

Adding Pepper to the Injury:  
Reaction to Ken Harrow's Response to Pius Adesanmi's "Disappearing Me Softly"

by  
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I read Kenneth Harrow's piece as a reinforcement of the notion that African feminist writing is below standard and has to "grow up" in order to be included in world feminisms. I disagree, but he has every right to hold his opinion.

He states that he is in "complete agreement with" Pius Adesanmi's critique of Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Reader; a critique that questions the exclusion of African women. However, Harrow's view that by excluding African scholars "Gubar and Gilbert are arguing for a standard of excellence grounded in culturally defined notions of quality," contradicts his agreement. The kind of questions that he poses also contradicts Adesanmi's argument for inclusion of African scholars. I cite only two of Harrow's questions:

1. "Is there room within our profession for the non-African theorists' work to be read in conjunction with African literature?" My simple reply is "yes there is room for the non-African but he should not take up the whole room." However, I want to augment my reply with a question: Why must the theorists, in his question above, be non-African and the product (literature) be African. He seems to believe that African literature has to be analyzed SOLELY from the thinking produced from non-African (western) theorists? This implies the exclusion of African scholars and theorists. African way of thinking generated from African experience must be included in analyzing African literature and other literatures too!

2. "But are we doing the same by excluding non-African theorists in our readings of African literature, and in our understanding of what constitutes 'African'?" My reply is also a question: Do they use African theorists to understand what constitutes 'American' or the west for that matter?

It is true that African critics see the need to view African literature from the basis of African context and critical perspective, but that has never meant exclusion of non-African critical lenses. On the contrary, it is a struggle for the inclusion of Africans in discussing African affairs. In fact, I don't know any criticism of African literature by Africans or non-Africans that did not include non-African theorists or views.

When Harrow said as cited above that "Gubar and Gilbert are arguing for a standard of excellence grounded in culturally defined notions of quality;" what culture is he referring to as the Center from which all others are judged? Is it not the West? Feminist epistemology thrives on querying traditional way of thinking and argues for the

expansion and in some cases the rejection of monocentric vision including the so called classical cannon that has been used to exclude white women for a long time. I don't mean that we should lessen standards but that we should continue to question the constitution of that "standard." This is at the core of feminist thinking.