

Voices from the Hearth: An Afro-Feminist Reading of Accad's *Wounding Words*

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Abstract: This paper explores traces of African rooted feminisms in Evelyne Accad's *Wounding Words*. Accad's work explores the definition and boundaries of Lebanese/Arabic feminism. Accad's *Wounding Words* is critically examined to assess how the central female characters exhibit and portray African centered feminist ideologies. This study holds the assertion that the particular literary tradition portrayed in *Wounding Words* seems to be patterned after has the feminist struggle in Africa. The study reveals that Arabic feminism appears to mirror African feminism closely. In the strive to dominate the feminist discourse and channel it to focus on their socio-cultural realities, Accad, just like African feminists, has practically theorized concepts which are inherent in Nego-Feminism, Snail Sense Feminism and Womanism among others. All these feminist theories are anchored on negotiation and complementarity as the primary tools of engagement in the fight for gender equality and equity. Finally, the study reveals the universality of female modes of suppression. It also highlights the institutionalized nature of the feminist struggle as well as the adopted stratagems to dismantle oppression.

Keywords: Feminisms, Nego-feminism, Snail Sense Feminism, Womanism, Negotiation

1. Introduction

The kind of feminism seen played out in *Wounding Words* suggests the efficacy of an integrated approach to women activism. It springs out of the daily lived experiences and realities. It is interesting to note that Accad reconstructs the feminist discourse around compelling women characters who know how to negotiate for their own subjective preferences [16]. What they portray is not a mimicry of the mainstream White feminist thoughts or even that of black feminism which sometimes promotes lesbianism. Accad succeeds in presenting a blended concept of white radical feminism, womanism, motherism, stiwanism, Nego-Feminism and Snail-Sense feminisms as a viable source of cooperation between men and women. Accad's portraiture of women in *Wounding Words* depicts an innovative compelling picture of educated liberated women who are determined to rise and be heard in spite of daunting obstacles.

2. Conceptual Framework

Unique peculiarities and abilities are presented through a

process of characterization in creative works. Characters often transform imperceptible plots into relatable realities. In essence then, it serves as a depiction, identification as well as a representation portraying the manner, role and position of persons in society. There are differences in Characters due to an interplay of a myriad of factors. Characters are essential in any creative work because they symbolize ideals and themes the author is dealing with [1]. Hence, within the confines of cultures, concepts, values and ideals, character connotes unique perspectives and evaluations of the world around us. This framework is essential for this particular study because it emphasizes the conceptualization of feminist struggles as it plays out in the lives of individual female characters from varied backgrounds [6].

3. Theoretical Framework

Theories are important in scholarly works because they help explain and give meanings to human society, existing phenomenon and human beings as well as their behaviour and response to specific circumstances. This study adopts an integrated gender-oriented theory. It analyzes the application

of different feminist theories like womanism, Negofeminism and radical feminism as a viable response to a structured and gendered socially initiated oppression. In the estimation of [12], it is problematic to attempt a singular definite definition for a Feminist theory. This is because it comprises many theories or perspectives. It also offers an attempt at describing the second-class status conferred on women. Moreover, it explains the plausible causes and effects of such a subjugation and then finally propounds what is regarded as a workable strategy in the fight for liberation. The integrated feminist strategies that are evidenced in the text strives for complete and wholistic equality between men and women in every possible conceivable way [17].

4. Accad's *Wounding Words*

Evelyne Accad was born in Beirut. She is a feminist, writer, musician and poet. She is concerned with Arab women and feminism. *Wounding Words* centers around Hayate, a young Lebanese woman. She keeps records of a year - long events in Tunisia. As friendships develop, she explores the choices available to women in that culture and discusses how they can work for a better society where women are free to exert themselves without fear of negative reprisals. When Hayate's own freedom is threatened, the issues she is confronting come sharply into focus. There are sharp distinct debates where the role and place of women in relation to themselves and men are brought under intense scrutiny. Through Hayate's warm and thought-provoking story, Accad captures the feminist debate, how women especially are supposed to carve out a niche of relevance for themselves so that women's emancipation in the Arab world will be a persisting reality.

The narrative creates awareness of a pervading structured oppression against women. The individual women characters are engaged in a form of diverse collective activism in an attempt to break this vicious cycle of subjugation. The reality is scarred by years of patriarchal domination and sometimes the women are blinded as to where to really start from. This paints a pathetic picture as women who are supposed to unite in a fight against an established and known outsider rather turns the heat and aggression inwards [11]. This divided front is ineffectual as the 'struggle for relevance' is crippled and made inept. There is hope however as the women quickly fall back in line and re-strategize with a common agenda.

5. Tunisian/Arabic Feminism in *Wounding Words*

According to [10], the blossoming of female writers could be counted as one of the most dramatic literary changes in the last decade. Hitherto, the previously held male domain was now experiencing a dramatic shift. Women were now infiltrating the ranks of literary production. It is also interesting to note, according to Hull, that in the past, only male narratives of female experiences were deemed

admissible. Hull concludes her essay by stating that in recent years, women are taking up literary creations in a bid to theologize their lived experiences in the way they portrayed and depicted female characters [10]. This assertion holds true for Accad's *Wounding Words* because the women in Hayate's circle are consumed with a single passion; they want to project their own (her) stories to the fore. These women have rejected the hegemonic and overgeneralization of women issues.

One of the reasons Accad's work is phenomenal stems from the fact that it pulsates with a new kind of life. It works in part as a counter-narrative to an established literary tradition. The roles are reversed and women assume center stage. The whole story revolves around women. Their lives and experiences are brought to the center stage. It breaks right through the glass ceiling of restriction. Again, and much more importantly, Accad takes women away from their traditionally assigned roles and gives them an innovative feminist identity. Traditional perception of women as symbols of biological fertility is thrown on contested grounds. The fertility of women assumes a new theoretical dimension; they are empowered enough to do away with a definition of self that is firmly hinged on motherhood. Here in *Wounding Words*, women express an existence that is anchored on projection of ideals and not in marriage or any sort of association with a man.

In the estimation of [11], some women writers portray women in elevated positions. This is where they give women superhuman roles like mythical queen mothers and goddesses. In such positions, women only occupy ceremonial roles where their lives are carefully carved out for them. Such roles and designations are humiliating to say the least. Accad's documentation of Lebanese women makes a compelling read. All the female characters are as real as they want to be and they successfully negotiate for a niche of relevance for themselves. In the end, their individual and collective efforts might not have a resounding ring of victory, but it will surely echo on in the margins of activism till significant inroads are chalked.

Accad begins her story with an exploration of friendship between Hayate and Aida. It is through the eyes of Aida that we get a glimpse of the Woman of Tunisia. This woman is

"... borne up her dreams

Crying out her burning desire to live, her thirst for

Freedom

A call for justice, an unmasking of oppression

Her movement communicates itself

Her wave generates other waves...." (1)

It is clear from the depiction of Tunisian women that a plethora of compelling issues accumulate and compound her very existence which remains circumscribed by her own expectations. She is a product of her dreams, calls for justice, consumed with an ardent desire to thrive and flourish as well as giving prevalent oppression a specific identity. It is important to name the struggle since theorizing it will aid in conceptualization which will then dictate an effective antidote. The Tunisian woman is denied the liberty to be her

expressive self by institutionalized patriarchal schemes of oppression. It is so ingrained that women have no choice than to operate within the confines of their socio-cultural designated roles. That is the struggle they are faced with. Any attempt to change this oppressive reality must be rooted in a well thought out counter scheme. It must incorporate an ever-changing combating tactic that is fueled by diverse approaches.

Their living conditions as women does not only affect their physical sense of being, it also transcends to the crippling of those innate forces that can combine to restrict heavy-handedness. Hayate tells Aida, "The sea has a power to renew that always surprises me. I chose to live here for just that reason, even though for a woman alone, staying in such an isolated house by the sea is risky." (p. 2) If the sea is given a purifying presence, then Hayate's statement could imply women in Tunisian society were cut off from a refreshing source that could aid their collective struggles. This is why she says an isolated position is not the ideal place for a woman. A woman needs to have access to a nourishing source from where she draws her strength.

The condition of Tunisian women is further made clear through the eyes of Hayate. There are many instances in the novel where the daily struggles of women are laid out in the open. For instance, Hayate tells us;

"... Women singing through the darkness of their time
Women crying out so that others may hear the call
Women writing to denounce fear, cowardice, injustice....
(p. 7)

Oppression and suppression work together to create a thick layer of darkness which hinders both progress and self-actualization. This is why they sound the clarion call to rally other women to collective activism of denouncement, to engage in the dismantling of fear that limits and inhibits and to main the shackles of injustice [12].

The exact nature and form of the struggle women in Tunisia are involved in begins to take on a definite shape through the writings of Hayate in her dairy. Her writings function as a mirror that reflects the deplorable conditions of women. As a visitor to Tunis, she documents her initial impressions of the city through the women she meets in town. She watches them as they go about their normal duties and observes this about them;

... The damp dust of your walls clings to the skin
Like the insistent eyes of your men
On women's bodies and faces
Violent glances which incite revolt
Cries of rage, a call to action,
A walk in the forbidden city
A table in barred restaurants....
Solidarity of women approaching spaces closed to them....
The story of these women
Silent and strong
Daring to challenge.

Women have become 'mere objects' for the fascination of men [7]. Any form of female defiance, sometimes as harmless as a fierce staring down, is an occasion for a revolt.

This form of subjugation comes in various forms and shapes. It is physical, psychological, as well as emotional. Tunisian women were going through a kind of segregation which was similar in content and form to Apartheid in South Africa. They were confined to places where monitoring and controlling becomes easy. They were treated and regarded as second-class citizens. Perhaps it is the enforced normalization, made to function basically as a herd control mechanism of sorts, that evokes a collective collaborative response. All women everywhere are victims of these existing injustices and all must rise as one uncompromising entity to battle it off. This shared kind of response reads in parts like Ogunyemi's womanism. It reaffirms the independence of women and demands equal treatment. This is why men are not denigrated in the struggle. The call is for a meaningful interaction between men and women. Thus, men are being called upon to desist from their sexist stance and perceive women as worthy partners [17]. This sums up the core of what Hayate is describing in her diary. The rallying call is for the purposes of inclusion, where every woman is part of the process. Then the actualized victory can then resound from every mouth. Hayate is welcomed in Lebanon because she represents a viable alternative. In the words of Rima, Hayate is in Lebanon "to bring us new ideas, that we might support the oppressed!" (p. 11) She is expected to usher in a fresh breath of ideas in the fight for women liberation; one that includes men in the fight for women liberation. As the other alternative, she is not likely to be crushed because she holds something in reserve. It is that spare space of signification, its refusal to nail its colors too firmly to one pole, that accounts for the enduring force of *Wounding Words*. It has universal appeal though it is woven into the historical and cultural fabric of Lebanon. In this way then, *Wounded Words* is a transnational, transcultural and transhistorical novel.

It is clear from the first meeting of the women that they are all not ready to conform to the status-quo. They are appalled that religion is used as a tool for effective oppression. Samia recounts the chilling tale of what happened to a group of women who had agitated for justice in Monastir. The group had been "silenced with a reminder that the Koran had proclaimed that nothing good could come from a woman leader, that women are too emotional, do not have the intellectual capacity of men...." (p. 14) This assertion circumscribes an inferior parameter for women. The ground for their delineation is simple enough; intellectually, they are not at par with men. There is therefore the need put men in charge of their affairs. This conferral of elevated status on the man implies that he has become a formidable institution to reckon with. All the women at that meeting were unanimous in their resolution; "we won't allow repression to become established." (p. 14)

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that that there are many facets of oppression in Tunisian society. There is a definite link between sexuality and identity. The oppression women in Tunisian face are multifaceted. Perhaps the most demeaning is the loss of sexuality which in turn creates a sort

of identity crisis. This frustration is expressed in these words, 'Men are not secure and cannot reassure us. I don't dare ask anything of a man on a sexual level, but I refuse to be castrated in order to remain the little girl I was, the one they want me to be again.' (p. 15) The argument can be sustained that Tunisian women's suppression stems from the restrictions of sexual identity [9]. This targeted oppression negates the very foundations of their existence. According [12], the most important and vital role that women play in African traditional society is that of mother, because motherhood is central to all other roles. She again observes that, "[e]ven in strictly patrilineal societies, women are important as wives and mothers since their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage and it is because of women that men can have a patrilineage at all." (p. 88). This implies that on a much larger scale, women only exist as reproductive appendages of men. As they exist in themselves, they have no value at all. This is the kind of suppression Tunisian women are agitating against. They want a sexual identity which is not anchored on their ability to play out to perfection prescribed womanly roles.

Accad attacks the very foundation and seat of patriarchal power. Women for a long time have been indoctrinated to be ashamed of their own sexuality [19] 'For Tunisian women in general, sexuality still means reproduction. A man is traumatized by impotence whereas a woman agonizes over infertility and not orgasm.' (p. 15) This same reality plays out in most African societies. This is why a woman cannot conceive of a life outside motherhood. It is imperative for men to enforce this reality because the reality of a woman owning and taking pride in her sexuality would spell doom and disaster. Again, it would mean the hold and dictatorship over women will be broken and dismantled. This is explained by the woman psychiatrist, 'the Arab male is afraid of the female orgasm... afraid she will be unfaithful to him. In a relationship, the man's stakes are higher than the woman's.... Men are therefore very afraid, for in losing their sexual identity, they can lose everything....' (p. 16) In order for men to hold on to a semblance of relevance, they must position women in a place or space where she would not be conscious of their sexual identity. Women have to be made to think that 'I had an orgasm; I am a whore!' When this is successfully achieved, then women can put under control. Any woman then who wants to be in control should redefine her sexuality or put the reins on it. That is definitely not a state she would achieve easily. This is why Hayate describes these women as having 'scars in their words, open wounds in their hearts tears in their writing, cries in their tears... light a thousand fires of rebellion and hope.' (p. 17) This is the kind of feminism women in Tunisian society are engaged in. It is a continual sustained fight which is wrought in pain and tears. It is however a needful venture if any form of self-actualization is to be achieved.

There is the need to roll out a well-strategized policy to combat gendered oppression against women. At the initial informal meeting to map up an effective stratagem, they

expressed the desire 'to create publication for women, a magazine in which they would finally be able to express what torments them. In this way, they could make their voices heard, unveil and reveal society's ills.' (p. 18) The desire to have their voices heard is of paramount importance to the feminist struggle. It gives a form of expression to their innate desires. In the articulation of their specific needs, there is hope of redemption. In the estimation of [1], what happens to women in society is a reflection of their inferior status. She goes on to prove the notion that women are facing issues and challenges because of their gender. Some of these issues are rape and polygamy. Men are the ones who stand to benefit from such traditions and customs. These are some of the issues women want to give form and meaning to with words. It is hoped that accurate expression of their specific challenges will not only create awareness but also, importantly put into motion, the agenda for change. Here the women are living out what Obioma Nnaemeka refers to as Negofeminism.

6. Fusion of African and Lebanese/Arabic Feminism

Negofeminism refers to feminism of negotiation and no-ego feminism. Most African societies are hinged on the principles of give and take, collaboration and negotiation. It does not advocate for confrontation and aggression. It is collaborative and complimentary. In place of aggression, there is a sustained advocacy for skirting/negotiating around till a solution is achieved. This kind of feminism is situation sensitive, it knows when, where, how, and why to challenge an existing injustice. The issue of context is important to nego-feminism [16]. The adopted strategy depends on the issue at stake. This is the approach the Tunisian women adopted at their first meeting. They were not going to engage in aggression or violence. They were going to employ dialogue as a means of successful negotiation. By agreeing to publish their collective feminine concerns in a magazine, they were demonstrating their willingness to tell their story to whoever would listen. Employing tact and diplomacy in fighting gender inequality is what Nnaemeka refers to as a calculated 'detonation of patriarchal landmines.' [16]. This proves the universality of feminist struggle and the viability of an African centered model which works in other contexts despite socio-cultural differences.

Feminism, as portrayed by Accad, can be significantly successful if it is hinged on active collectivism. 'What each has to say, write, explain, and analyze is important. No piece of writing or single voice should claim superiority over another....' (p. 19) This is the kind of feminism which is most likely to chalk successes and make impactful inroads. This is why a crucial element of importance is conferred on the publication of an all-female journal. It would be a needful weapon occupying a strategic place in the liberation agenda. This, Accad captures, explicitly thus;

To create a new journal

With new ideas,
 Far from dogma, authorities,
 From systems built on fear
 To bring it into the world as a child for the future
 Show the child the possibility of other relationships
 Based on respecting difference
 To converse with the other, him, her, every day
 To open the other to hope
 Rebirth of a better world of life and light...
 So that a continent of wheat, of bread, of love
 May rise, climb, multiply! (p. 19)

There are certain vital concepts espoused about Afro-feminism in this poem. There is an alluding to the fact that feminism starts when women have an active voice, this voice should not be shackled with old restrictive interferences from society [18]. They must chart their own course to a desired emancipation. This new reality would be devoid of fear and intimidation. It will also be an all-inclusive society where the center and peripherals will converge on a common ground; there will be a re-rendering of otherness. In the end, a just and equitable society would be actualized. By painting such an idyllic picture of an envisaged future, Accad is imperceptibly pointing to the existing injustices prevalent in the current society. This reality cannot be actualized without obstacles. This is why there is the urgent need for resilience. Halima is not far from wrong when she estimates that, 'I see too many problems.... Several irreconcilable ideologies will bump heads... disputes are inevitable....' This is what Nnaemeka refers to in Negofeminism as knowing how, where, how and why to when to denotate patriarchal landmines. This is very necessary if their struggle and fight will achieve any positive results. There is the need to avoid what Fanon refers to as 'the oppressed fight among themselves and play the game of the oppressor....' (p. 21) Hence, focusing on the essentials becomes a necessity. It is possible for them to come together and work together if they are all willing to sacrifice a little and compromise a little. A critical assessment of this situation reveals the practicality and efficacy of Negofeminism. This form of feminism which has been practiced by our mothers and their mothers before them has found expression in different cultural contexts. It is effective as a 'compromised combative' strategy because it is hinged on a recurrent feature of an already existing culture. It is not different or act as an outsider trying to peep into exclusivity; it is woven out of the very fabric of society. This is why it will work. The form and composition are not antagonistic; it is collaborative.

Moreover, the concept of African Womanism, which was first propounded by Chikwenye Ogunyemi around 1980s, advocates for the full inclusion of women in the social, economic and political sphere of society. Ogunyemi further explains the totality of female experiences, struggles, specific needs and the cry for social recognition within patriarchal society. In the end, Womanism aims to change the existing oppressive discourse so the African woman can achieve an equal status and rights as that of the man. Ogunyemi sums up African Womanism as;

Womanism is black centered; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. [17].

It is possible to see traces of Nego-feminism in Ogunyemi's Womanism. They both advocate for complementarity between men and women. In an attempt to inscribe and enforce the importance of women as worthy partners in national development, caution must be exercised so that men are not constructed as the 'insignificant other.' There is a need for a collaborative effort between men and women if anything of value is to be achieved. This is seen played out among Hayate's friends. 'To converse with the other, him, her, every day....,' implies the possibility of dialogue opening doors of inclusiveness. Here, they espouse womanist theory of the need for men and women to form complementary allies [19].

Ghanaian writer, Ama Ata Aidoo also adds her voice to the ongoing debate. She stresses a kind of feminism which is neither men nor women centered but humanity focused. She asserts that;

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes, but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives and the burden of African development [4].

Aidoo's assertion proves that she believes in both Nego-feminism and womanism. These two theories call for an inherent belief in the potential of the woman. This conviction should be so strong that she is put in charge of various responsibilities that demands skill and expertise. This is an authentic way of achieving true and lasting development. Hayate and her friends are rolling out a kind of activism which plays out the tenets of Afro-African feminism.

The fusion of Lebanese/Arabic feminism and Afro-centered feminism also portrays a demonstration of an identity theory as well as that of Gee's (1997). [15]'s theory explores how existing social structures influences and defines one's identity. The thrust of the theory is that language-in-use, which is a form of social behaviour, is indirectly influenced by social structure. People act within the specific context of their social environment. Thus, an assumed role and the person's identity become unified [19]. Most identity theorists argue that the self normally consist of diverse identities and each one of them depends on an occupied role [8]. An identity then becomes an internalized or a co-opted positional designation which expresses deep-seated convictions and is reflective of the different positions one occupies in society [15]. This is what Accad achieves by making the women display different feminist identities. There seems to be a direct correlation between identity and subjective expectations of the individual. Hayate, Ahlame, Nayla and all the other women are shaped and identified by their restrictive patriarchal societies. This is what defines them; their non-

ascription to an established system that only seeks to oppress and deny them of an identity [14]. In their estimation, 'it is the only way to move things forward, to transform human relationships, between women and men, among women and among men' (p. 90). Emphasis on the transformation of relationships is at the core of both African and Lebanese feminisms. A pulsating sub-issue that throbs just beneath the surface of transformation of relationships is that of ensuring equality and equity among women. It is not always that men are the villains in the story. There are also class struggles amongst women. Women with situated identities like mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law become agents of enforcing cultural restrictions that works against women. Accad advocates for a total and holistic 'liberation' of the woman on all levels. She re-echoes the African feminist cry through the distinctive identities she gives her characters. This is seen played out during the first meeting of the Women Club.

7. Tunisian Feminism as Reflective of African Feminisms

The women club formed by Hayate and her friends has one tasking obligation. They want to situate and contextualize feminism. They are all in agreement that there is the need for a collaborative approach to feminism to ensure inclusivity. Most forms of African feminisms like Negofeminism, womanism and stiwanism among others all advocate for all-hands-on-deck approach as an effective means of engagement in the feminist struggle. In the words of Nadya, there is the need to 'develop a pluralistic view of feminism – analyze different approaches that already exist and define ourselves with regard to them and our own experience...' (p. 102). This approach Hayate and her friends are considering closely mirrors that of Nnaemeka's Negofeminism.

Accad assigns specific detailed roles to all the women involved in the Club. They become vessels or channels for the execution of the feminist agenda. Afafe is an all-inclusive entity. She believes in the power and ability of unassuming individuals to bring about change. In the feminist picture Accad is painting, Afafe adds a touch of shifting possibilities. She demonstrates, through her portraiture, that 'ordinary everyday women' have the ability to effect a desired change. It is not reserved for either the well-trained or skilled woman. It is through Afafe that a re-definition of feminism comes to the fore; desire for radical change among men and women is possible and can be initiated by women in all spheres of life.

Aida symbolizes life, vitality, hope and restoration. She strongly advocates for collaboration and is totally against all forms of aggression, confrontation and active ill-will. In her estimation, the best way of achieving intended results is to draw on all available and willing sources of strength. It is indeed self-defeating to isolate and alienate forces that can otherwise be harnessed to active collectivism. This all-inclusive chant for liberation is re-echoed in most forms of African feminisms. In Negofeminism and snail sense

feminism for instance, there is no room for penis envy and man hatred. In the quest for dismantling restrictive and oppressive societal structures, men need not be sidelined. This is the very anchor that gives a sense of rootedness to the struggle for both equality and equity. Aida is really no different from Malika who is portrayed as a strong advocate for cohesion and integration. All the women in the club are depicted as pieces in a puzzle. Their subjective ideologies all converge to proffer a lasting solution to the issues of women. Through her unique individual characters, Accad outlines the panacea to the existing gender inequalities. It is nestled in our collective efforts [20]. An integrated approach is needful 'so that other women elsewhere, in other times, will be comforted and will no longer feel alone.' (p. 149)

According to [3], every individual has diverse identities. The identity that is contracted depends largely on the context of interaction. This is what was seen play out among the women in the Club. In their various presentations, the women assumed both combative and collaborative personalities to scholarly argue out the feminist position. The arguments they presented can be grouped under three thematic areas; 'we can find in our culture, our traditions, the elements with which to reaffirm the status of women, rather than turning towards the western model which uses our weaknesses in this domain to destroy the whole society'; 'what are we, who are we? We who express ourselves in French?'; 'Feminism... is a universal trend, but always diverse in content. It is not expressed in the same terms at any moment in time, or across all societies.' [p. 165]. To the women then, feminism should be culturally determined, with a universal appeal and articulated in a language that does not connote oppression or ideals of the oppressor.

8. Conclusion

A cursory look seems to confirm that Accad warns against a blatant universalization of feminism. She asserts that if we attempt to 'define feminism in a general way, as women reclaiming all rights, we see that it is a universal trend, but always diverse in content. It is not expressed in the same terms at any moment in time, or across all societies.' (p. 165) In effect this highlights the fluidity of feminism as it is culturally determined. This confirms Nnaemeka's view that there is a close link between feminism and culture. Collectively and individually, Hayate and her friends represent different facets of the feminist struggle. The different character traits of the women represent the available tools of engagement. The content and form of feminism do not indeed remain the same across cultures yet they bear a certain level of semblance. This is where Accad's version of Arab/Lebanese feminism mirrors that of African feminisms. It is the context that determines the appropriate strategy of engagement. This is the intersection where Arabic feminism shares boundaries with African feminism. The similarities in the feminist struggle validates the universality of women's subjugation. There is therefore the need to redefine the terms of engagement to include negotiation, inclusiveness,

compromise, collaboration and perhaps a pinch of 'tempered radicalism.' Conceivably, Ahlame's bruised and battered body at the end of the story is representative of women's call for recognition and equality; frail and tottering on the very edges of oblivion nevertheless alive and breathing. There is definitely hope.

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