4/WOMANISM FOR QUALITY LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA : A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *LA DEUXIEME SEXE AND* AMINATA SOW FALL's D*OUCEURS DE BERCAIL*

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Abstract

The contemporary society, despite its level of global influence and advancement in areas of science, technology and advancement in women recognition and empowerment still dwells and operates within the ambient of a man's world. Simone de Beauvoir, a French writer and Aminata Sow Fall, an African Francophone writer in their works understudy, argue that man is considered the default while woman is considered the other. La Deuxième Sexe and Douceurs de Bercail chronicle the account of the suppression of opportunities for women, the unhealthy competition in the guise of anything-a-man-can-do, a woman-can-equally-do, and even better campaign and many other deprivations or disadvantaged positions of women. Through a critical appreciation and comparative analysis, the researchers using womanism as a theory portrayed and defended women's place in history as well as provided alternatives regarding women's full acceptance in the participatory development of African society and her political leadership positions. Our corpus shows that the development and advancement of any society be it African or French societies depends on how the two genders can appreciate one another, recognize and respect each other's abilities and potentials for the promotion and maximum exploration of core values.

Keywords*: womanism, leadership, Africa, politics*

Résumé

La société contemporaine, avec son niveau d'influence mondiale et d'avancement dans les domaines de la science, de la technologie et de l'avancement de la reconnaissance et de l'autonomisation des femmes, demeure et opère toujours dans l'ambiance d'un monde d'hommes. Simone de Beauvoir, une écrivaine française et Aminata Sow Fall, une écrivaine africaine francophone dans leurs travaux de doublure, soutiennent que l'homme est considéré comme le défaut tandis que la femme est considérée comme l'autre. Ainsi, l'humanité considérée comme masculine localise la femme dans l'homme et les femmes sont donc considérées comme le deuxième ordre de la création. La Deuxième Sexe et Douceurs de Bercail relatent le récit de la suppression des opportunités pour les femmes, la concurrence malsaine sous l'apparence de tout ce qu'un homme peut faire, une femme peut tout autant faire, et encore mieux la campagne et bien d'autres autres privations ou positions défavorisées des femmes. À travers une appréciation critique et une analyse comparative, les chercheurs utilisant les théories actuelles que les auteurs ont posées ont dépeint et défendu la place des femmes dans l'histoire et ont proposé des alternatives en ce qui concerne la pleine acceptation des femmes dans le développement participatif de la société africaine et ses positions de leadership politique. Notre corpus montre que le développement et l'avancement de toute société, qu'elle soit africaine ou française, dépend de la manière dont les deux sexes sont capables de s'apprécier, de reconnaître et de respecter les capacités et les potentiels de l'autre pour la promotion et l'exploration maximale des valeurs fondamentales.

Mots-clés *: féminisme, leadership, Afrique, politique*

Introduction

Okereke is of the view that the society generally has presented woman as being the weaker vessel, second class being, feeble minded being, child bearer, emotional being, man's helper, caretaker, man's better half, man's wealth preserver, man's soul mate, home managers, among others. The evolution of women's condition according to the existentialist author Simone de Beauvoir, blames the society and motherhood as the key factors that weakened the recognition and vibrancy of the women folk.

This view is equally upheld by Aminata Sow Fall in the presentation of her female characters and the roles she assigns to them as mothers. Beauvoir writes that motherhood has reserved in the woman an animalistic condition and has made it possible for men to dominate her in her perceived subordinate nature. Contrary to the perception of the woman in many societies, a woman is powerfully created with superior structures; she is impeccably and uniquely made by her creator hence the need to address issues bothering women development and self-discovery in a manner more beneficial to the society without fighting gender wars. The need to appreciate the women folk aiming at benefitting from their womanistic endowment and natural blessings cannot be over emphasized as it advances a great advantage to the African society at large. Womanism from Walkers point of view can be seen as an act of encompassing feminist approaches while being more inclusive towards black women. The assertion that some capable women are beginning to lose faith in their capabilities because of social and cultural limitations is directly related to Simone de Beauvoir's dissatisfaction about the woman's inability to break free from a man's world Sow Fall in *Douceurs de Bercail*, through her protagonist also demonstrates the possibility of this break but at the end portrays a version of African womanism where women are not necessarily seeking for a break from men for the sake of

pleasure but for reasons of preserving a harmonious society devoid of oppression and injustice for the advancement and development of the society.

The 21st century is laden with sufficient scientific evidence that women are as capable of holding leadership positions as men. Women, as many think, are not naturally weak. They neither have limited contractual capacity nor lower intelligence quotient than men. This is proved in the likes of women like Margaret Thatcher "the iron lady", former Prime Minister of Britain, Indira Ghandhi, former Prime Minister of India, Queen Elizabeth II of England, Ellen Johnson Sir leaf, President of Liberia. In Nigeria, we have women like Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, one time Finance Minister, Late Professor Dora Akunyili, former Minister of Information and Director of NAFDAC, Dr. Ndi Okereke Onyiuke among others. These women have distinguished themselves in leadership and administration in Nigeria. In the last two decades, according to Olaleye, debates, on the status of women and the need to integrate them into the development process of any nation have raged on at national and international workshops, seminars among others. In Nigeria today, women have come a long way in business, politics, education, sports and other professions. They have made indelible marks in their efforts to conquer the limitations of the perception which seeks to permanently limit their area of operation to the kitchen and the bedroom. Yet, many Nigerian women are still relegated to the background as they lack the educational, economic and political power necessary to actualize their innate potentials. Ifedili and Ifedili asserted that Nigerian women are stalled by culture, which makes them, vulnerable to effectively join the workforce and contribute to the economic and thus, national development. Majority of Nigerian women have not been fully mobilized and empowered to contribute to national development. The concept of development has been viewed from different angles; social, economic, political and cultural. Okemakinde viewed development to depict positive change in

socio-economic and political conditions or situations of the society. Olomukoro views empowerment in terms of human potentials and capabilities in the context of relations with other social groups. He further emphasized that the inclusion of women means a greater understanding of social, economic and political process, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day-to-day living, expansion of manual skills, greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity, self-respect and equality. Financial independence and empowerment of women have been established as successful strategies to address poverty around the world.

Concept of womanism

Womanism is a social theory based on the history and everyday experiences of Black women in America. According to the womanist scholar Layli Maparyan (Phillips), “Womanism seeks to restore the balance between people and the environment/nature and reconcile human life with the spiritual dimension”(9). Womanism supports the idea that the culture of the woman, which in this case is the focal point of intersection as opposed to class or some other characteristic, is not an element of her identity but rather is the lens through which her identity exists. Her strengths and weaknesses have absolutely nothing to do with her gender, but the psychological fear already imbibed in her makes her to believe that they have limitations.

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. This inclusion of men provides black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression without directly attacking men. Author and poet Alice Walker first used the term "womanist" in her short story, ‘*lish*’ in 1979, and later in

In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: *womanist prose*. The term comes from the expression commonly used by black American mothers to describe the behaviour of their female children, 'You are acting womanish', referring to grown-up behaviour. The womanish girl exhibits willful, courageous, and outrageous behaviour that is considered to be beyond the scope of societal norms. Walker defines a womanist thus:

A black feminist or feminist of colour" who loves other women and/ or men sexually and nonsexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility and women's strength and is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. (12)

According to Walker, while feminism is incorporated in womanism, it is also instinctively pro-humankind; womanism is a theory that counters feminist ideas. The focus of the theory is not on gender inequality, rather race, social and class based oppression. She sees womanism as a movement for the survival of the black race; a theory that takes into consideration the experiences of black women, black culture, black myths, spiritual life, strength and orality. Walker's much cited phrase: "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender", suggests that feminism is a component beneath the much larger ideological umbrella of womanism.

Walker's definition also holds that womanists are Universalists. This philosophy is further invoked by her metaphor of a garden where all flowers bloom equally. 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. This inclusion of men provides black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression without directly attacking men. The term womanism has thus evolved to envelop varied, and often opposing, interpretations of concepts such

as feminism and gender equality. There are other simpler definitions for womanism such as the one used by The American Heritage Dictionary, which recognized the word in 1993 and defined it as “Having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race (tribe) and class; exhibiting feminism that is inclusive especially of Black American Culture”. Within Africa, some women now suffer even more violent attacks from fellow blacks due to ethnic differences and this denies peaceful coexistence and limits progress and advancement within Africa.

Clenora Hudson-Weems came up with a different idea of womanism which she termed Africana womanism and this is projected as an ideology applicable to all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and Afrocentrism and focuses on the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women of the African Diaspora. It distinguishes itself from feminism, or Alice Walker’s womanism. Africana womanism pays more attention to and focuses more on the realities and the injustices in society in regard to race. Hudson-Weems believes that the creation of the ideology separates African women's accomplishments from African male scholars, feminism, and black feminism.

The Africana Womanism Society lists 18 characteristics of the *Africana womanist*, including being self-naming, self-defining, family-centered, flexible, and desiring positive male companionship. She states that ‘‘The Africana womanist is not to be confused with Alice Walker's 'womanist'" (48). She continues:

> Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desire of Africana women. (49)

Alice Walker and Hudson-Weems' ideas about womanism all stand in favour of the self-actualization of women. Having clearly stated these two different approaches to womanism, we intend in this research, to look at womanism more from Alice Walker's point of view but as it affect women in the African society rather than the African American woman seeking consciousness in their foreign society.

Beauvoir's exasperation of the woman's status quo

Beauvoir in her existentialistic ideas as stated in her work *La Deuxième Sexe* shows distaste for the so-called weak nature of the woman by default, she argues that the woman was never created weak but is subject of social condemnation and cultural limitation. Beauvoir hopes that the woman will rise against her estranged nature to explore her creativity and live her full potentials irrespective of what the society thinks of her, who the society defines her to be and what the society expects of her. She starts by asking the question *"What is a woman?* «She argues that man is considered the *default*, while woman is considered the *"Other":* "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him. Beauvoir describes the relationship of ovum to sperm in various creatures (fish, insects, and mammals), leading up to the human being. She describes women's subordination to the species in terms of reproduction, compares the physiology of men and women, concluding that values cannot be based on physiology and that the facts of biology must be viewed in light of the ontological, economic, social, and physiological context.

According to Beauvoir, two factors explain the evolution of women's condition: participation in production and freedom from reproductive slavery. Beauvoir states that motherhood left woman riveted to her body like an animal and made it possible

for men to dominate her and Nature. She describes man's gradual domination of women, starting with the statue of a female Great Goddess found in Susa, and eventually getting to the opinion of ancient Greeks like Pythagoras who wrote, "There is a good principle that created order, light and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness and woman." Men succeed in the world by transcendence, but immanence is the lot of women," (10). Beauvoir notes that men oppress women when they seek to perpetuate the family and keep patrimony intact. She compares women's situation in ancient Greece with Rome. In Greece, with exceptions like Sparta where there were no restraints on women's freedom, women were treated almost like slaves. In Rome because men were still the masters, women enjoyed more rights but, were still discriminated against on the basis of their sex consequently, they had what can be described as empty freedom.

Beauvoir finds fault with the Napoleonic Code, criticizes Auguste Comte ad Honoré de Balzac and describes Pierre-Joseph Proudhon as antifeminist. The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century gave women an escape from their homes but they were paid little for their work. Beauvoir traces the growth of trade unions and participation by women. She examines the spread of birth control methods and the history of abortions. Beauvoir relates the history of women's suffrage, she writes thus: "Women like Rosa Luxemburg and Marie Curie brilliantly demonstrated that it is not women's inferiority that has determined their historical insignificance: it is their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority. (14)

Presenting a child's life beginning with birth, Beauvoir contrasts a girl's upbringing with a boy's, who at age 3 or 4 is told he is a "little man". A girl is taught to be a woman and her feminine destiny is imposed on her by society. She has no innate maternal instinct. A girl comes to believe in and to worship a male god and to create imaginary adult lovers. The discovery of sex is a phenomenon as painful as weaning

and she views it with disgust. When she discovers that men, not women, are the masters of the world this imperiously modifies her consciousness of herself. Beauvoir describes puberty, the beginning of menstruation and the way girls imagine sex with a man. She relates several ways in which girls in their late teens accept their femininity, which may include running away from home, fascination with the disgusting, following nature, or stealing. Beauvoir describes sexual relations with men, maintaining that the repercussion of its first experiences informs a woman's whole life. Beauvoir describes women's sexual relations with women. She writes that "homosexuality is no more a deliberate perversion than a fatal curse". (69)

Sow Fall's Deconstruction of Feminism to Womanism

Sow Fall, in *Douceurs de Bercail* presents the patriarchal society where women are marginalized and ill-treated. She opens our eyes to see through Diouldé the Husband of the protagonist, Asta. The lack of regard for women is obvious as Asta is not seen as a human but as a punching bag. She is just considered as an object of sexual pleasure that is only good for procreation. It is a known fact that the African woman's world is characterized by a variety of oppressive systems. Women belong to an oppressed class. The oppression of women is total, affecting every facet of their lives. In talking about her situation, Asta remarks that: « La vie ne m'a jamais rien offert sur un plateau d'argent sauf l'enfance » (86) Life has never offered me anything on a platter of gold except during my childhood.

She further delves into the sufferings and challenges she encountered as a woman which were imposed on her by social devaluation in these words.

Je suis devenue un esclave qui vit à ta charge, qui doit accepter tous tes caprices et maintenant, tes violences ! ... Nous ne pouvons pas vivre comme

ça…Ce n'est pas digne, ni pour les enfants…Demain lundi, je déposerai une requête de divorce (168-170)

I have become a slave that depends on you to live, that must therefore put up with all your whims and endure your violence! … We can no longer live like that… It is neither worthy of us, nor of the children…Tomorrow Monday, I am going to request for divorce!

In Douceurs de Bercail, everything about the protagonist's action portrays her as a feminist, ranging from her filing for divorce, her determination to break limits, and her spirit of innovation, the creation of farmers' co-operative to her decision never to remarry. These portray her as a radical feminist. After her success and self-fulfillment, we observe a change, a kind of mellow down which was manifested in her remarriage to Boubou, a cousin to one of the ex- immigrants. It is instructive to note that the farmers' co-operative was for both men and women. With this project she breaks limits and reconstructed the image of women in general. The establishment of the farmers' co-operative brought about human and social development to her community.

The remarriage of Asta, deconstructs the patriarchal culture of subjugation and silence of women in the society and at the same time deconstructs the unbending characteristics of radical feminism which is not in consonance with Africana womanism known to promote justice, equity, and fairness for both men and women. Africana womanism advocates a healthy relationship between men and women which promotes equal development for both sexes still upholding African healthy socio-cultural practices. Asta's project "Naatangue" and her remarriage is in line with Alice Walker's theory of womanism where men and women co-exist in peace

and in harmony and together build a strong and vibrant society. Women should recognize their abilities and put them to useful societal development to build a harmonious society devoid of violence and oppression. The theory of womanism emphasizes the need for development and respect for both sexes, men should therefore recognize the strength of women and give them full support to attain their goals and aspirations in life. Together African societies trapped in the snare of bad leadership will come out of bad governance triumphantly. African societies can turn into Eldorado sought for in western countries. Ndu 2020, in *Contributions of African female writers to female participation in leadership* concludes that:

Today, women don't need to wait to be appointed leaders by any man. Women should like these writers recognize their potentials in their families, places of work, and in the society generally and provide leadership for those around them. She further noted that leadership positions are available for women everywhere. (96)

Omoyemi views Asta as an achiever, a custodian of culture and saviour of her country from economic distress. Sow Fall through Asta demonstrates that women can be agents of social change and harbingers of a new reality. Also, through Asta, emphasis is laid on the struggles of women of all ages against patriarchal conventions. The story of Asta shows her awakening of the type of consciousness, which reveals the true nature of women. She thereby attains the moral values which enable her to jettison the prescribed female roles, testing herself through adventures in the outside world to reconstruct her identity.

Womanism: Enabler of quality leadership

Walker's definition of womanism reveals that it can enable quality leadership and good governance. Loving men and women sexually and nonsexually, is all

encompassed in womanism. Womanism sees all men and women as beings of equal respect and attribute, none is a higher or lesser gender, as people who need equal treatment in cultural, economic and social issues, as humans among whom no race, color, class or gender should be privileged to be loved. This is one of the characteristics that governed the Naatangue community established by the protagonist of *Douceurs de Bercail*. The success achieved through this principle where men recognized the strength of each other without discrimination of any kind is equal to none. In this community men and women were more concerned about the progress and the development of their society than anything else. Womanists appreciate the peculiarities of both sexes and respect them. Those who demonstrated leadership abilities were recognized and given the opportunity and the privilege to lead without any form of discrimination based on race, sex or gender. There was rapid progress and development in this community of farmers as each one, men as well women brought in their initiative unhindered. One of the foreign characters dreaded by Diouldé was Annee. He told his wife that they don't have the same values with her, but Asta who is already a reformed woman will not give heed to her husband. Anne was involved in the building of Naatangue though a foreigner and nobody discriminated against her.

The American Heritage Dictionary, which recognized womanism in 1993 and defined it as "Having or expressing a belief in or respect for women and their talents and abilities beyond the boundaries of race (tribe) and class; exhibiting feminism that is inclusive especially of Black American Culture". Within Africa, women now suffer even more violent attacks from fellow blacks due to ethnic differences and this denies peaceful coexistence and limits progress and advancement within Africa.

It is therefore worthy of note that womanism is what the African societies need to be able to harness her human potentials and material resources for quality leadership

which will bring about great development in Africa. Beauvoir's grievances over women's limitation cannot be neglected; it calls for a reanalysis of the feminine nature, and a redefinition of the woman's status quo. It is a clarion call for all to appreciate the existence of women and the natural goodness that comes with her creation, there is need to overlook the social subjugation and grant her an unlimited opportunity of bringing forth her magical prowess which will in turn favour man and the society at large. The major interest should be how to get it better and not who takes the crown, it is not a vengeance by any superior being or gender, rather what should benefit all. Front a different point of view, analysing womanism and applying the Igwebuike theory can offer better solutions to woman cohabitation. Igwebuike is a theory that depicts the extension hand of brotherhood and friendship as a principle of unity which promotes love amongst neighbours, hence the understanding that no man is an island, and no man can exist alone because the African tradition does not overlook intervention. Onebunne and Ezeaka (2021) proposed the Igwebuike Ideology as a strong option for quality leadership, they express the opinion that:

> Charlemagne's victorious achievements in the medieval period were not by mere fortress, rather by unity and solidarity. Unfortunately, the regrettable destruction that befell his reign was as a result of disunity in the form of betrayal, treachery and division. (24)

Seeing the importance of solidarity, the need to be unified as a nation to fight insecurity, maintain national peace, and achieve quality leadership in general, it is therefore sacrosanct. The spirit of unity should be deployed and applied as a support system to uplift the concept of womanism for quality goals in our leadership system.

Conclusion

The two writers portrayed the problems of the place of women in the society, the subjugation of women, the oppression against her, myths associated to her, and the way she has been affected negatively. Their distaste for the woman's status as imposed on her by society has provoked the awakening of the consciousness of the female gender to their predicaments. Our corpus shows that the development and advancement of any society be it African or French societies depends on how the two genders are able to appreciate one another, recognize and respect each other's abilities and potentials for the promotion and maximum exploration of core values. Quality leadership cannot be realized in any society so long as there is an unhealthy competition, rivalry, and despise of any of the genders. Exclude women from leadership and the quality of that leadership will not be substantive. Exclude men from leadership and it will not achieve its complete objectives. Man in his own interest needs to have a communal understanding and unify with objective understanding with the opposite gender to give his society the best. It is therefore imperative and very instructive that the concept of womanism should be embraced to achieve unparalleled progress and development especially in African societies.

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