

**HARNESSING WOMEN POTENTIALS FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND DEVELOPMENT:
A REVIEW OF REGINA YAOU'S LA REVOLTE D’AFFIBA**

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Abstract

This paper delves into the imperative of harnessing the untapped potential of women for the advancement and cohesion of the nation. Undoubtedly, progress requires the concerted effort of all individuals, and the active engagement of women is indispensable for meaningful development. Historically, women have been relegated to the sidelines, deprived of opportunities to fully contribute to national development. Yet, Régina Yaou's work, *La Révolte d’Affiba*, sheds light on the vast reservoir of potential within women, waiting to be tapped for the nation's benefit. Through the lens of traditional African society depicted in the novel, it becomes evident that women continue to face marginalization and indignity. Various factors, including entrenched traditions, have stifled women's ability to realize their full potential. This research exposes how negative aspects of African tradition have perpetuated the subjugation of women, depriving society of comprehensive progress. Thus, the paper advocates for affording women equal opportunities to participate alongside their male counterparts in national affairs. The analysis underscores the repercussions of sidelining women, illustrating that a nation risks significant setbacks without their full involvement and collaboration. Consequently, the paper advocates for the comprehensive integration of women across all spheres and sectors of the nation. Beyond textual analysis, the paper adopts sociological criticism as its theoretical framework, emphasizing the societal implications of gender inequality and the imperative of inclusive participation.

Key words: Women Potentials, National Development and Unity, Socio-Criticism

Introduction

For centuries, African society has been deeply entrenched in patriarchal and hierarchical structures, shaping the roles and representation of both women and men. This enduring dichotomy has persisted over generations, largely untouched by significant changes. Particularly for women, societal norms and prejudices have imposed formidable barriers, relegating them to subordinate roles.

In response to this entrenched inequality, African feminist writers have assumed the mantle of responsibility to challenge and reshape the status quo. Their literary endeavors are aimed at uplifting women, challenging ingrained attitudes, and showcasing the intelligence and capabilities inherent in women, akin to their white counterparts. These writers craft narratives that portray strong and empowered female protagonists, often surpassing their male counterparts, thereby highlighting the immense reservoir of untapped potential within women.

Furthermore, "La Révolte" prompts a critical examination of existing paradigms and structures that inhibit the full realization of women's potentials. By amplifying the voices of marginalized women and challenging entrenched norms, Yaou underscores the imperative for inclusive policies and initiatives that dismantle barriers and foster a conducive environment for women's empowerment.

As aptly articulated by Orucha (2003), the progress and development of any society hinge crucially on the status of women within it. Therefore, women represent a pivotal force for positive transformation, contingent upon the degree to which they are afforded equal treatment and opportunities to actualize their inherent potentials. This underscores the imperative for societies to recognize and harness the immense talents and contributions of women, not only for their individual advancement but also for

the collective prosperity and development of nations. As we look into the complex terrain of national unity and development, this review endeavors to highlight the indispensable role of women as architects of change and progress. Through a synthesis of scholarly analysis and real-world application, we aim to extract actionable insights that inform policymaking, advocacy efforts, and grassroots interventions aimed at harnessing women's potentials for the collective benefit of society.

In essence, "Harnessing Women's Potentials for National Unity and Development: A Review of Regina Yaou's *La Révolte d'Affiba* serves as a rallying call for concerted action towards a future where gender equality is not merely a lofty ideal but a tangible reality underpinning sustainable development and harmonious coexistence.

Definition of key Words

National Development and Unity

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, national development encompasses the progress of an entire nation, while unity signifies agreement and collaboration, the amalgamation of disparate elements into a cohesive whole. Thus, national development embodies the collective advancement across socio-economic, political, and religious spheres, adopting a comprehensive approach to societal growth. It entails a multifaceted process of reconstruction and progress, encompassing both the nation's diverse dimensions and the personal development of its citizens.

Indeed, true national development cannot be achieved without concurrent individual growth. This necessitates meticulous development planning, involving a coherent framework of strategies and

actionable policies devised by the government. National development and unity demand the convergence of all citizens, transcending differences of gender, ethnicity, religion, and other identities, to collectively contribute towards the nation's advancement on an equitable platform. In essence, it entails fostering an inclusive society where every individual is empowered to contribute meaningfully, thereby propelling the nation towards its full potential.

Women's Potential

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, potential is described as the inherent qualities or abilities that exist within individuals, capable of being cultivated and harnessed for future success or utility. In the context of women, their potential encompasses the latent strengths and capabilities awaiting exploration and utilization for the advancement and prosperity of society.

Building on this definition, women's potentials represent a reservoir of untapped talents and abilities, poised to contribute significantly to national development when appropriately nurtured and utilized. These innate strengths, when recognized and empowered, have the capacity to drive positive change across various sectors and elevate the collective welfare of nations.

In accordance with findings from the World Bank Group report, societies characterized by greater gender equality and diversity exhibit heightened levels of productivity and efficiency. By dismantling gender barriers, businesses and institutions can enhance their performance, bolster competitiveness, and stimulate economic growth. Consequently, this facilitates poverty reduction and fosters improved development outcomes for future generations.

In essence, recognizing and harnessing women's potentials not only aligns with principles of equity and social justice but also serves as a pragmatic strategy for achieving sustainable development and

inclusive prosperity. Embracing the full spectrum of women's capabilities not only empowers individuals but also enriches societies, paving the way for a more vibrant and resilient future for all. Moreover, harnessing the potential of women is not merely a matter of economic consideration but a fundamental human rights issue. Every woman deserves the opportunity to fulfil her aspirations, contribute her talents, and lead a life of dignity and fulfilment.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is the sociological criticism. The sociological criticism approach was introduced by Kenneth Burke in the 20th century; it is directed to understanding literature in its larger social context. It analyzes both how the social functions in literature and how literature works in society. According to Kenneth Burke, works of art, including literature, “are strategic naming of situations” that allow the reader to better understand and “gain a sort of control” over societal happenings through the works of art. Therefore, sociological criticism is interested in the social universe present in the text under study. Given its wide nature, we shall adopt the aspect of feminist criticism in this paper, which has to do with the place of the woman in the society.

Why the woman in national development and unity?

The importance of women resonates deeply across all aspects of life. As the bearers of life and nurturers of society, women play an indispensable role. Yet, despite their invaluable contributions, women often find themselves undervalued and constrained by a myriad of factors, including entrenched traditions, cultural norms, and misinterpretations of certain ideologies.

A closer examination of traditional African societies reveals a stark reality: women were marginalized, their voices silenced, and their agency stifled. They were relegated to the side-lines, denied the freedom to express themselves or make decisions autonomously. In Mariama Bâ's poignant work, *So Long a Letter*, the protagonist, Ramatoulaye, poignantly reflects on her own experiences, stating, "My voice knows thirty years of silence, thirty years of bullying" (109). This sentiment encapsulates the plight of countless women across Africa who have been marginalized and silenced by the constraints of tradition.

Indeed, the consequences of these entrenched norms have been profound, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and disenfranchisement for women. Yet, amidst these challenges, there is hope for change. By challenging outdated traditions, advocating for gender equality, and amplifying the voices of women, societies can begin to dismantle the barriers that have long stifled female empowerment.

It is imperative that we recognize the inherent worth and potential of women, not only for their individual well-being but for the advancement and prosperity of the society. As we strive for progress, let us heed the lessons of the past and work towards a future where every woman is empowered to fulfill her potential and contribute meaningfully to the tapestry of human existence.

Regina Yaou in her work *la Révolte d'Affiba* also affirms this fact of male dominance in a patriarchal society through Koffi:

Madame va réfléchir pour voir si elle peut insérer la venue d'un autre enfant dans son programme pour l'année. Comme je regrette l'époque de nos grands-parents où seuls les hommes avaient droit à la parole au sein de la famille. (43)

Madame will think about it to see if she can accommodate the coming of another child into her program for the year. How I miss the days of our grandparents when only men had the right to speak in the family. (43)

In societies where tradition holds sway, women often find themselves marginalized and excluded from roles crucial to development, including national progress. Regina Yaou, alongside other feminist authors, underscores that in traditional African societies, women are burdened with duties but denied rights. This disparity motivates these writers to advocate for change, aiming to empower women and restore their voices.

Susan Moller Okin, in her work, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, posits that:

when we seriously look at the distribution between husbands' critical social goods such as work (paid and unpaid), power, prestige, self-esteem, opportunities for self-development, and physical and economic security, we find socially constructed inequalities between them, at the bottom of the list (33)

The participation of women is very important to have an orderly society, because a society where a particular set of people feel cheated can never be in order. Bâ, in making a critique of negritude, asserts that «littérature africaine doit reconnaître les contributions politiques et économiques des femmes pour leur sociétés » (38). "African literature must recognize the political and economic cotributions of women for their societies" (Translated)

African literature must recognize the political and economic contributions of women to their societies. Women, are not only good at home for children rearing, but have also been graciously endowed by the creator to solve and meet some of the human needs.

Orucha (2003: 34) posits that the progress and development of any nation is the women in the society. Thus, the women represent a tool for positive change, depending on how they are treated and the levels of opportunities given to them to actualize their potentials.

In addition, women are the unifying element by nature. In the home, they unify children to father, and make sure that the both parties cohabite happily; any home or society where the woman figure is absent or not active will always experience instability. Hence, the development of any society or nation can be guaranteed when the woman is given ample opportunity to play out her ordained role.

Mohammed & Abdulquadri (2012) posits that women are responsible for carrying out 50-60 % of the Nigeria's' food processing, agricultural and animal husbandry activities even with the fact they are challenged by lack of resources and funds. Women are resilient in nature; they are able to endure challenging situations without giving up. The full involvement of women for national development and unity is imperative. It has been established that, inclusive leadership teams make better decisions that deliver better results. Through women's innate leadership skills, they mentor, foster, and empower, thus leaving a legacy behind.

Barriers to full recovery of women's potential

In traditional societies, women frequently face marginalization, preventing them from participating in vital developmental roles, such as contributing to national progress. Régina Yaou, among other

feminist authors, highlights the imbalance in traditional African communities where women are obligated to fulfill duties but lack corresponding rights. This inequality serves as a driving force for these writers, compelling them to champion transformative efforts that empower women and amplify their voices.

Childcare

In the novels under examination, a prevalent theme emerges: women bear the primary responsibility for childcare and domestic duties, which often have adverse implications for their professional pursuits. Régina Yaou sheds light on the enduring sense of obligation African women feel toward their children. Through the character of Affiba, Yaou observes that motherhood significantly impacts a woman's economic prospects and career trajectory.

De son cote, également Affiba monologuait intérieurement:

Un garçon! C'est sa seule trouvaille pour m'occuper! Et ma carrière? je n'ai pas encore un an d'ancienneté. Diane vient d'avoir deux ans seulement; il est trop tôt pour recommencer. (48)

On her part, Affiba also monologues internally: boy! This is his only way to keep me busy! What about my career? I don't have a year of seniority yet. Diane is just two years old; it is too early to start over. (Our translation)

Also, in *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Bâ recognizes this fact, that motherhood can hinder a woman's economic effect, since women are more attached to children than to men.

Of course, economic autonomy ensures that women are able to make choices that they consider important in their life thereby contributing their quota to development. In the novel *La Révolte d’Affiba*, Affiba recounts why she must fight for her right:

I fight against the principle of robbing a woman in her husband's agony. We must not give in. Women, who have no gainful occupation and live only on their husbands' income at a pinch, can let that happen, although they should not. But, we who, with the sweat of our brow, help our men! I work! I have earned enough money to support my husband in acquiring everything. (139)

Poverty has silenced the potentials of several women from manifesting, made them to swallow their ideas and killed their vision for a better society.

Eyinate (2010:3-4) has also identified numerous other obstacles that hinder women's participation in political spheres. These include entrenched cultural norms that portray women as confined to domestic roles, religious beliefs that reinforce these barriers, women's perception of politics as inherently corrupt, and the considerable time commitment and risks associated with political involvement, including violence and threats, etc.

Helen Chukwuma in her article ‘‘Positivism and the Female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta’’, describes characters like Affiba as women who excel in their roles, they are forceful and articulate, thinking beings whom the reader is brought to recognize and appreciate as individuals, not types. Each character brings to bear on a stifling situation her own peculiar way of solving the problem, hence we appreciate them for what they are and have become and not so much what they are supposed to be. (9).

Regina Yaou through the character of Affiba illustrates how women, who are trapped in unpleasant circumstances, can be "forced" to use their intellectual independence "ingeniously" in their attempt to experience personal choice and self-determination.

Affiba resolutely fights for her rights, employing all available means in her pursuit. Her determination leads to transformation, yet her intellectual confidence does not shield her from conflict or emotional anguish. Despite fully understanding the costs of freedom and self-determination, she refuses to succumb to a common victim mentality.

Affiba's struggle embodies the broader challenges faced by women in Africa, yet her triumph transcends the entrenched battle lines between genders. Instead of passivity, Affiba engages in strategic thinking and decisive action. Through this journey of assertiveness, her individualism and personality emerge, showcasing her ability to make and execute decisions.

The ongoing struggle revolves around whether society will acknowledge and embrace the transformed identities of women like Affiba, enabling them to contribute fully to the nation's development and unity. Modupe posits that: 'the liberation of Africa is directly connected to the liberation of women' (12)

For a woman to effectively challenge patriarchy in society and fully realize her potential, she must undergo a rebirth, shedding her submissive female identity and embracing the authority traditionally associated with masculinity. Affiba asserts the importance of reminding men that women have played pivotal roles in Africa's liberation, urging them to recognize women as partners in progress. Yaou's research demonstrates the transformative impact of a select group of intelligent women on African

society. The protagonist's triumph symbolizes the liberation of African women, marking a significant milestone in their journey toward freedom and equality.

Recommendations

The most pressing priority is to cultivate conscious individuality, beginning with an inner revolution that entails confronting and overcoming ingrained prejudices, the internal tyrants that hold us back.

Furthermore, the education of women stands as a crucial cornerstone in their emancipation and empowerment. An educated woman possesses an enlightened mind, capable of making significant contributions to national development and unity. Education is universally acknowledged as the most potent tool for advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls. Investing in their education has the potential to transform and uplift entire nations.

Moreover, it is essential to allocate more opportunities to women, ensuring equal access alongside men. Providing equal opportunities fosters a more inclusive and equitable society.

Lastly, feminist writers should persist in showcasing the resilience and strength of women through their diverse literary creations, further amplifying their voices and experiences.

Conclusion

The emergence of French-speaking African writers and the resilience of African women have shattered the one-dimensional portrayal of women as mere weaklings confined to domestic roles. Authors like Yaou and numerous other African female writers offer a nuanced depiction of African women,

transcending the passive and submissive stereotypes often found in earlier African literature. Instead, they portray women as capable of remarkable feats and decisive action.

In particular, Yaou's works empower women to break free from societal constraints, portraying them as strong individuals determined to carve out their place in life and contribute dynamically to their societies and nations.

The unity of any nation hinges on the fulfillment of all its constituents, including both men and women.

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