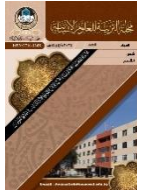




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Education as the Panacea for Women Liberation and Sustainable Development in Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*

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Abstract

Many works have been carried out on Fatou Keita's *Rebelle*. However, less attention is paid to the call for the importance of education with regard to the emancipation of the woman. This study, therefore, examines how formal education in particular contributes to the woman liberation agenda. The French explication de texte is adopted as the methodology for the study and Feminism is the theoretical framework on which the study is premised. The choice of this novel is informed by the novelist's inclination towards transforming the living conditions of African women. Findings establish that the emancipation of women is possible and can be enhanced through formal training and acquisition of required skills. Education is the pivot of growth and sustainable development not only for the women but also for the society at large. The study concludes that cultural and religious factors that limit women's opportunities and chances should be addressed without any delay.

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مجلة التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة، تصدر عن كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / جامعة الموصل



دور التعليم في تحرير المرأة وتعزيز التنمية المستدامة دراسة في رواية:

"ثورة فاتو كيتا"

ذكر الله أدِينِيْمِي أُوْغُنْدُوْكُنْ¹ ID

قسم دراسات اللغات الأجنبية، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، حرم إيكير، جامعة ولاية أوسون، أوسوغبو، نيجيريا¹

الملخص

معلومات الارشفة

نُفِذَت العديد من الدراسات حول رواية فاتو كيتا "المتمردة". ومع ذلك، لم يُولَّ اهتمامٌ يُذكر للدعوة إلى أهمية التعليم في مجال تحرير المرأة. لذا، تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية مساهمة التعليم الرسمي تحديداً في أجندة تحرير المرأة. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الفرنسي "شرح النص" (explication de texte)، بينما شكلت النسوية الإطار النظري الذي تركز عليه. وقد استُوحى اختيار هذه الرواية من توجه الروائيات نحو تغيير الظروف المعيشية للمرأة الأفريقية. وتُثبت النتائج أن تحرير المرأة ممكن، ويمكن تعزيزه من خلال التدريب الرسمي واكتساب المهارات اللازمة. ويُمثل التعليم ركيزة النمو والتنمية المستدامة، ليس فقط للنساء، بل للمجتمع ككل. وتخلص الدراسة إلى ضرورة معالجة العوامل الثقافية والدينية التي تُحد من فرص المرأة وفرصها دون تأخير

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Introduction

Education is any form of experience, training and skill that one acquires from the time one is born to probably when one is to die. Whether formal or informal; structured or unstructured, one requires education to live a meaningful in various societies of the world. Anyone's freedom and sustainability also has something to do with the education he/she has received. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English 7th edition (2006, p. 467) defines education as "a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in school or college, to improve knowledge and develop skills." As a matter of fact, education is a means to provide the technical know-how about issues of life and a tool to cope and sustain one's existence with the required wisdom and understanding of the cosmos.

Citing the Sustainable Development Commission, Obadiah Mailafia (2018, p. 6) says any sustainable development as that development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In other words, a development is capable of being tagged sustainable if it is sufficient for the present population and the population of the unborn generation with the present human actions not affecting the well-being of the future generation adversely. Philippe Aghion et al. (2013, p. 6) are of the view that:

Economic growth is the increase in a country's capacity to produce good and services. We care about such gains because they lead to improvements in citizens' leisure and/or improved public services. We prefer these fruits of growth to be as inclusive as possible rather than for them to be appropriated by a small, fortunate slice of society... (All economies should) have mechanisms for distributing the fruits of growth more widely through taxes, benefits and the provision of public goods such as education. And equipping citizens with skills gives them the best chance of participating in the process of growth.

From the except above, it is sufficed to say that education is central to both the women emancipation and the societal development. Again, sustainable growth and development of any nation hangs on the balance without liberating women from socioeconomic and political bondage. Mailafia (2018, p. 6 - 7) remarks thus:

Growth and development are, of course, inter twined. It is inconceivable that human development could be achieved without significant and sustained increases in output growth.

However, growth may not bring about development automatically. There could be a situation where the economy appears to be doing well but the people remain poor and suffering. This is what Volker Treichel, (2010) described as “jobless growth”.

In most communities around the globe, the relationships between the woman and the man as mother, wife and daughter remain the first perspective and one of the cultural ways of defining the woman roles. However, in the modern society, the woman is defined beyond being somebody’s daughter, wife or mother. The woman has made efforts to redefine herself as a responsible member of any community as a hardworking worker, investor and political gladiator. In other words, girls, ladies and women are beings created with their own destiny. Dorothy Etuk posits thus:

That even though a woman’s nature is complicated, she must escape, liberate herself, shape her own future and deny the myths that continue to confine her.

The woman should reject being a second class citizen, a weaker vessel or a mere helper to the male counterpart. All that the woman needs is assertiveness which as a matter of fact very complex due to the way an African woman is traditionally wired to be submissive, polite and accommodating. According to Etuk (2013, p. 295), she explains that many people see assertiveness as a negative behaviour which they confuse with aggressiveness. On her part, Iniobong Uko (2004, p. xiv) relying on the account of Evelyn Leo affirms that from a girl’s early stage in life, she :

Is programmed for a passive role... she is told to play with girls because boys are too rough. If a girl shows too much aggression or independence, she is encouraged to modify this behaviour and be more passive... The little girl’s father adores her, but only if she is acquiescent, passive or “a good girl”, that is, stays within the role society permits her. More importantly, she is indoctrinated to obtain what she desires through the male.

The bottom line is that for the woman to redefine herself and repackage her roles in any given human society, she requires the third-eye. Of all legacies that any parent should give his/her children, education is the best. It is what will provide the enlightenment that is called the third-eye. Education empowers anybody; male or female to be economically reliable and sufficient as it provides job opportunities. It also makes somebody socio-politically relevant and acceptable everywhere one finds oneself. Away from the narrow horizon and ill-informed boundaries, education creates a world view that is laced with best of experiences, beliefs and ideological stands.

Molemodile (1977, p. 57), when reacting to the importance of education, particularly for girls and women asserts that:

Education is the crucial liberating force in the lives of Emecheta's heroines, and in fact their degree of servitude is inversely proportional to the amount of education they receive. ... has no faith in social change or in the prospect that the environment will ever grant African women freedom, instead they must wrest it from the environment themselves, and the only thing that will give them the power to do so, is education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the theory of Feminism. Like the Marxist theoretical framework, feminism believes in addressing social unfairness in a given society; particularly those issues that negatively affect womenfolks. The study is tailored around Ama Ata Aidoo's concept of feminism. As a feminist writer and social activist, she holds that education is an instrument for liberating women all over the world; especially in Africa.

The ideals of any form of feminist movement is to argue for a better understanding and treatment of the woman. It draws attention towards equability between genders; good and quality education for girls and women, saying no to child-marriage and forced marriages as well as discouraging polygamy. For instance, Calixthe Beyala (1990, p. 115) advises that:

Il faudra absolument interdire la polygamie : un homme aussi intelligent soit-il ne devrait pas avoir plusieurs femmes. A mon avis, une, c'est déjà trop. Il faut réclamer la pilule. Ensuite l'avortement libre. Ne plus être boursouflées d'enfants. Ce n'est pas aux hommes de nous faire un enfant. Notre corps nous appartient. (*Seul diable le savait*).

Polygamy must be banished entirely. No matter how intelligent a man may be, he should not have many wives. In my opinion, one is already too much. We should ask for the pill. Then free abortion. Men should not force us to make babies. Our bodies belong to us (Translation).

Analysis and Discussion on Education as the Panacea for Women Liberation and Sustainable Development in Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*

One of the new generation of African writers of French expression is Fatou Keïta, an Ivorian female novelist. She believes strongly in the feminist ideology and agitates for a better treatment for the woman. She holds strongly that one major tool for the emancipation of the woman is to acquire formal training and education which will enhance the attainment of self-determination of the female gender at different fronts and levels. The socioeconomic and political relevant of a woman in her community whether a small enclave or a larger society is significantly connected to the skills she has acquired. Keïta is of the conviction that the oppressed are capable of suppress their oppressors if they can engineer the transformation of their sordid condition. Paulo Freire (1970, p. 34) observes that “in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exist, but as a limiting situation which they can transform”. On the same vein, Ramonu Sanusi (2015, p. 111) remarks thus:

The oppressed are those who suffer domination at the hands of oppressors. There is no record in history that the oppressors have willingly yielded freedom to the oppressed. For the oppressed to gain complete freedom, as Paulo Freire opines, there must necessarily be first a will to free themselves, and second, a mindfulness of a way out. Since majority of women in most sub-Saharan African societies are oppressed by traditional rites and patriarchal attitudes, the coming together of women as a group is critical. By having a common agenda, women can successfully carry out their struggle to destabilise completely the system that oppressed them. By coming together, the tools oppressed can successfully destroy the tools of domination used by the oppressors.

Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* is a story of a young girl called Malimouna. She is pushed into an arranged forced marriage with one Sando. The said man, Sando is even older than the girl's father. As a young lady, she is able to reject female circumcision, however, she keeps it to herself because of the fear of isolation in her community. The traditional society sees it as an offense for a female child not to be circumcized. Having harmed her supposed husband, she runs away and later becomes a house-help to a French couple, Eric and Michèle who takes her to France. In France, Malimouna develops herself by furthering her education.

À présent, elle (Malimouna) savourait sa victoire sur ces mots. Elle pouvait tout lire, tout. Ses yeux allaient d'une affiche à l'autre, captant les mots au

passage, le plus rapidement possible comme pour se le prouver. Comme quelqu'un que l'on avait longtemps privé d'un bonheur et qui essayait de rattraper le temps perdu. Non seulement elle savait lire, mais elle comprenait ce qu'elle lisait. Elle comprenait l'ironie, la subtilité, l'humour... Elle lisait les lignes, elle lisait entre les lignes. **C'était une belle revanche. Elle se sentait forte, prête à conquérir le monde.**

Now she (Malimouna) savored her victory over these words. She could read everything, everything. Her eyes moved from one poster to another, capturing the words as they passed, as quickly as possible, as if to prove it to herself. Like someone who had long been deprived of a happiness and was trying to make up for lost time. Not only could she read, but she understood what she read. She understood the irony, the subtlety, the humor... She read the lines, she read between the lines. **It was a beautiful revenge. She felt strong, ready to conquer the world** (Translation).

The two last sentences in the excerpt above summarize the importance of formal education as an instrument to conquer the world in all ramifications. It is so because education opens the door of opportunities. Malimouna's ability to read effectively and efficiently is a weapon to fight any form of social injustice and calculated imbalances. A little later, Malimouna gets a job and makes a living for herself. She becomes friend with one Fanta who resides in Paris with her Malian husband. She decides to help Fanta after understanding the many challenges the woman faces; particularly with regard to multiple childbirths and the unfriendly conditions she encounters in her marriage. The narrator puts it thus:

Fanta passait le plus clair de son temps entre les couches, les tétées, la vaisselle, la cuisine et la lessive... La nuit, elle était constamment réveillée par les pleurs des bébés. Fanta avait les yeux cernés et maigrissait à vue d'œil. Elle avait besoin d'aide (*Rebelle*, p. 93).

Fanta spent most of her time between changing diapers, breastfeeding, dishes, cooking, and laundry... At night, she was constantly woken up by the babies' cries. Fanta had dark circles under her eyes and was losing weight quickly. She needed help (Translation).

By keeping Barou, Fanta's husband in the dark, Malimouna teaches Fanta the need to use contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies as a form of family planning or child control measure. The narrator captures the scenario thus:

Prétextant qu'elles allaient faire des courses, les deux amies se rendirent un après-midi chez un gynécologue. Fanta portait le bébé sur son dos et poussait les jumeaux dans leur double poussette, tandis que Malimouna tenait Noura par la main. Malimouna avait accepté de garder les pilules et, tous les jours, Fanta venait frapper à sa porte pour recevoir son comprimé (*Rebelle*, p. 94).

Pretending they were going shopping, the two friends went to a gynecologist one afternoon. Fanta carried the baby on her back and pushed the twins in their double stroller, while Malimouna held Noura's hand. Malimouna had agreed to keep the pills, and every day, Fanta came knocking on her door to receive her pill (Translation).

Education has continued to raise its beautiful head when it comes to preparing people individually or collectively for a better and sustainable life. It is the education Malimouna has that enable her to know about family planning technique of using contraceptives to prevent pregnancies when they are not needed. She does not just buy the medication anywhere, she makes Fanta to consult a gynecologist for workable prescription and necessary counselling. Commenting on the education of women in Africa as reflected in Aoua Keïta's literary work, Aduke Adebayo (2020, p.) writes:

Aoua Keïta's book is instructive in that it told of the intense opposition African men towards female political aspirants in a society where women and politics were and are still opposed because politics is power and power is the traditional domain of the men. In the Islam dominated areas of Africa, the religion imposed strict codes of conduct on women, which prevented them from going to school. Besides, the colonial administration put less emphasis on the education of girls than that of boys since the latter were more needed to serve the colonial administrative structure.

In her effort to fight against female genital mutilation, circumcision and promote formal training for girls, Malimouna joins a non-governmental organisation that is interested in helping women in difficulties (l'Association d'Aide à la Femme en Difficulté, AAFD). Shortly after joining the association, Malimouna is chosen as the President as a result of her commitment and active participation in the activities of the organisation. The position attracts full salary. Au cours d'une assemblée générale, il fut décidé à l'unanimité que Malimouna deviendrait la Présidente de l'Association et percevrait un salaire, puisqu'elle travaillait à présent à plein temps (183 - 184)

Malimouna's name appears in the newspapers, she is seen on television, pressing home the message that violence against women had to stop. According to her, violence of different forms such as female genital mutilation, the forced marriage of very young girls, their suffocation in their homes, and the domestic brutality that often followed must be stopped. She also condemns the denial of the right to education for the girl-child and women (p. 189). In fact, the narrator announces that:

Dans les salons, les restaurants, les maquis, on ne parlait plus que de Malimouna. Elle était adulée par certains, haïe par d'autres, mais elle ne laissait personne indifférent (p. 194)

In salons, restaurants, and bars, Malimouna was the only person anyone spoke of. She was adored by some, hated by others, but she left no one indifferent (Translation)

Malimouna prepares a large meeting that brings together a delegation of at least two hundred women from the Sandougo neighborhood. The theme of this gathering is "The Dangers of Female Genital Mutilation." It is a very important meeting because it consists of a series of testimonies. Malimouna and the women of the Association have managed to convince some parents of victims of female genital mutilation to come and testify. Several mothers have lost their children as a result of infections . The narrator put the account thus:

Elle préparait un vaste meeting qui devait rassembler une délégation d'au moins deux cents femmes du quartier Sandougo. Le thème de ce rassemblement était "Les dangers de l'excision." C'était un meeting très important puisqu'il consisterait en une série de témoignages. Malimouna et les femmes de l'Association avaient réussi à convaincre certains parents de victimes de venir témoigner. Plusieurs mères avaient perdu leur enfant à la suite d'infections

As a feminist writer, Keiïa has attempted to change the mentality of the African society by interrogating the male domination over women and by challenging the traditional myths of the patriarchal system. She believes that there is a need for a leveled playing ground for both the male and the female children in order to create an atmosphere for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development in human societies. Education for all will provide equal opportunities and socioeconomic and political sustainability.

Conclusion

From the study, it is obvious that new strategies for confronting and deconstructing male chauvinism has emerge in the Francophone African women's writings. In this study, the major orientation for the liberation of women is formal education. Access to formal education will equip women with socioeconomic and political powers and ultimately will pave the way for their self-realisation, determination and sustainability. Malimouna is able to launch a campaign against violence that are gender based apart from the literacy programme for women. Again, the strict conditions imposed on women by religious injunctions that prevent them from going to school should be eradicated.ss

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