

Panafrican Feminism: A Case Against False Female Liberation

The Panafrican movement is the cornerstone of African liberation. Indeed, Panafricanism, which unites Africans under [a common goal to consolidate African power for a fairer allocation of global resources and the unleashing of Afro political assertion](#) remains our best bet to freedom. However, many women – myself included – may occasionally worry that like several fights for black liberation, Panafricanism does not prioritise our well-being as much as it **does** the black man's.

For one thing, feminism has unjustly been categorized as a western import, as if once more white people, and in this case, white women, should hold a monopoly on having their humanity acknowledged and respected. The African feminist is encouraged to emulate from the shadows, copy-pasting liberation strategies that have not prioritised us. However, as [Dr Lonzen Rugira](#), an ardent Panafrican and Public Policy Researcher in Kigali recently stated in [a podcast on Panafricanism](#), “there is no Panafricanism without African feminism”. These words mirror the message of the quintessential Panafrican icon Thomas Sankara: “Women's fate is bound up with that of an exploited male”.

Therefore, Afro-feminism is a fundamental feature of Panafricanism. In fact, Panafricanism supports the liberation of the African woman, and protects the African feminists from the threats of false allies and **challenged** inspirations.

Neutralizing The Weaponry Formed Against The African Feminist

There is an alarming conflation of liberation and **libertinism** when it comes to western feminism. A movement that began with

the aim of denouncing and defusing gender inequality, western feminism brought light to the centuries of female oppression that judeo-christianity justified. From the suffragettes (who earned women the right to vote in the US) to the [ERA movement](#), the 20th century western feminist showed awareness of and defiance to the means of women's socio-political and economic oppression.

However, while there are still a multitude of western feminist movements that focus on earning equal power to women, some seem fixated on sexual liberation (and lately, an [alarming glorification of sex work](#)) as the end-all symbol of our emancipation. Many Africans might argue against the moral basis of this fixation; however, I merely consider it an unfortunate and occasionally dangerous distraction.

African feminism should note the particular vulnerability of the poor, especially those from war-ridden countries, to human trafficking. South East Asia, Scandinavia and [East Africa](#) are striking examples of an explosion of human trafficking post war and famine. The women's testimonies – including those of intentional sex workers – often allude to exploitation, racism, fetishism and even sexual enslavement. Media agencies have sadly perpetuated the sensationalism of these tales, portraying the typical consensual female subjects as glamour and wealth-crazed victims of their own vanity. Little effort is put to establish the connection between life post dehumanizing hunger, fear and instability and vulnerability and desensitization to objectification.

A study [on 200 juvenile and adult sex workers found that 60% had been sexually abused as children, at an average rate of 2 abusers per subject](#). Trauma breeds an indifference to self-infliction of further traumatic experiences, from the ex-soldier whose self-medicating alcohol abuse may land him in jail, to the child witness of domestic violence and sexual assault who, as an adult, may engage in and [glorify sexual](#)

[irresponsibility](#) and abusive relationships.

Panafricanism defines reason on African terms; therefore, the Panafrican Feminist mustn't fall into the trap of considering abstinence, restraint or mere responsibility as further oppression of her womanhood. Defining the issue of female [promiscuity](#) and sex work as a moral one is entirely beside the point; when defined from an African feminist perspective it, in fact, is a matter of mental and physical health, as well as the human right to protection from exploitation.

Panafricanism defends the African's right to human dignity and, as such, any threat to a woman's dignity is fundamentally anti-Panafrican. While I invite every woman to claim absolute ownership of their body, and the autonomy to use it as responsibility allows, I also want to point that a rejection of the western hypersexualisation of the "free" woman and a simultaneous quest for female liberation isn't only possible, it is logical.

Sadly, the testaments of ex sex-workers, who cast their experiences as deeply traumatic and often dehumanizing (whether consensual or forced) are routinely ignored by the parties claiming to empower all women. This seems oddly familiar to the Rwandan whose unpleasant recollection of the Rwanda in which calls for hate were cast as freedom of speech is purposely ignored by the anti-RPF westerner that will speak over them to defend "Rwandan human rights". In both cases, only the victim could possibly describe their experience, and the latter shouldn't be twisted and revised to serve an ill-intended third party's arguments. In other words, it's about perspectives – in this case, the western and African feminist perspectives on the priorities of women as a result of how they experience life are not the same.

The First Three Letters Of "Manipulation"

The African feminist's empathy for fellow women in their daily

struggles against patriarchal oppression is often seen as an exploitable vulnerability by those with no desire of seeing the current order shift. Paul Rusesabagina's daughter, in a characteristic quest for attention, recently used a nauseating metaphor to depict her father's arrest, [in a letter addressed to President Paul Kagame's daughter](#). She compared the arrest of a man accused – with overwhelming evidence – of funding the murder of men and women, to the rape of young, unsuspecting and helpless women by Uber drivers. This metaphor is a deeply patriarchal manipulation; it surmises that feminism and the quest for female liberation cannot coexist with reason, rationality or an awareness of the facts. The implication that the African feminist, blinded by empathy for rape victims, should relinquish all sense and liken an alleged terrorist to a rape victim is deeply patronizing. The audacity here stems from a historical precedent; as communities attempt to evolve past painful and shameful oppressive practices, they are vulnerable to the manipulations of false allies.

Consider the Hollywood success of the fictional movie Hotel Rwanda. At the start of the 21st century, as the UN & friends attempted to cast genocide and crimes against humanity as a distant stain against a foreign mankind they bore no ties to, movies like Schindler's List and Hotel Rwanda, which placed a particular emphasis on the good among evil, the hope amidst despair, expressed such comforting messages to those disturbed by the wicked strains of fellow humans that pointing to any factual inaccuracy in the film was considered misery-mongering. This is the vulnerability Rusesabagina knew to exploit, and the tutelage his daughter is now trying to honour.

However, Panafricanism, having arisen as a treatment against psychoses of its antithesis, colonialism, is deeply rooted in unlearning, questioning, and re-discovery based on the facts Africans know to be accurate depictions of African history and African culture. The Panafrican feminist's greatest weapon

against the manipulations that sustain the patriarchal colonial machine (which has forever considered Africans as mere bodies, as opposed to sentient and intellectual beings) is her dedication to fact-based critical thinking.

Feminism's core message and definition have never shifted from a quest for equality, which is essential to ethical and healthy human cohabitation. Female subservience has been unjustly categorized as objective morality and native culture. The "respectable" African woman, long characterized by her sealed lips and bowed back, was deemed by the large number with a muddled awareness of African culture as the historical female ideal that should be maintained post colonization. Her greatness stems from her ability to shrink herself to provide her male counterparts more space to thrive, and she, unlike the western feminist, is incapable of complaint for she lacks the humanity to perceive or experience emotional and physical pain like, say, a man may. However, there are striking similarities between the African woman who lives to endure (and endures living) and the hyper-"liberated" while hyper-sexualised feminist. Both have been sold the tale of a false nirvana accessible only through desirability. Both know this desirability to be a survival tool, and either's admittance of the trauma resulting from these constant survival efforts will be unbecoming to the patriarchy that has moulded them. The Panafrican feminist should know that the rejection of female objectification and dehumanization lies not in the use or appeal of her body, but rather the recognition of her worth as a human beyond it.