

CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN FEMALE WRITERS TO FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, female writers of African Literature have played a vital role in ameliorating the condition of African women in a patriarchal society. This view is observed in the works of the Calixthe Beyala of Cameroun, Mariama Ba and Aminata Sowfall of Senegal. These writers have used the power of the pen to encourage female assertiveness and consciousness in women. Through their works many female sleeping giants have risen up to the challenge to take up leadership responsibilities in their chosen careers, in politics and other sectors of national development. This paper exposed how the works of these writers have opened up avenues of economic empowerment for women. It also addressed how the socio-political situation of women has drastically changed and women have evolved from a second class, suppressed and marginalized group to a class of emancipated and independent group taking part in leadership positions in the society. The feminist theory of Alice Walker formed the bedrock of this paper. Our finding is that women in leadership are more organized and do better in leadership than their male counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

The study of African literature opens one's eyes to the different eras of the African life and history. The works of many African writers from colonial and post colonial eras reveal the oppressive stages Africa as a continent have undergone. Borrowing the words of Julie Agbasiere in the introductory part of her work, *The "New Eve" in francophone African literature* she remarks; "Blacks are underprivileged on the account of color of their skin, so are women undervalued because of their sex". {1999:123}

It is therefore not a surprise that these writers by experience, observation and through history discovered the ordeal of the African woman and addressed it squarely. Women participation in leadership in Africa is viewed with contempt be it in the larger society or at the family levels, African women have been victims of discriminatory attitudes. Very rigorous gender roles have prevented women from "being" and always set them at the doing as Okoye observes, [2009:334].

Women are subtly excluded from participating in national politics. In this system women are seen to be intellectually incapable, unable to take right decisions. The girl child was denied access to western education as at the time her boys counterparts started, hence women continued to view themselves with men's mirror for a very long time. But for these female writers in focus who had access to western education, they deemed it fit to help liberate other women and awaken the sleeping giant in them to move forward and explore every sphere of life including politics.

Calixthe Beyala, Mariama Bà and Aminata Sow Fall have all through the means of writing demonstrated how African women can effectively take part in national development and in all sectors of life endeavor. These women as writers are pace-setters themselves in that through writing, they have already classified themselves leaders, showing other women the right path to tread. Through their works strong female characters are created who are rising to take part in the leadership of their societies. We have-through-the feminist theory analyzed the works of these writers, our focus is the works of calixthe Beyala's *Les honneurs perdus*, while we examined equally *une si longue lettre* of Mariama Bà and finally we also examined *La greve des Battues* of Aminata Sow Fall.

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism, fictional or philosophical discourse which aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It equally examines women's and men's social roles, experiences, interests, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as sociology, Anthropology, education, literature etc. The three female writers in consideration expose through literary writing, gender inequality inherent in patriarchal society, women experiences, social roles of men and women and interests.

The theory focuses in analyzing gender inequality and in the 1970's Feminist literary criticism concerned itself with women authorship and the representation of women's condition within literature, in particular the depiction of fictional female characters. The works of these three female writers examined, captures, powerful, strong and forceful female characters in their works which negates gender inequality that brought about discrimination in leadership against women by men hence the consideration of how female writers use literary works to take part in leadership and through the same medium rouse the leadership potentials of other women is not out of place.

These Francophone female writers have contributed to literature and their works have played vital roles in the society especially among women, their works have instilled courage and open the eyes of many women to discover their potentials in life and use them appropriately. Oladele in *female novelist of modern Africa* sees African female writers as members of the elite class, they are professional women who often have benefited from university Education, and they have worked so hard that they are accepted as honored members of the society. They are active in social organizations especially with those connected to the improvement of the quality of home and family life". Oladele observes. (1984:15). In this write up, we shall see the corrective mission of these writers, education for enhancing women participation in leadership, economic empowerment for enhancing women participation in leadership, and finally our conclusion.

THE CORRECTIVE MISSION OF FEMALE WRITERS

African francophone female writers like Aminata Sow Fall, Mariama Ba and Calixthe Beyala stormed the literary scene; their mission was to counter the poor image of women painted by male writers. They made women and women preoccupations the subject of literary investigations. They represented women in fictional works. They made women the protagonists of the story in their creations; they placed women struggling at grips with retrogressive practices that hinder the full realization of her potentials as a person. They portray the image of women with guts, strength of

character and the choices she makes which go a long way in determining the level of her success in freeing herself from her predicaments.

This positive image of the African woman is a means of countering the negative portrait of African Women by the male writers. In *une si longue lettre* of Mariama Ba, Ramatoulaye the protagonist and her friend Aissatou are characters whose dispositions Bà used to correct the image of feeble, dependent and un-intelligent African woman who is incapable of decision making.

Ramatoulaye is faced with family challenges, she takes a personal decision one, to accommodate Modou her husband after taking a second wife who is her daughter's age mate and friend. She rejects the remarriage offer of Dauda Dieng contrary to the advice of her well-wishers. Rama is intelligent as a woman, having considered the plight of her twelve children if she opts for divorce. She is considerate enough to think through the hurt other women like her will go through should she accept any offer of remarriage. She writes thus to Daouda Ding

Tu crois simple le problème polygamique. Ceux qui s'y meuvent connaissent des contraintes... Abandonnée hier, par le fait d'une femme, je ne peux allégrement m'introduire entre toi et ta famille ---- (100). To her brother-in-law Tamsir, she retorts: Tu oublies que j'ai un Cœur, une raison: que je ne suis pas un objet que l'on se passe de main en main. Tu ignores ce que se marier signifie. Pour moi, c'est un acte de foi et d'amour ----- (85).

Aissatou on the other hand, rejects polygamy in its entirety. She abandons her marital home when she learnt of her husband's second marriage, she divorces him and takes her four sons away first to France, then to America. She became an interpreter which helped her to take proper responsibility of her children. Aissatou divorce stems from a proper articulation of means of escaping psychological trauma she could encounter if she remains in the marriage. In her wisdom to live and see her children well taken care of, she opts for divorce. She writes to her husband.

Je me dépouille de ton amour. Vêtue du seul habit valable de la dignité, je poursuis ma route (50). She epitomizes an independent woman who is capable to brave any circumstance on her way to progress.

Aminata Sow Fall in her corrective mission as well created strong and powerful women that become key characters in the novel. In *la grève des battues* she creates a powerful and strong character in the person of Salla Niang who is the leader of the beggars in their face-off with the government. She undertakes to fight the cause of the down trodden beggars in the capital where they are domicile. The government of the day saw the beggars as a menace to public health and economic enterprises, drives them out of the city. The beggars repost by organizing a revolt to assert their humanity importance in the society. Agbasiere (90). These beggars were organized by this resourceful woman.

Salla as a woman is not equally dependent on her husband. From the story she has a shop, but the husband manages it. In her wisdom she saves up beggars contributions and returns to them five times what she has contributed. At her level she starts what we call co-operative today. Salla Niang became very independent that she could afford to purchase a piece of land, build an estate on it where these beggars assemble every evening to take stock of the day's activities and discuss the government officials cruelty and brutality towards them.

Salla asserts and imposes her personality; she wins the admiration and acceptance of her as a leader. In the course of their evening meetings, she was notified of the brutality and killing meted to some of these beggars, she gets them to agree with her to stay away from the city. An intelligent woman she is, she uses her wisdom to reverse the turn of events that instead of the beggars begging for alms, it is the highly placed and the government officials that came looking for them to give alms. In this vintage point, they dictate the quality of alms given to them. Salla stands as powerful figure that even Mour has to reckon with her in order to give alms to beggars to enable him win the position of a vice-president. Mour exhausts all gimmicks and subterfuges to get the beggars back to their begging posts in the city. Salla makes him believe the beggars will respond but eventually makes sure they don't step out. Mour realizes that real power lies with the beggars and not with him as his dreams of becoming a vice president is shattered.

Salla Niang epitomizes the true image of African woman who is at every stage in her life very forceful, powerful, confident, intelligent and vocal. She is useful and influential in her society. In "*Les honneurs perdues*" Calixthe Beyala also in her corrective mission of the negative image of African women creates the character of Ngaremba who in France is concerned about the destiny of Africa. Ngaremba is independent in France, she has her office where she does some writing or history of Africa, she also welcome, prepares and pursues the complete papers for Africans who are new in France.

Ngaremba, though a woman hosts African intellectuals on weekly basis. She assumes the leadership of this group, a position that makes Saïda the protagonist of the novel addresses her as *Négresse-princesse-et dignitaire*.

Ngaremba is an African woman who is talented in writing, with other intellectuals; they think and talk of how to preserve the African cultural heritage even in France. Thus she participates in the plan of building and developing her continent.

Ngaremba like African men keeps a man, and provides for him as men would do to women. There is a reverse of role as Fredrick stays with this woman and takes orders from her. Ngaremba as an African emancipated woman is used to correct the negative image of African woman as being incapable in every area of her life. Saïda appreciates Ngaremba's role for Africans as a woman and said!

- Fobulouse, Ngaremba, dis je: vous vous rendez compte de votre importance parmi les immigres? Que devraient-ils sans vous? ---- (CP217)
- Elle reponde: J'ai décidé de consacrer ma vie au bien être de notre communauté.

Ngaremba is equally a single parent. She adequately takes care of her two children; she does not solicit for the help of any man in this. She is bold and asserts herself in that she desires in her own house without constrain from any man. Ngaremba also educates Saïda the protagoniste of the novel; she assumes the place of a mother for her. She counsels and teaches her about life generally and about men. Saïda observes :

“Je restais silencieuse. Au fond, Ngaremb avait raison, pour vivre en France, un immigré doit être très fort, comme elle, ou simple d’esprit de manière à organiser sa vie sans se poser des questions. Il me fallait pour vivre ce qui est indispensable à la vie d’une femme en Afrique; les claques d’un époux, les colères des parents, les critiques des cousins, la jalousie des tantes, les caprices des petits-enfants et tout le tralala qui accompagne ces états pour que mon univers ne soit pas désavé”. (page 357).

The three African female writers’ play this corrective role all assigning to the female characters some rare qualities that they were presented before as not possessing. In their works we find certain elements that help the African woman attain her desired goals without hindrance. They used the acquisition of Education and economic empowerment of these characters to lift them from the base place assigned to her originally.

There are a host of other writer’s men and women who have also through their works portrayed the leadership qualities of women. In “women and creative writings” of Flora Nwapa in *African literature: An anthology of criticism and theory*, the author made mention of different authors whose works portrayed this leadership in women. Peter Abraham’s *A wreath for Udom* and Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s bits of Woods* recognize these leadership qualities in women. In *A wreath for Udom*, there are three characters, Lois, Selina, and Maria who are portrayed as women who take up their rightful positions in the society. They are the powers behind the struggle for independence. Adebhoy notes: “Selina is the power behind us, Homeboy”. This woman through wisdom instructs other women what to tell their men, and their men do what the women tell them. Adebhoy concludes that without this woman, they would not have this party.

In Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Woods*, the success of the railway workers’ strike is attributable to women. The women scout for food and water. They march on to Dakar, in their numbers which incapacitated the colonialist from action. These women equally fight the police. Seeing the position of women during the strike actually opened men’s eyes to leadership qualities in women and so they learned to consult the women before undertaking any measure issues or projects. In Achebe’s *Antihill of the Savanna*, Beatrice Nwanyibuife, the heroine, is seen as a liberated and powerful woman, which gives the understanding that she symbolizes a sudden awakening to the importance of woman-being. The name of this woman means that a woman is a force to reckon with. In Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, the author created a female character, Efuru the heroine, who a beautiful, intelligent, hardworking, and wealthy woman. This woman despite her challenges in life, yet she attains a very high and respectable position in her community. Efuru is the chosen one of the great woman of the lake: she is called late

in life to be the priestess of the water goddess. By this choice, she is elevated to a plane higher than that of human beings: she communicates with the gods and goddesses. Amaka the heroine of Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* finds herself performing tasks considered as men's jobs. She becomes a contractor and attains economic independence.

Alice Walker's womanist theory which was first used in her short, 'Coming Apart', in 1979, the author defined womanist as 'black feminist or feminist of color. She goes on to say that a womanist is also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and / no sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women emotional flexibility...and women's strength...committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Walker opines that a womanist is committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women can coexist, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. {en.m.wikipedia.org}. From the definition of womanism, the three writers in consideration created female characters who appreciate women's culture and are committed to the survival of all. In *the beggars' strike* of Aminata Sow Fall, Salla Niang was concerned about the well-being of all the beggars, not only the female beggars. In *Les Honneurs Perdus* of Calixthe Beyala, Ngaremba is interested in the welfare of all African migrants not just the female Africans. In *Une Si Longue Lettre*. The heroine as well rejected the proposal of marriage by Dauda Dieng considering his wives who will be hurt if she accepts to be his wife.

Education: for enhancing women participation in leadership.

These female writers, Calixthe Beyala, Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall recognize Education as very powerful and useful tool to foster courage in African women to participate actively in leadership positions in her society. The acquisition of Western Education proffers solutions to problems of inferiority complex in African women. Education is a tool through which the mentality of African women changes and affords them individuality. When women are enlightened it helps them to be self assertive, confident and courageous to take up leadership responsibilities.

In *Les honneurs perdus* of Calixthe Beyala, Ngaremba a major character in the novel is introduced as an intellectual. Ngaremba hosts other African intellectuals weekly to discuss African issues and to seek for solutions for the many problems plaguing the continent. It takes an intellectual, a woman who has gone through western education herself to organize such group. Ngaremba as a result of her education is able to attain this height. .

In *la grève des battues*, Aminata creates the character of Raabi, Loli's daughter, a law student who proves her non-conformism to the negative image heretofore painted of African woman. Through her Education in the novel she rejects polygamy and gender role reserved for women earlier in a patriarchal society.

In Mariama Bâ's *une si longue lettre*, Daba, Ramatoulaye's daughter is educated and married. She was able to dictate her father's indignity in taking a second wife and she advise her mother to quite the relationship. Aisaatou as well through western Education became aware of her potentials, she refused to be treated as a property that could be

used and dumped. She opted for divorce and was courageous in her decision, thus inferiority complex is taken care of through enlightenment and education.

It is after the education of these three writers that they could venture into writing and having the desire to provide leadership for others through writing. Aminata Sow Fall revealed this in an interview.

*Après mes études, Je suis revenue au Sénégal
et Je me suis mise à regarder autour de moi
pour constater que beaucoup de choses
avaient changé.*

Alors le désir d'écrire est devenu assez vif en moi ----- (64-65).

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: FOR WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP

In *La greve des battues* Fall created Salla Niang a character who might not be attributed any kind of Western Education but through her resourcefulness she became economically independent and thus became the leader of the down trodden in the society. A character that exposes the inner strength inherent in women at any level be it family or in the larger society to lead others thereby becoming instruments of positive change and development in the society. This woman did not wait to be elected president of the beggars, she simply took up the challenge to help and provide leaders for the beggars. It is worthy of note that if she did not have a place to keep these beggars during their face off with government, perhaps things would not have been easy with her and the beggars. Her resourcefulness and economic liberation made possible the triumph of the beggars over politicians of their time.

In *Les honneurs Perdus*, Ngaremba used her ability to write to put up adverts about Africa and its problems through which she made some money. She was involved in voluntary services for the blacks in France. She said: J'ai décidé de consacrer ma vie au bien être de notre communauté. (217). Being economically empowered she could afford to bring in Saïda as a house help, help her friend Fredrick and took care of her daughter Loulouze. When women are economically empowered, it helps them avoid many social vices which run contrary to accepted norms and culture of the society.

In *Une Si Longue Lettre*, Aissatou is a career woman, an interpreter in her country's embassy abroad. She considered the well-being of her children; she took care of them, providing for their needs all by herself. The economic roles of these female characters created by these three writers are clear evidence that when women are diligent and economically empowered, they wield great positive influence on the world around them.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, these three writers examined, have by observation and experience witness discriminatory attitude of patriarchy against women participation in leadership in Africa and raise their voices against it. They as African women have traced the path to leadership and success in life through writing and through the same means sensitize African women population on the need to participate actively in leadership in their societies. Through their works female characters that despite all challenges took part in the leadership of their communities and effected changes are portrayed. This they

do to arouse the spirit of leadership buried in women untapped. Mariama Bà, Aminata Sow Fall and Calixthe Beyala are unmistakable about the leadership potentials in women. Through the power of the pen they have all taken it as a mission first of all to correct the negative images of African francophone women by patriarchy through their various female characters who demonstrate high leadership qualities in their novels. Through these characters they uncover the indispensable tools that lifted these women to the enviable leadership positions they occupied. Therefore, Education and economic empowerment are very necessary tools that women who aspire to get to the top in their societies and their careers must pursue. This work considers Mariama Bà, Aminata Sow Fall and Calixthe Beyala as feminist who through writing are considered pace-setters of women participation in leadership in Africa and they have also played the role of arousing women interest in leadership participation through their various works considered. They have demonstrated through the female characters they created that women are better leaders as these women despite all odds show high leadership qualities. Today, women don't need to wait to be appointed leaders by any man. Women should like these three writers recognize their potentials in their families, place of work and in the society generally and provide leadership for those around them. Leadership positions are available for women everywhere; it's not until a woman becomes the president of a country before we can agree to the fact that women take active part in leadership in Africa.

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