

A Historical Overview of African Feminist Strands

By Minna Salami

What does the phrase *African feminism* bring to your mind?

Does the phrase conjure an image of a uniform group, or does *African feminism* evoke an image of multiple beliefs and ideas?

I begin with these questions, because when people hear the phrase *African feminism*, they typically associate it with a uniform group. Yet in truth, a variety of views are represented within African feminism.

People think of African feminism as an unvaried group partly because little has been written about the differing ideas within the movement. There are a few attempts at naming the different approaches in the intellectual and sociopolitical project that is African feminism. Scholars such as Rudo B. Gaidzanwa *have* pointed out that “It is not possible to refer to a single ‘African feminism’¹ and, therefore, speak instead of African *feminisms* in plural, rather than in singular. But what are these feminisms? This essay seeks to answer that question. By tracing the chronology of African feminism and outlining the strands of thought that have shaped its development, it aims to expand the dynamic and significant body of work that is African feminism.

Taking the time to understand the contours of our ideological home is useful for both budding and veteran African feminists. When we distinguish ideological standpoints within the movement, we not only expand African feminism, but also the global feminist struggle. As scholar Simidele Dosekun says in a book chapter that similarly to this essay seeks to review “different theories and models of ‘African feminisms’”, it is “imperative for African women to stake and differentiate their theoretical and other positions and therein also resist being spoken for by not only Western women but African men too.”²

Typically, people comprehend African feminism according to what drew them to the movement in the first place. For some, African feminism is an entry point to exploring developmental issues and human rights, others’ interest in African feminism stems from alienation in the male world of pan-Africanism, some seek to anchor and explore their female and black identities in a political cause, and yet others come to African feminism from personal experiences of discrimination and trauma. Most people probably take an interest in African feminism via a mix of the above. But the more knowledge about the specificities within the movement, the clearer one’s position becomes. Clarity is always needed to shine a light on oppression so that we can fight it.

My interest in exploring different strands within African feminism began with a 2017 *MsAfropolitan* blogpost entitled, “[What is African feminism, actually?](#)” The blog was a preliminary attempt to distinguish patterns within African feminism. It has since become one of the most frequently cited posts on my blog, and so in the interest of African feminist knowledge production, when the *House of African Feminisms* asked me to expand the blogpost, I responded affirmatively. In the original blogpost, I explained that I felt a need to explore the different strands of African feminism in part because

Young African women and men are increasingly engaging with feminism, but fewer are engaging with feminist theory and this is at least partly because there aren't enough new theories to engage with. Many African feminist theories: Motherism, Stiwanism, African Womanism and so on are still brilliant reads but they feel somewhat dated only because—remarkably—significant numbers of Africans are comfortable with the term feminist in ways they weren't when these concepts were coined as substitutes.

In addition, I wrote

So which African feminisms exist today? In order to think through the strands of African feminism operating today, I looked at factors that have shaped African feminism thus far and identified the short, imperfect and overlapping categories below.

This essay is a continuation of the blog. However, the strands are still “short, imperfect and overlapping”. There are undoubtedly numerous other ways of categorising African feminism than those that I—partly out of space limitations, and partly out of my own outlook (and its limitations) —have chosen in this essay. Suffice to say, that even with more space than the original piece on my blog, this essay is also just a beginning. Moreover, I still approach the task of thinking through strands of African feminism with mindfulness and care. It occurred to me as I began writing, that like a hair technician who separates, patterns, feels their way under, above, and around strands of hair to ultimately connect the whole, I too am patterning the strands of African feminism across a co-existing terrain like a hair technician rather than a cartographer.

Although I am seeking to label different positions within the movement, they share more commonalities than divergences. All African feminism is preoccupied with [intersectional analyses](#). That is, all strands of African feminism are informed not only by discourses about patriarchy but also about colonisation, imperialism, heteronormativity, ethnicity, race, class, as well as human rights issues such as poverty reduction, and violence prevention and health and reproductive rights. However, as my focus here is to chronologically locate divergent strands within African feminism, this essay aims to, to a lesser degree, position arguments concerning the above topics.

The format of this essay reflects the aims: to as straightforwardly as possible provide an accessible guide and reference for discussion about African feminist history and its contemporary usage. To situate different strands of African feminism, the essay provides a historical overview of African feminism. It is divided into two main chronological parts. These are:

1. The Pre-feminist Modern Period – c 1500 – 1900
2. The Contemporary Feministing Period – c 1900 – present

The “Contemporary Feministing Period” is further split into three parts:

- i. African Women in Feminist Formation – c 1900 – 1970
- ii. The 1st Rise of African Feminism – 1990 – 2010
- iii. The 2nd Rise of African Feminism – 2000s – present

The Pre-Feminist Modern Period c 1500 – 1900

History is a text on desire. When we learn history, we learn about what generations have fought for, resisted, and dreamed of. But under patriarchal rule, history is largely a text on *male* desire. Only 0.5 per cent of the last 3500 years of recorded history is women's history.³ It is men's drives that are reflected in the shared human story.

For women, history is instead a chronicle of absence. Through the ages, in every part of the world, women have struggled against their exclusion. They have developed ways to share knowledge, fought to control their bodies, battled for positions of power, and struggled against male dominant traditions and laws.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, these longstanding struggles consolidated in the international feminist movement and transformed the social history of humanity. As *Century Magazine* wrote in 1914, "The time has come to define feminism; it is no longer possible to ignore it."

Yet despite its undeniable impact on history, the event of feminism is not typically considered a landmark in historiography. Modern history is divided into the Early Modern, Late Modern, and Contemporary periods. But these conventional periodisations inevitably centre on male history, not least because they are stages of the human journey when women's contributions were categorically distorted and written out.

In this essay, I instead split modern history into two alternative time periods, the "Pre-feminist Modern Period" and the "Contemporary Feministing Period". Although these alternative periodisations have the potential for further elaboration, here, my deliberations are not an academic exercise per se, as much as they are a dissenting way of viewing the past. Chronology is political. Male history lies at the centre of history-making. To centre women in history, we need to centre feminism. As historian Karen Offen writes, "The history of feminisms is, in fact, women's political history."⁴ Most importantly, from its earliest days, feminism has unearthed and reinstated women's history. The point in time when feminism blazed upon the world should form the axis of modern history for feminists.

The "Pre-Feminist Modern Period" refers to the period between the fifteenth century, when the printing press was invented, up to the twentieth century. I'm starting at this moment in time to correspond with the periods conventionally divided into the Early Modern, Late Modern and Contemporary. Obviously, this time span is long and sociologically varied. It spans ages and societies as wide-ranging as the Age of Discovery, the Qing Dynasty, and New Imperialism. Yet it shares one major feature in common: it was a world without feminism. It was Pre-Feminist.

The "Contemporary Feministing Period", on the other hand, connotes a world *with* feminism. However, a world "with feminism" is not synonymous with a "feminist world" (far from it). Rather, it is a world *provoked* by feminists and what they represent, for better or worse. To *provoke* means "to incite resentment", "to stir to action", or "to deliberately give rise to", all sentiments that feminism has summoned since it was established as an interest group at the turn of the 20th century. It is for this reason that I refer to the period that follows the "Pre-Feminist Modern Period" as the "Contemporary Feministing Period" as it is marked by a complicated and often challenging processual quality of becoming, shifting, and the many meanings of the word *provoking*.

Europatriarchal Chronology

The writing of modern history is not only male-centred but also Eurocentric. In my previous work, I refer to this simultaneously male-centric and Eurocentric bias that has shaped knowledge production as “Europatriarchal Knowledge”, an epistemology that impacts all knowledge production including historiography.⁵ Europatriarchal Knowledge centres Western imperialism in Africa’s story, and male supremacy in women’s realities. It suggests passivity on both Africa’s and women’s part and makes little room for understanding African women’s resistance movements. Labelling the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries as the Pre-Feminist Modern Period not only places women’s history at the centre of this writing, it also forces us to think of African history from a different prism. It is crucial, as I seek to do in this essay, to complicate the Europatriarchal ways we periodise history and to explore if history instead can be explored from a woman-centred and an Africa-centred perspective.

The politics of chronology means that Europe’s history is centred in the stories that shape global narratives. For this reason, when it comes to African history, colonialism has become the defining axis. I am not suggesting that colonisation hasn’t shaped the course of African history significantly, but the rendition of African history into Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial periods imply that Africa had no history before Western colonisation. This is woefully unfortunate. These categorisations place Western colonisation, and subsequently the West, at the centre of African history. They reinforce the destructive views of British historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, who said, “There is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness... And darkness is not a subject for history.”⁶

Much work of tremendous value, scholarly and otherwise, has been generated using conventional Europatriarchal periodisations. I am not dismissing that work, and nor am I for that matter claiming that the classifications of history into the Early Modern, Late Modern, and Contemporary periods are not useful.

Furthermore, I am not saying anything which hasn’t already been stated. There are thorough debates concerning periodisations of African history (see, for example, the work of people like G.A. Akinola, Toyin Falola and Omar Gueye) as well as seminal feminist historiographies (Judith Bennett, Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker, for example). The field of African women’s history is richly shaped, too, by scholars like Nakanyike Musisi, Nwando Achebe, Judith Byfield, Elizabeth Schmidt Africa past and present, Nkiru Nzegwu, Laura Grillo, to name *very* few.

What I am doing, however, is making these arguments in relation to African feminist meaning-making.

African Protofeminism

African women’s resistance to power structures goes far back in time. As the radical feminist thinker Patricia McFadden says, feminism is “not an event that is just emerging now. It is embedded in the oldest memories of human consciousness about freedom.”⁷ Classifying the modern period before feminism began as “Pre-Feminist” does not mean that women didn’t resist patriarchy before feminism began. They did. It is called “[Protofeminism](#)”.

Protofeminism is a global phenomenon. In Europe, protofeminism includes women like the Italian writer Christine de Pizan who already in the 15th century wrote about how misogyny diminished the roles of women. In the Middle East, to give another example of protofeminism, there was the radical Iranian scholar Qurrat al-Ayn who caused a scandal in the 1840s by preaching equality of the sexes and religious freedom.

In the African context, protofeminism in the Pre-Feminist Modern Period was

especially alive. There were the Amazons of Dahomey in modern-day Benin who built the strongest known female army in history, there was the Angolan politician, Nzinga Mbande, or “Queen Nzinga” as she is popularly known, who powerfully fought against invaders. There isn’t enough space to exhaustively detail the numerous examples of African Protofeminism. African feminists such as Nakanyike Musisi and Margaret Busby have done immense work in reinserting women into history and writing. Suffice to say, Africa was home to varying groups of women such as priestesses, healers, cults, queen mothers and chief market women, who used their authority to resist social power and gain autonomy. In addition, women in Pre-Feminist Modern Africa did not only contest the power order but also the limitations of how gender is defined. To give an example, in her now classic African feminist text *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, anthropologist Ifi Amadiume shows how women in Nnobi (a town in modern-day Nigeria) used varying rituals to take on male gender roles such as ‘husband’ and ‘king’ to access privileges otherwise unavailable to them.

It is worth mentioning, though, that such careful and intentional work that restores African women’s resistance throughout history is wilfully misinterpreted by adversaries of feminist struggle in Africa. Precisely because the African continent has so much protofeminist activity, it has become popular in civic discourse to suggest that this period in African history was egalitarian and even matriarchal. Africa’s past was ruled by male kings, chiefs, and oligarchs. Women in Pre-Feminist Africa pushed back against patriarchal authorities using indigenous expression and specialised knowledge of power. Opposing those systems of rule in Pre-Feminist Modern Africa is what we can refer to as the first strand of African feminism – **African Protofeminism**.

The Contemporary Feminising Period c 1900 – present

From the 20th century onwards, women in all parts of the world started organising to secure legal, political, and economic rights. The word *feminism*, coined in France in 1895, came to describe this deliberate organising. Early feminists compared notes, especially concerning suffrage, at international women’s congresses and publications. In the first two decades of the century, women in countries as wide-ranging as Finland, Sri Lanka and Ecuador gained suffrage.

Yet, as is the case today, feminists of European heritage were dominant within the movement, a position which they often exploited to bolster Western imperialism. As pan-African activist Amy Jacques Garvey wrote in 1925, “White women are rallying all their forces and uniting regardless of national boundaries to save their race from destruction and preserve its ideals for posterity.”⁸

Yet, World Wars I and II inflicted unprecedented globalised patriarchal militarism, violence and control of women and children. Feminists recognised that they too had to tackle patriarchy as an international effort to have a strong effect. From the first International Feminist Congress in Buenos Aires in 1910 to organisations such as The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to global movements today such as One Billion Rising and Me Too, feminism has—for better or worse—always relied on global feminist organising. It is into this context that African feminism, as an interest group, enters.

The 1st Rise of African Feminism

The feminist movement of the 20th century is often split into three “Waves”, the 1st Wave, the 2nd Wave, and the 3rd Wave. African heritage women are contributors to those waves and so to avoid removing our contribution to global feminism while looking at resurgences within African feminism, I therefore refer to key periods in African feminist history as “Rises” rather than “Waves”.

“To rise” implies “to increase in number”, and “to move upwards”. These are two qualities that characterise the period of African feminism that is under consideration in this section.

African Women in Feminist Formation c 1900 – 1960s

Before the “official” 1st Rise of African feminism took place between the 1970s and the 1990s, there was a period which is important to consider first. It was a period without which the nascence of the 1st Rise is unlikely to have taken place. I’ll describe this period between the turn of the century and the 1960s as “African Women in Feminist Formation”.

During this period, women active in the struggle for women’s emancipation did not describe themselves as feminists, and are hence not part of the “1st Risers”, but it was a time during which women organised in the spirit of African feminism, resisting multiple oppressions. This period of “feminist formation” is further split into two timeframes as follows:

Internationalist & Indigenous Women’s Rights Activists c 1900s – 1950s

As elsewhere, African women participated in the above-mentioned international women’s congresses taking place around the world in the early twentieth century. Women like Adelaide Casely-Hayford and Constance Cummings John, both educationists from Sierra Leone, the Ghanaian activist Mabel Dove Danquah, the South African Liberation Activist Charlotte Maxeke, and the Nigerian revolutionary Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti were some of the African women who contributed to the growing international feminist arena in the first half of the 1900s. Ransome-Kuti, for example, was, among other things, the vice-president of the Paris-founded Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).⁹ These women were not only internationalist women’s rights campaigners, but they were also part of rising emancipatory movements such as Pan Africanism and Black Liberation struggles. They were cultural icons, grassroots activists, and peace campaigners. They travelled to America, England, Switzerland, America, China, where they spoke of the coming of “A new day, in which Africa shall be allowed a chance to expand and develop, along her own ideas and ideals, grafting from Western civilisation only that which is necessary for her development and progress on up-to-date lines,” as Adelaide Casely-Hayford said during an advocacy trip to America in 1920.¹⁰ They also provoked the patriarchal structures in their countries. During a trip to England in 1947 as the only woman on a national delegation to demand freedom for Nigeria, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti contacted women’s organisations and women factory workers. She spoke at numerous speaking engagements and wrote articles in the press. An anti-patriarchal article she published in the *Daily Worker* during one of her trips to England angered senior statesmen to the extent that statements of disagreement were publicly filed.¹¹

But it was not only women from privileged class backgrounds, as the aforementioned women were, who led the struggle. Women from all walks of life weighed in. In 1920s Nigeria, local women in Eastern Nigeria formed a movement called

Nwaobiala against the collusion of local and foreign patriarchal rulers in the advancement of colonialism.¹² In Kenya, militant women joined the Mau Mau rebels in the 1930s, the same decade when South Africa's Bantu Women League was founded. In South Africa, in 1956, over 20,000 women marched in Pretoria demanding change.

International women's rights activists and indigenous women's rights activists were, however, part of the same fight. As Ransome-Kuti wrote in the *Daily Worker*, "The true position of Nigerian women had to be judged from the women who carried babies on their backs and farmed from sunrise to sunset, not women who used tea, sugar, and flour for breakfast." Nevertheless, this period may set the beginnings of the class divides that still shape African feminism.

Independence & Decolonisation Freedom Fighters c 1950s – 1960s

If the first half of the 1900s were marked by *formation*, the two decades that followed were all about *revolution*. The key themes that emerged during this period are patriarchy, colonialism and imperialism, and the women at the forefront of the fight opposed all three.

Yet despite their influence on anti-imperialism and decolonisation struggles, women were compromised within the male-dominated movements. They were judged for being "Western", for example, when they took contraceptive pills so that they could fight at the frontlines without the risk of pregnancy. Women like Josina Machel, who dedicated her short but impactful life to the Mozambican independence movement, FRELIMO, and revolutionary, Wambui Otieno, who procured arms, spied and mobilised women against the British in Kenya. Otieno helped eradicate the "colour bar" which designated areas for Asians, Europeans, Arabs and Africans in public spaces. She fought the first high-profile case in Kenyan history for the right of a widow to decide where her deceased husband should be buried.¹³ We have these women to thank for key milestones in African liberation and yet, they are hardly known in comparison to their male counterparts.

These are some of the reasons why African feminists, me included, have tended to label women like Machel and Otieno, as well as those mentioned earlier (Casely-Hayford, Maxeke, Ransome-Kuti etc.), and many others active during this period, as feminist. They fought against the multiple structures that oppress women and so we have argued that, although they may not have been feminist as an identity, they were feminist in action. This is an important feminist intervention that disturbs a neat patriarchal historiography where women are excluded.

However, I have come to reposition myself on this question for three reasons. Firstly, precisely to encourage clarity on the genealogies of feminism in relation to Africa, as is the motivation behind this essay. Applying the feminist label anachronistically creates confusion around the timings and patterns of feminist resistance in Africa. Secondly, applying ideological labels to people posthumously increasingly strikes me as an ethical question especially worth consideration in Africa where the term feminism is so contested. Some of the women mentioned may have taken issue with being reconstructed as feminists. The third reason behind my hesitation has to do with nationalism. The nation-state is "patriarchal". It promotes distinct and mutually exclusive gender roles to people to the advantage of men. The main priority at the time of independence struggles, however, was nation-building. This is understandable. Nevertheless, many of the women we now position as feminists were part of independence struggles, and thus directly or indirectly helped to strengthen the relationship between nationalism and independence. They sought

to complicate the close relationship between patriarchy and independence, of course, but it isn't straightforwardly useful for the contemporary feminist cause to conflate the verb *feminist* with the political label *feminist*. As the radical activist and writer Patricia McFadden writes in her essential essay on contemporaneity, there is a "seepage of nationalist ideology into feminist discourses on the continent".¹⁴

The posthumous labelling of women as feminist is a potential cause of such "seepage".

The 1st Rise of African Feminism 1970s – 1990s

It is not until the 1970s that the first direct references to feminism as a sociopolitical movement with clear inferences by black African women are seen. One of the earliest instances of explicitly African feminist discourse by a black African woman is the foundational, and to this day among the most radical African feminist texts, *Black Sisters, Speak Out*, by Awa Thiam. Other early books on the topic include Filomina Steady's *African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective* and Carol Boyce Davies's and Ann Adams Graves's *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*.¹⁵

By the 1980s there was a large and solid enough group of women identifying as "African Feminists". It is at this point that we can truly identify the "1st Rise of African feminism". The 1st Rise was inspired by multiple factors, a key one being commemorative events such as the landmark UN decade for women 1975 – 1985, and the subsequent World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, which resulted in coalition-building, increased (if insufficient) funding for feminist activism and scholarship across the continent and diaspora. Another factor was the growth of Women's Studies in universities in Africa, and for that matter globally. (The first Women's Studies program in the United States was established in 1970, to give an example.)

There were at least three identifiable strands of African feminism during this period. There was a proliferation of Developmental African Feminism focusing on issues such as poverty reduction, anti-FGM advocacy, the harms of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and human rights generally. Notable feminist organisations with a development angle such as the pan-African group, Femnet, based in Kenya, and BAOBAB and Women in Nigeria (WIN), were launched during this period. Secondly, there was an emergence of Academic African Feminism focusing on scholarship, theoretical writing, and debate. The feminist journal, *Agenda*, launched in South Africa, the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) launched in Senegal and The Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies (CGSPS) was established at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria. Thirdly, what we could call Cultural African Feminism with a focus on reclaiming and reappropriating the values and principles of historical and traditional Africa, embellished this period. Theories like "Motherism" (coined by Catherine Achelonu) and Africana Womanism (coined by Mary Modupe Kolawole) shaped important conversations.

Developmental, Academic, and Cultural African Feminism overlapped. And as mentioned already, there are probably additional and alternative ways of discerning the patterns of thought that mark the period. Classifying them in this way is an analytical device to help us think about the period in both critical and generative ways. For example, Developmental African Feminism risks overpowering the narrative about victimhood and obfuscating women's complex interior and personal lives. Academic African Feminism could be and was indeed accused, of being elitist and westernised due to its institutional and privileged positioning. Cultural African

Feminism often imported essentialist and homophobic values into African feminism, not to mention the already mentioned contention between nationalism and feminism.

The 2nd Rise of African Feminism 2000s – present

In a similar way that the UN decade for women and the Nairobi conference bolstered the 1st Rise of African feminism, the Internet and social media played a large part in ushering the 2nd Rise of African feminism in the 21st century.

The Internet enabled African feminists to bypass traditional gatekeepers and restraints that prevented them from advocating their cause. They could use new technologies to tackle sexism and repressive traditions; they could document their stories and connect with each other; and they could use the tools of the Internet and technology to the campaign, raise petitions, create blogs and apps and empower one another to foster change.

But it is not only the technology that differentiates the 1st rise from the 2nd Rise of African feminism. The debates and attitudes that shape the ongoing era are of a different nature too. Most notably, the 2nd Rise is considerably less embroiled in discussions concerning the very term *feminist*. The 1st Rise was moulded by a hesitation toward the *feminist* label within the movement itself, which led key advocates of women's issues to denounce the notion entirely (eg. Flora Nwapa¹⁶), or to coin alternative terms to feminism (Africana Womanism and Motherism, as already mentioned, but also Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's "Stiwanism" and Obioma Nnaemeka's "Nego-feminism" etc.), or to refer to themselves as feminists with a small "f" (as Buchi Emecheta did¹⁷).

The 2nd Rise is, on the other hand, shaped by a determined embracing of the feminist moniker. If I were to describe the 2nd rise of African feminism in one phrase, it would be that they--we--are, "Feminists with a capital F". As one of the defining texts of the 2nd Rise, the 2006 "Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists" states: "Our feminist identity is not qualified with 'Ifs', 'Buts', or 'Howevers', We are Feminists. Full stop."¹⁸ Or as Sylvia Tamale writes, "In the part of the world I come from, that is, Africa, most women's rights practitioners prefer to call themselves 'gender activists'. For various reasons, we avoid the F-word: Feminism. However, I personally steer clear of the term, 'gender activist'. This is because it lacks the 'political punch' that is central to feminism."¹⁹ Other defining features of the 2nd Rise--the Maputo Protocol, the Feminist Africa journal, The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF)--, are equally unhesitatingly feminist.

Of course, there were many feminist shapers of the 1st Rise who also were "Feminists with a capital F". Activists and scholars such as Amina Mama, Ayesha Imam, Patricia McFadden, Fatou Sow, Abena Busia, Cheryl Johnson Odim, Theo Sowa, Sylvia Tamale, Desiree Lewis, and many, many others who laid the unmistakable groundwork for a distinctly *feminist* politics in an African milieu. Yet, among them were also critical shapers of African feminism who hesitated about the term *feminism* eg. Oyeronke Oyewumi, Mary Modupe Kolawole, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Catherine Acholonu, and Ifi Amadiume to name a few. Distinguishing between these thinkers in this way is not to place them in two "camps". That would be simplistic. Their work was overlapping and dialectic. Moreover, while the hesitations toward feminism by a number of shapers of African feminism may seem problematical and contradictory in our times, they contributed greatly to the rigour of the debates without which African feminism wouldn't be the strong movement it is

today. It is also true, of course, that many African women's advocates *still* distrust feminism. But the feminists who are shaping the 2nd Rise are more inclined to claim a Feminist identity partly because unlike the 1st Risers, who had no manifestly feminist body of work to refer to for their embodiments, the 2nd Risers—who grew up during the 1st Rise in the 1990s—came of age in a world where others had paved the way.

The 2nd Rise has faced a different set of threats than the 1st Rise. While the Internet has provided an important tool for feminist activism, it came with challenges such as cybercrimes against women, stalking, sexual harassment, digital manipulation of photographic images, abusive messages and threats, humiliating comments, professional sabotage and social media backlash.

The backlash against feminism has hardly waned. If today's African feminists have an urgent task, it is to demystify the ways that conservative, patriarchal values have crept into the feminist movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, you could easily identify the backlash against feminism, in today's environment of co-opting social causes and women's empowerment-speak, alongside an Internet where false information is easily spread, more discernment, critical thinking and radical commitment are required.

As for the strands, **Developmental**, **Academic**, and **Cultural African Feminism** have all been imported into our times. But it seems justified to argue that global schools of feminist thought such as liberal feminism, postmodern feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, intersectional/decolonial feminism and ecofeminism etc., which vary in relation to Africa, are also in emergence.

You could, for example, consider contemporary discussions about domesticity, marriage and romance, gender gaps and sexual rights in relation to Africa, heatedly debated online, as the emergence of **Liberal African Feminism**. Moreover, the notable increase, in the early 21st century, of political and cultural female leaders in the African continent has contributed to the growth of liberal “girl-boss” sentiment.²⁰

Psychoanalytical African Feminism, if it exists at all, is still in its infancy. It seems, however, a suitable framework for the growing interest in the connection between sexuality, language and the body, topics that largely influence the African feminist milieu today but which, during the 1st Rise of African feminism, were judged to be a Western feminist preoccupation.

Postmodern African Feminism is similarly engaged in conversations about language, bodies, and constructs, and was also condemned by many 1st Risers, but is now central to many African feminist discussions. In the African context, postmodern feminism has blended with indigenous metaphysics, using mythos and ritual to deconstruct and reconstruct language and the self.

Intersectional and/or Decolonial African Feminism are updated ways of describing factors of black and African feminism which have always been crucial. From “Triple Oppression” coined by Claudia Jones already in 1949, to “Double Jeopardy” coined by Frances Beale in 1972, to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's “Stiwanism” of 1986, to Kimberlé Crenshaw's “Intersectionality”, these perspectives always informed African feminism but in this strand, they inform the central point of analysis.

Lastly, **African Ecofeminism** is concerned like all ecofeminism, with the combined way that patriarchal systems exploit and diminish women's bodies and the environment, but with specific Africa-related concerns about issues such as land grabbing, nutrition, and agriculture.

Critical viewpoints to consider: **Liberal African Feminism** risks paying too little attention to how neoliberal consumption “empowers” women, which is

especially relevant in a continent where economic circumstances are antithetical to consumption. Insofar that the concerns of **Psychoanalytical African Feminism** are influenced by the broader psychoanalytical field of feminist thought, they are to do with symbols – the phallus, female desire, and “lack” as theorised by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Such preoccupations can become unsatisfying when uncoupled from structural analysis. Similarly, **Postmodern African Feminism** risks underemphasising agency and painting an image of docile bodies that are entirely shaped by structures of power. If the human body is undifferentiated then how can we explain the ways that African traditions differentiate female and male experiences? As a strand of feminism developed at a time of US-led culture wars and identity politics, **Intersectional and/or Decolonial African feminism** runs the risk of importing what are often US-specific debates without unpacking local nuances. Discussions that shape **ecofeminism** have always risked essentialising women as more “earthy”, “natural” and the like, and nature as “feminine”. This is also the case in relation to Africa, where the continent is frequently described in romantic terms such as “Naked woman, black woman”, as Senegal’s poet-president, Leopold Senghor, once described Africa to the ire of 1st Rise feminists. Lastly, there are potentially other feminist strands. In my 2017 blog, I considered Afrofuturistic Feminism or Afropolitan Feminism.

As a self-identified interest group, African feminism is now approximately forty years old. As I have shown in this essay, African feminism is no longer a uniform movement, if it ever was. Different strands of African feminism are now easier to identify. The goals of African feminism is stronger than ever.

In 1978 Awa Thiam wrote,

‘Women must certainly achieve total independence, but they will have to fight for it, they will have to wrest it from society. They will have to call men’s bluff and prove their independence; they will have to reject the alienating influences which have cast a shadow on their lives in the past, and still do so to this day.’

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Whichever way one approaches African feminism, her call is underway.

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