Womanism, Feminism, & the Business of Moving Social/Ecological Change Forward

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The Womanist Idea

What is it?

Womanism is a social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem-solving in everyday spaces, extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.

(Phillips, 2006, p. xx)
Womanist Triad of Concern
Interconnection of Human, Environmental, and Spiritual Realms

HUMAN-SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS

HUMAN-HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIPS
Womanism & Feminism

- Womanism and feminism are qualitatively different because they are based on different cosmological and cultural foundations.

- Thus, womanism is not a “version” of feminism.

- Yet, from a social and ecological problem-solving perspective, womanism and feminism are complementary, each contributing in different ways to wellbeing, peace, and justice.
Different Roots

Feminism
- European “Enlightenment” Foundation
- Secularism (Material Focus)
- Individualism/Individual Rights
- Emphasis on “Reason”
- Nomotheticism/Universalism
- Link to colonial histories
- Oppositional (Conflict) Methodology

Womanism
- African Cosmology Foundation
- Spirituality & Vitalism
- Emphasis on the Collective
- Emphasis on “Wisdom”
- Ecological Viewpoint
- Link to decolonial histories
- Integrative (Invitational) Methodology

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The Paradox of Feminism
Womanist Worldview

- Eclectic
- Holistic
- Cultural
- Spiritual
- Pragmatic
- Ecological
Womanist Methodology

- Lasting social & ecological change must involve:
  - Inner and outer change
  - Human and ecological domains
  - Visible and invisible realms
The African roots of womanism can be seen in African women’s social and spiritual formations, such as “secret societies” and “bush schools.”

Womanism is a New World vehicle for many of the ideas and dispositions that have historically been preserved by these African women’s social and spiritual formations.

Inherent in the organization and spirit of these ideas and dispositions is a unique orientation to social and ecological problem-solving, rooted in Africanity & global indigeneity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nemahulengo</td>
<td>cleverness, intelligence, use of the mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>kahungo</td>
<td>physical strength, endurance, stamina</td>
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<tr>
<td>kpayango</td>
<td>authority and power, social strength, command over a social unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>ndilongo</td>
<td>bravery, courage, and the ability to press on to victory despite difficulties and pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>fulo-fulongo</td>
<td>ability to finish in no time and get things done smartly and sharply</td>
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<tr>
<td>dingo</td>
<td>continuing until a job is done, even when tedious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malondo</td>
<td>silence, quietness, and the ability to endure without complaint</td>
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<tr>
<td>tonyango</td>
<td>the ability to fearlessly declare truth in a dispute and to serve as a good judge</td>
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<tr>
<td>ponango</td>
<td>being accountable for one’s actions and to one’s point of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>hindawandango</td>
<td>virtually infinite generosity</td>
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Women leaders are responsible for the women and girls of the community — and the community at large, including human, ecological, and spiritual communities. Women have both the power and authority to exercise this responsibility, individually and collectively — and they do so alongside men.
Some Womanist Methods

- Self-care: Health, Healing, & Wellness Practices
- Spiritual Activities: From Religious to Metaphysical
- Dialogue: The Power of the Word
- Mothering: Love & Leadership
- Hospitality: The Power of Welcome
- Arbitration & Mediation: “Siddon Look” Tactics
- Mutual Aid & Self-Help: D.I.Y.
- Standing-in: Creating Migration without Leaving
- Fly-over: Fast-tracking Change
- *Spiritual* Movement
Changing Hearts & Minds

- Recognize your own sacredness.
- Recognize the sacredness of everyone.
- Recognize the sacredness of all creation.

The “Three Recognitions” are 3 simple actions anyone can take to make change immediately.
Womanism is for Everybody

- Although womanism was named by Africana women, women of all cultures and backgrounds and people of all genders can operate from a womanist perspective and participate in womanist social/spiritual movement.

- Drawing from the wisdom of one’s ancestral culture(s) and identifying with the emerging global transcultures are pathways.
Examples & Exemplars

The Newtown Florist Club
Examples & Exemplars

Wangari Maathai

Sister Chan Khong

Immaculée Ilibagiza

Pregs Govender

Kiran Bedi

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Womanism in a Nutshell

Womanism is unique among the world’s critical theories and social movements today because of its woman-inflected African and indigenous cosmological and cultural roots.

These roots support a spiritualized reality that acknowledges the interconnections among human, ecological, and invisible realms simultaneously. Human beings are “energy transforming machines.”

Womanist activism changes social and ecological reality by changing their foundations in consciousness (hearts & minds) and by creating the social and environmental structures that make new and vivifying forms of human existence sustainable.
Womanism & Feminism in Tandem

- Wellness + Justice = Peace
- Individual + Systemic Approaches = Sustainable Change
- Integrative + Oppositional Strategies = All Angles
- Diverse Cultural Involvement = Global not Ethnocentric
- Spiritual + Material Methods = Holistic
- Gender Equality + Gender Complementarity Perspectives Working Together
Womanism & WCW

- Augments WCW’s existing holistic & ecological orientation
- Opens up avenues of spirituality as a factor in research or practice (e.g., mindfulness)
- Strengthens healing dimension of WCW’s mental health work
- Strengthens WCW’s foundation for international work, especially linking gender and peace
- Envisions social change activity more broadly
- Creates platform for inclusion of environmental questions

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A world that’s good for women is good for everyone.