an intellectual struggle towards affirming and asserting the humanity and subjectivity of the woman as a thinking being. Being a moral struggle, herstorcity, on the other hand, questions the arbitrariness and groundlessness with which African philosophical scholars are neutral about the subjectivity of the feminine gender, and thus accord it implicit inferior status in African philosophical space. In reference to this, Mesembe (2018, p. 158) describes herstorcity as “a neologism coined as a pun on the word ‘history’ as part of a critique of conventional historiography which is traditionally written as hisstory, that is, from the masculine point of view”. He then asserts that herstorcity encapsulates women’s philosophical “lives, experiences, deeds, contributions, voices, perceptions, expectations, representations, struggles and participation in human Affairs,” which have been neglected or undervalued in African philosophy (Mesembe, 2018, p. 158). Being an approach to African philosophical historiography, herstorcity is also an epistemology that “seeks to erect African philosophical epistemological edifice on a foundation that guarantees intellectual authenticity in the effort to balance male and female epistemological claims and how these have affected the philosophical temper”

(Mesembe, 2018, p. 164). To achieve this, herstorcity seeks to address questions about the experiences and ideas of women in a holistic and equivalent manner. This means that herstorcity advances especially the feminine views and mode of philosophising, though not in exclusive of masculine perspectives. Herstorcity is therefore an intellectual feminine politics that compels re-evaluation of feminine place, approaches and attitudes to philosophical inquiry and historiography.

Nevertheless, herstorcity is also a negation of the assumed feminine intellectual inferiority underlining African philosophical constructions. Consequently, herstorcity is a stride for intellectual recognition as well as an assertion of feminine intellectual worthiness and contributive rational ability (Odiye, 2010, p. 40). This makes herstorcity a profoundly individualistic philosophy; visible in projection of feminine intellectual emancipation and equivalence to the masculine his-storcity (qt. in Odiye, 2010, p. 41). The fore goings then implies that herstorcity is comprehensibly a feminine gender philosophical current struggling to balance the binary and hierarchical division in African philosophy dominated by men. In this direction, herstorcity remains an equivalent answer to African question and predicaments, as well as an intellectual struggle to emancipate African women in the male dominant African philosophical debates.

Herstorical processes are from the foregoing not devoid of politics. For the sphere of politics is not a clear cut territory relating only to government and governance but to

humans, their activities and the society in general. This is why politics is “the highest science of human good”; embracing and directing every human activity in significant ways (Stumpf & Abel, 2002, p. 465). As such, human existence is actually unfolding with politics. For as long as humans exist, they inevitably politick in one form or another for an interest or value. As such, there is never an isolated or solitary human and group in a social milieu; for each person or group masters her fate and struggles for self assertion by political means. On this ground, Merkl (1967) elucidates politics as those processes with which humans order their interest, implant their ideas and influence their audience. Since herstorcity exists for the philosophical audience; it displays this politics that naturally sprouts from it. Naturally therefore, herstorcity is an emerging philosophical contest; contesting feminine intellectual value-the place of women in African philosophy. It is an intellectual struggle replete with academic activities in relation to others. These activities, struggles, contests and their relations are ordinarily political and politics; an influence game and a game of power. For, in these herstorical activities are exhibition of political features; control, influence and direction, which stand as means of achieving the desired interest or value.

Thus, the gender politics of herstorcity is more glaring in its being influential in order to get the most of the desired or “what there is to get” in African philosophy (Lasswell, 1951, p. 205). Herstorcity politics is also visible in herstorcity being guided by the sense of what is useful and directed towards a utilitarian

goal. In the foregoing, politics underlie herstorcity because it is first a human action (politics underlies every human action), and secondly, it is usefully directed to utilitarian goals. Against these backdrops, herstorcity is an intellectual gender politics in as much as it resolves philosophical conflict and involves variety of intellectual techniques and approaches intended for the attainment of an intellectual value, interest, idea of good, change after a particular image and vision, wielding of influence and acquiring or retaining intellectual power or relevance in African philosophical space.

Human nature and politics in the comparative essence of herstorical thoughts in African philosophy

Herstorical perspective displays Plato’s tripartite immutable human nature through the auspices of intellectual politics. Fukuyama (1992, p. 45) describes these prideful and assertive side of human nature and its instrumental politics as being driven by human “struggle for recognition”. This struggle for recognition is observable in the philosophies of Plato where it is taken to be propelled by human thymos or spiritedness. Nicollo Machiavelli equates this struggle with man’s inevitable desire for glory. Thomas Hobbes describes it as man’s natural crave for pride or vain glory. Jean Jacques Rousseau depicts it as man’s comparism with his neighbors. Alexander Hamilton calls it the love of fame while James Madison views it as natural human ambition. All these descriptions refer to that part of human nature which feels the need to place value on itself.

Since women are made of this nature, it implies that women equate themselves with men in the sense of desiring the basic desires men desire, and desiring equal intellectual worth and dignity (Fukuyama, 1992, p. xvi). The feminine desire for intellectual recognition and the mode of actualising it subsisting in politics are then part of the essence of herstorcity. The politics therein consists in feminine intellectual justification herstorical divide and presentation of this divide as a comparative better equivalence. Such politics is decipherable in Oyěwùnmí's (2011, p. 234) herstorical work that reflects women in Yorubá culture as "representative of humanity" and thus "ungendered". To achieve more comparative equivalence, herstorical reasoning embodies verifiable objectivity and verisimilitude, that make herstorical ideas more compelling, "true to life and thereby, highly realistic" (Ogbazi, 2011, p. 68). In this implicit display of intellectual politics, herstorical divide also denigrates historical accounts in order to emancipate. The inevitability of this intellectual politics in herstorcity is implicitly captured in Battersby's (1998, pp.1-2) herstorical questions.

What would happen if we thought identity in terms that did not make it always spatially and temporarily oppositional to other entities? Could we retain a notion of self-identity if we did not privilege that which is self-contained and self-directed? Implicitly denigrating the other divide, a particular philosophical divide (like herstorcity) naturally takes pride in itself; what it has become and is. This is intellectual

politics; and it takes this politics for a philosophical current to assert itself on the positive and equal or equivalent side while implicitly placing the other divide on the reverse and unequal side. This politics displays in herstorical perspectives projecting feminine intellectual force and identity, which invariably involves denigrating the masculine historical perspectives. Such denigration is again visible in herstorical exposition of the incompleteness of African philosophical tradition based on its neutrality on feminine perspectives.

In intellectual gender politics, it is either a divide creates its desired identity, or the other divide creates and assigns an identity to it. Processes in this political exercise rest on Lasswell's (1951, p. 295) epochal notion of politics as who gets what, when and how? This is what displayed in male dominated African philosophical tradition where the masculine folk represent themselves as the thinking subjects and implicitly views the feminine gender as the other. Similarly, the male dominated African thoughts reflect African philosophy from the masculine perspectives; thereby projecting masculine superior rational identity while implicatively assigning an inferior status to the feminine gender. The emerging herstorcity now displays the same politics of asserting the rationality of the feminine gender and exposing the loopholes in the historical accounts in order to gain equal or even superior recognition. Inherent gender politics in African philosophy notwithstanding, harmonisation of herstorical and historical perspectives is crucial for the balance expansion of thoughts in African

philosophy. Yet, this still depends on the equal and unbiased recognition of both diversities and focus of each divide on critical interrogation of African experiences and predicaments.

There are outstanding political overlaps in the struggle for the existence of African philosophy and herstorical current. Like pre independence African philosophy, African women have been associated with the flesh than reason. This led to an implicit denial of their capacity for rigorous philosophical knowledge production. This denial places African feminine thinkers in the contest of convincingly asserting their equal mental capacity, intellectual qualities, identities, abilities and intellectual equivalence. In this direction, herstoricity presupposes comparism with the masculine dominated African philosophical tradition with processes that is quite political.

Feminine consciousness catalysing herstorical intellectual politics in African philosophy

Part of the feminine consciousness underlying feminine thought and scholarship in African philosophy is the feminine intellectual subjectivity awareness. This consciousness was sparked by masculine dominated scholarships in African philosophy that implicitly portrays feminine intellectual inferiority. This is arguably evident in the African philosophical “historiography and the way in which this has developed...in ways which perpetuate the stereotyping of philosophy as masculine and excludes women in the construction of historical knowledge”

(Mesembe, 2018, p. 156). This masculine intellectual domination was also spurred by western philosophical canon that in aspiration for universality (to be the philosophical paradigm or norm) influenced other regional or cultural philosophies. The feminine gender is thus left to wonder why Aristotle and African male philosophers question the feminine subjectivity by considering her rationality insignificant. The feminine consciousness behind herstoricity is therefore an intellectual personality consciousness aimed at averting feminine intellectual ‘herstorycide’. This means that herstorical currents arose to escape this consequence of imposed identification, by assertion or manipulation of the feminine rational sense of self, identity and personhood (Fields, 2001, p. 49). This consciousness is a dictate of common sense, reason and logic that responsibly fields answers to critical questions bothering on the humanness, rationality and dignity of the feminine gender. Thus, the most profound questions of value and meaning underlying this consciousness are: Who are we? What is the purpose of our lives as women? In what does feminine subjectivity/rationality consists?

Answers to these critical questions are made available via feminine will power and intellect-the power of choice and reason. “These twin powers are the patrimony and prerogative of all human beings” (Iwe, 1984, p.76). Because of the universality of this patrimony, feminine herstorical consciousness is also an awareness of the fundamental universal equality in the personalities/subjectivity of men and women. This equality is the true and objective basis of

human dignity despite sex differences. This is so because human dignity rests not on sex but on personality (rationality), and personality has no sex. Herstorical perspectives are therefore a consciousness of self worth, belongingness, effectualness and contributiveness driven by female intellectual experiences. This consciousness opposes the illusion, intellectual myth and courteous concession of low feminine rational prowess. It then unravels feminine intellectual uniqueness and rational ability.

There was also the feminine gender awareness of her general change in attitude. This is an attitude that has been “shaped by the combined fear of a backlash in the traditional, patriarchal sectors of African societies” (Eze, 2015, p. 312). The African feminine has come to see the awareness of this change as indispensable following the increasing globalisation, modernism and secularism that pervade the world with motivations for emancipation. The womenfolk has embraced these global cultures reflecting it in their quest for philosophical “rights and urgent needs for African philosophy to make its contributions towards the emancipation and empowerment of women in the continent and globally” (Ani, 2013, p.178). The relevance of this change also predicates on the need “to challenge the masculine domination of ideas about Africa” and to be active players in shaping African philosophical tradition (Eze, 2015, p. 312).

Catalysing feminine intellectual politics in African philosophy is also the quest for holistic, balance and rational accounts of the African world. Part of this account is the feminine perception and rational experiences

within the African world. This has become necessary for despite “a well-established African philosophical tradition, very little has been done in the field of African feminine philosophy” (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, p. 86). Thus, most of the accomplishments are masculine in nature as they reflected masculine gender experiences and perspectives (his-storicity) of the African world. Consequently, this incomplete state of African philosophy remains worrisome, especially as lively feminine gender discourses emerge in other disciplines like African history, theology, anthropology and sociology. Bringing a balance, wholeness and authenticity to African philosophical tradition thus spurred the emergence of herstoricity. Osha (2006, p. 162) acknowledges this herstorical balance when she writes that African “feminine philosophy went through a similar crisis as the African philosophy prior to her delivery; the problem of creating authentic discourse to balance the philosophical records”.

Emergence of Herstoricity from African Masculine Philosophical Intellectual Politics

Emergence of herstorical perspectives results from the conspicuous feminine marginalisation and masculine intellectual politics in African philosophy. This politics is such that the large communities of masculine subjects that drive African philosophy have little interest in feminine thoughts (Metz, 2011, p. 24). As such, these philosophical communities do not consider feminine issues and participation as fundamental. Besides,

“there seemed to be tacit agreement by men, pro Aristotle”, and western philosophy “that women do not have the rigor for philosophy” nor energy, creativity influence and value to add to the field (Mesembe, 2018, p. 156). Thus, African philosophy appears as if “the main figures in the discipline have almost, in a conspiratorial way, avoided feminist discussion” and thus opted for ‘herstoricide’ (Oluwole, 1998, p. 96). This marginalisation is even glaring in the periodisation of African philosophy which reflects deeper African masculine averse to feminine voices. Referring to this, Mesembe (2018, p. 159) writes that the,

possible periodisation of African philosophy, with different understandings and interpretations of philosophy, both informal and formal, completely ignore and exclude the thoughts and voices of women, as the characters selected as representative of the various periods under discourse are men.

Like in western philosophy, African philosophy has masculine symbolic order in which women are rendered “functional/instrumental and for-men, or invisible and inaudible” (Du Toit, 2008, p. 414). In other words, the masculine dominated African philosophy presents women “as incapable of creating worthwhile critical and scientific knowledge,” hence “men are put at the centre and made to establish and constitute the canons of knowledge, whilst women’s perspective is under-valued” (Mesembe, 2018, p. 157). Le Doeuff (1989, p. 28) observes this intellectual politics in the women appearing excluded even in other contemporary philosophical circles, discourses and traditions

that are “patterned on male social intercourse”.

Le Doeuff (1989, p.28) thus reveals that,

the philosophical republic is resolutely fraternal. Sometimes the brothers wrestle with each other, sometimes they fraternise, sometimes they fight over who can play at founding fathers, but in every case, they are liable to exclude the sisters from their little games.

In this intellectual politics therefore, there is “absence of strong feminine voices” as herstorical perspectives are encapsulated in a radical silence (Du Toit, (2008, p. 413). This is more so as discourses bear masculine thoughts patterned on masculine pronouns that implicitly speak for the feminine gender and allude to feminine issues (Walker, 1998, p. 1). The feminine gender is thus subsumed in the African philosophical ‘we’, ‘he’ and ‘him’ usage where it is merely decipherable (Dube, 2000, p. 20). These make African philosophy a masculine political exercise and mask its subject matters and philosophical outcomes with a masculine bias. Omoregbe (1985, p. 6) reflects this masculine chauvinist politics in the proposition; “all civilisations, all people, have their own philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Africa cannot be an exception”. Where the feminine gender is recognised in this invented African intellectual politics, it is then reduced to exceptions. Sequel to these, African philosophy is replete with masculine gender essentialism. It conceptualises and reflects the African person from

What it means to be an African man while ignoring what it means to be an African woman. As a result of the assimilation of gender into other philosophical issues and

the use of ‘man’ and ‘he’ to encompass all persons, the African discourse on personhood proceeds with a certain gender bias in favour of masculinity, which may at least partially be responsible for the subversive nature of the patriarchal tradition in Africa and the ways it continuously reinforces the status quo of male domination” (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, p. 86).

Because it has not adequately and explicitly engaged feminine issues or operate in a way that encourages feminine thinkers’ participation, African philosophy is also non egalitarian. Congruently, Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014, p. 85) argue that in spite of “the perennial problems of gender-related violence, gender discrimination and the increasing evidence that African society is in actual fact not gender egalitarian but sexist, African philosophy shows very little concern with gender identity or gender issues”. This larger silence on feminine issues is now daunting feminine participation in the philosophical enterprise, resulting to few African women philosophers (Coetzee, 2017). This fewer women philosophers are quite evident in the overwhelming male African philosophy PhD holders and domination of African philosophical positions in the indigenous Universities. This has further induced the masculine dominance in determining and embodying the standards of excellence in African philosophical institutions (Jenkins, 2014).

The dominant male intellectual politics in Africa is however rooted in logic that constructs African world “as a society of self-generating (masculine) bodies, a world where

the re-productive maternal body is replaced by the productive masculine one” (Walker, 1998, p. 2). Dukor (2010, p. 27) consummates this African perspective contending that

the relation of man to woman in African context is cultural and metaphysical. Like in the Genesis account of creation, African cosmology and ontology see the concept of womanhood as an extraction from the concept of manhood. Similarly, social and political organisations are culturally patterned to reflect the mystery and superiority of manhood.

African philosophy also took after the patriarchal foundations of western philosophy, civilisation, values, and remained masked by its coloniality (Osha, 2006). Thus, feminine gender discourse in African philosophy has been tainted by what Dukor (2010, p. 147) calls “loss of focus because of the tendency to leave out the gaps in culture created by colonial experience, modernity’s assaults and un-africanness in ontology and essence”. Oyěwùmí (1997) alleges that this western pattern (concepts and categories) has even been the basis of validating African experience and philosophical knowledge production. As such, African philosophical thoughts pitted against the feminine gender; leaving a pain that is now being healed by the emerging herstorcity.

From all indices therefore, the masculine politics in African philosophy remains the force behind the representation of African philosophical production from the masculine perspective. In this way, masculine superiority is promoted, while the feminine subjectivity and rational contributions are implicitly assigned an inferior status and

discussed as ‘the other’. In this evident ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, African masculine thinkers recognise the subjectivity/rationality of the feminine gender but not on an equal level. Yet, the one-sided historical perspectives and intellectual politics reflecting in African philosophy do not offer balanced epistemic outcomes. This makes the emerging herstorical perspectives a desideratum.

Alignment and non neutrality of herstorical perspectives in African philosophy

One of the burdens of this treatise is to explore the political essence of herstorcity. The most outstanding of this essence is the intellectual alignment character of herstorical perspectives. It is this non neutrality character that fundamentally makes herstorcity an intellectual feminine politics. Herstorical perspectives are therefore not value neutral but an alignment. This is in the sense of being a philosophical current, school of thought, and an epistemic rebellion hitched against the masculine dominated African philosophy. Du Toit (2008, p. 420) admits this alignment when he notes that “the allegiances to both woman’s intellectual emancipation and African liberation as equally crucial for African philosophic herstorical projects”.

As a philosophical divide, herstorcity is hatched with implicit or explicit intellectual superiority connotations. It is spurred by feminine intellectual marginalisation, but it gears towards asserting feminine intellectual identity, rational equality and equivalence. In this way, herstorical perspectives aim to counter the inferior philosophical status implicitly assigned to women in African

philosophy. In a way, herstorcity too denigrates the hyped masculine rationality through exposition of its weak spots. These functions make herstorical epistemic production a philosophical alignment.

A state of dichotomy presupposes an alignment. A subject would not be many things simultaneously, but would necessarily maintain a fluid that is dynamically reducible to one side of the divide. Oyěwùmí (2016, p.71) acknowledges this necessary alignment in her herstorcity via preferences of terms like ‘worldsense’ in place of worldview, and ‘seniority arrangements or rational status’ in place of genderedness seen in masculine accounts. She further alludes to herstorical difference through describing historicity as “rigid, static, and exclusive in that they are permanently promoting one category over the other” (Oyěwùmí, 2016: 71).

The non neutrality of herstorical current is also glaring in its unique feminine philosophical views that for Ogbazi (2011, p. 67) includes feminine understanding, expression, interpretation of being and literal ‘craftwomanship’. It complementarily projects feminine values, philosophical voices, intellectual viewpoints and capacities; thereby refuting the erroneous notion that men are heirs of reason, sole producers of knowledge and holders of philosophical truths. Although herstorcity is an intellectual projection of African experiences from feminine perspectives, it vies for gender equality and opposes sexism. It opposes the theory that women are intellectually voiceless, helpless and dependent on masculine

epistemic outcomes. This makes herstorcity a feminine self assertion, a non value neutral and an aligned intellectual position.

Herstorcity in African philosophy as intellectual gender politics

Owing to being an intellectual alignment, herstorcity like every other philosophical current require politics to effectively project its contents. In fact, politics is inevitably displayed in every sphere of human endeavour; hence herstorcity is not an exception. This is the basis of Aristotle's description of humans as "political animals" (Stumpf, 1994, p. 103). Politics is thus played in philosophical circles as philosophical traditions are patterned on varied thoughts of diverse thinkers that are not immune to criticism and replacement. This criticism and processes of thought replacement are what are inevitably political. Le Doeuff (1989, pp. 27-28) alludes to this politics when he states that "Women coming to philosophy do not leave the ordinary world by doing so; they enter a universe where they often have to face people who do not believe that they can speak".

Herstorcity thus consists of feminine intellectual identities, but involves politics in the projection of those identities. Rational and meaningful formulation of herstorical contents and intellectual identities also require politics. This is as determination of herstorical contents; its projection and justification involve choice of ideas and concepts that are plausibly feminine. As such, crafting convincing philosophies that depict feminine intellectual difference in African philosophy is quite a political exercise. Advancing this

feminine philosophical difference is also underscored by political modes, maneuvers, methods and tones. Thus, herstorical intellectual politics is quite glaring in the discussions, debates, rhetoric, contestations, confutations and refutations that justify and solidify herstorical viewpoints.

Herstorcity is again an intellectual gender politics based on its unique interrogation of African philosophical experience from feminine lens in order to achieve female recognition or domination of African philosophical circle. Because herstorcity views his-story as largely 'herstorycide', it fosters arguments that validate feminine intellect and experiences against the mainstream masculine narratives. Some of these arguments even reverse his-torcity by creating discernible balance and equity between feminine and masculine accounts as complete constituent of African philosophical canon. The politics in herstorcity is as well evident in the belief that feminine rational experiences has to drive discourses in determination of what holds in African philosophy. Much gender politics is visible in the herstorical stand as intellectual modernisation in African philosophy. This is as notions and processes of this intellectual modernisation are replete with persuasion towards convincing the intellectual audience. Herstorical intellectual modernisation thus flows with rhetoric, persuasion, tone and content superiority that are political in nature.

Politics is again displayed as herstorical perspectives exact importance and recognition, and authoritatively determines its status in African philosophical circle.

Shrouded with politics, herstorical current has become a philosophical agency promoting feminine intellectual difference. It does not only vie for supremacy of the arguments in its divide, it challenges the masculine domination of African philosophical knowledge production and justifies herstorical difference as a viable option. In this epistemic rebellion, there are positions and oppositions characterised by politicking in prove of relevance. The alternative knowledge represented in herstorical perspective thus poses a challenge to the universality of African philosophical knowledge. This is as herstoricity is a necessary pursuit of new version of knowledge that corresponds to African realities that earlier relied on masculine dominated philosophical framework. This dichotomisation in reality occasions an epistemic struggle in which both divides; her-storical and his-storical perspectives pursue survival, overshadowing each other. Unfolding against the existent African philosophical tradition therefore, construction of herstorical perspective remains an act and an intellectual gender politics. This politics lies more in the herstorical objection of the passive and inferior status implicitly accorded it in the African philosophical scheme. This counters the notion of female in traditional African societies as domestic beings representing the natural, and lacking equal rationality with the male counterparts. It is this countering process that makes herstoricity a struggle for reason and recognition, an epistemic deconstruction and intellectual gender politics.

Because of the political exhibitions of herstorical perspective, African philosophy is now like the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, with herstoricity stereotyped as the “other”. The “other” is a philosophical notion culled from the theory of psychoanalysis that refers to a separate position that is distinct; a group “other than and to ourselves” (Clarke 2017, p. 38). This notion of the “other” is deeply at the base of herstorical perspectives in which feminine intellectual capacities and qualities are politically displayed. Intellectual politics of herstoricity however extends to balancing knowledge in African philosophy and reversing the masculine epistemic notion that equate men with reason and women with the flesh and roles devoid of philosophy because of their anatomy (Coetzee, 2017). Thus, herstoricity vie for feminine difference, advances feminine equivalence and rationality of human intellect. This is glaring in its anchor on the relational character of male and female genders and absurdity of acclaimed masculine rational superiority. As such, herstorical perspectives reinforce an egalitarian arrangement whereby men and women experience equal intellectual recognition on the basis of common rationality.

Relevance of herstorical perspectives and feminine comparative thoughts in African philosophy

At this juncture, it is pertinent to determine the relevance of herstoricity to comparative philosophy in African thoughts. Going by the fore interrogation, herstoricity has showcased as “analytic and critical tool in African comparative philosophical

understanding and debate” (Nzegwu, Bockover, Chaudhuri and Femenias 2016, p. 75). In an African philosophy replete with gender bias, feminine rational contributions stand to balance his-torical perspectives and expand African philosophical thoughts. This is the case when African philosophical space ensures epistemic justice by allowing reconstruction of her knowledge system to accommodate feminine perspectives. For, if African philosophy should be a holistic epistemological edifice, it is imperative that it draws from the experiences, expectations, perceptions and creativities of the feminine gender. As such, African philosophy cannot claim complete knowledge when its substance is lopsidedly or exclusively drawn from the experiences, ideas and creativities of men. It is on the knowledge of this lopsidedness that the Nigerian female writer Chimamanda Adichie (2009) warned drivers of knowledge about ‘the danger of a single story’. Herstoricity therefore remains a complementary philosophical current towards the complete knowledge required in African philosophical construction. On this note, Okolie (2012, p. 490) tends to portray herstorical perspectives as construing intellectual development and expanding African philosophical thoughts.

Besides, African herstorical perspective is a potential key decolonising force in African philosophy. This potential is visible in its exposition of the workings of colonialism in the highlights of how gender bias and historical perspective are imposed colonial constructions in African philosophy. Bringing the African mind to these colonial imposed operative mechanisms indeed amounts to

decolonisation and reconstruction of the African mind. The inherent decolonial force in herstoricity glows again in its exposition of how feminine realities and active participation were subtly undermined in the masculine colonial discourses in African philosophy. Herstoricity is therefore a decolonial current because of its exposure of masculine dominance of African philosophy and how African thoughts support this dominance by representing the masculine gender as rational and construing the feminine as passive. Thus, herstorical perspectives unclothe the garb of feminine intellectual docility; turning feminine thinkers to philosophical models. These now academic icons were then undermined by the rational blend of African humanism, culture and universal values. Herstoricity is as such a philosophical revolution that has installed intellectual confidence in the African feminine gender, and drives away the complexes of intellectual inferiority and self abandonment.

A striking decolonial role on this lane is the dual perspectives of African philosophical difference and equivalence paved by herstoricity. This is a decolonisation of African philosophical knowledge and knowledge production that is long characterised by one single masculine account. This has boosted African philosophical tradition with complementary account that enriches its knowledge base. Along this is the decolonisation of the feminine gender that now engages and interact the African world equally with the masculine gender. Herstoricity is thus a decolonising force, especially as it opens a space for the

emergence of more feminine thinkers and interrogation of feminine topical issues from feminine perspective. As such, herstorcity creates an epistemological shift occasioned by sense of male dominance and its derogatory feminine signals in African philosophy. This is more so as it potentially transforms the African mind from what has been (masculine worldview) to what ought to be (holistic worldview). From another perspective, Coetzee (2017, p. 69) captures this decolonisation force of herstorcity from the critical herstorical investigations of “gender structures and practices in African societies and their pivotal role in sustaining the hierarchical, exclusionary and oppositional metaphysics of Western colonialism and modernity and the ongoing subjugations of African peoples by the West”.

Indeed, the feminine difference being asserted in herstorcity satisfies the great need for African philosophy to be approached and interrogated from another rational perspective. This is important as the modern colonial construction of African philosophy in which the feminine gender needs to ‘catch up’ with the masculine counterpart, and in terms of which the appeared legitimate intellectual accounts are his-torical perspectives hinder holistic development. The modern mono-narrative and unidirectional progress of African philosophy in which the masculine gender is the pinnacle even results in the ‘erasure’ or ‘epistemicide’ of the complete African philosophical narrative and destruction of African philosophical institutions (Oyěwùmí 2016, p. 4). African philosophy should therefore not be contented

with the parochial masculine thought and foundation of thought on which thinkers merely add on what has been laid. This is as herstorcity has become the viable alternative, equivalence and a complementary divide from which African philosophy can be whole and balanced. On this basis, herstorcity not only resists the modern African erasure of feminine critical perspective, it reimages African philosophy by drawing and constructing knowledge that contest the univocal and linear modern African masculine rendition of history and philosophy.

The philosophical basis of herstorical perspectives in African philosophy

Philosophers may not have been explicitly herstorical, yet many of them taught the great need for a complete and balance approach to realities. Many of them acknowledged the ‘change’ pervading the universe, and admitted natural dualism and conflict of opposites that brings disorder, agreement and balance in nature. Heraclitus, for instance, taught that ‘variances’ that naturally agree with each other subsists in nature (Stumpf, 1994, pp. 15-16). These variances are actually the unfolding in the herstorical philosophical current. Along with these taught is Socrates’ teaching that ‘unexamined life is not worth living’. Alutulu and Ajakor (2011) interpret this to mean that the worth living life must draw knowledge from dual or multiple sources that enhance alternate knowledge and adequate assessment. In the modern time, thinkers like Georg Hegel, Karl Marx and Ludwig Feuerbach unveiled the natural dialectics existing in form of thesis,

anti-thesis and synthesis. This process is what herstorcity is re-engineering through its alternate and complementary knowledge production.

Conclusion

From African philosophical perspective, this paper interrogated the notion of herstorcity and identified it as an intellectual gender politics. The study finds an existential masculine dominance in African philosophy that has excluded the feminine gender. Thus, the emerging subjects in African thoughts are largely masculine created discourses that pitted against the feminine gender and actively undermined feminine perspectives. This academic scenario is deepened by African philosophical language that is patterned along masculine mode where it constructed a community of male subjects with voices that further exclude women intellectuals. Consequently, African philosophy is given a masculine approach and perspective where feminine experiences are largely neglected. This became the spur of herstorical perspectives that now project feminine equivalent account to avert 'herstorycide' and 'epistemicide' in African philosophy. This African philosophical situation gives credence to the fact that pluralism in a given tradition first emerges within. The outside influences have their impact where there are already cracks in the wall and members of a tradition are willing vehicles of the external forces. In the knowledge of this, Hountondji (1976, p. 165) describes herstorcity and its emergence as

another mutation produced within African civilisation, the successor to many earlier ones about which our knowledge is very incomplete, and, no doubt, the precursor of many future mutations, which may be more radical still. The decisive encounter...is the continuing encounter between Africa and itself.

The processes and modes of this feminine rationality projection however involve politics. This intellectual gender politics character of herstorcity is rooted in human nature; the natural desire by every human to project oneself and dominate a space. It is through this feminine intellectual gender politics that herstorical perspectives are now redefining African philosophy in expansion of thoughts and balancing of African philosophical narratives.

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