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Women and leadership: A Feminist Analysis of Awa's Leadership in Babacar Sall's *Le Stagiaire*, Roman d'un President de la Republique

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ABSTRACT: In most African societies, women are not given the chance to show their talent in leadership due to the customs. Most of the African traditions acknowledge that the place of African women is in the house, mainly in the kitchen. Sometimes, having women leaders would be better than having men leaders. Babacar Sall illustrates this in his novel *le Stagiaire* via the character of Awa. A committed woman who is motivated by the surrounding ills that her community lives. Those social and daily conundrums experienced by her entourage push her to think about some ways out for her surroundings. Despite the housing tasks, she succeeds in gathering her surroundings and awaring their consciousness around her policy "la republique manager" which aims in changing the political system in place that molests them and restricts their rights. In showing the leadership of the main character Awa, the Behavior and Situational theories are used. Therefore, the focus of the current inquiry is to show that women like Awa can be good and determined political leaders in changing positively the oppressed people's life or in raising their awareness to revolt for change. Following the qualitative method, the data have confirmed that women like Awa can be good leader. For that to be so, women should be given chances as same as men.

KEYWORDS: African customs, Leadership, Political leader and Women

INTRODUCTION

It is worth beginning with having a glance at the term leadership would be more significant in understanding the current study. For that matter, Kouzes and Posner (1991) define leadership in the following terms as, "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (qtd in University of Cambridge 5). As for Muhammad and Sameen (25), "Leadership is a process in which a person or persons inspire(s) and motivate (s) the

people to meet the shared goals or objectives which may be changed or added as per the needs and challenges. They continue arguing that, "Leadership connects with the people beyond superficial or formal level, and creates a bond that motivates them to do things rather than forcing them" (ibid). Napoleon Bonaparte as cited in Definitions of Leadership by Scholars (2019) said, "A leader is a dealer in hope." (qtd in Muhammad

and Sameen 18). They make Napoleon's assertion clear in the following terms, "It is an interesting statement that may explain a very important characteristic of a leader "inspiring and motivating the people, giving them hope" (ibid). According to it, what separates a Leader from a common man is his/her ability to encourage, and bring hope to the people (ibid). Khan et al. (2015) said, "Successful leader Is one who is flexible to Adapt to the differences among the groups and the changing situations" (qtd in Muhammad and Sameen 19). Bass (2019) said, "The primary purpose and value of a leader and leadership practice is to inspire others, deemed followers, to willingly engage to get her to achieve a goal" (ibid). Considering all the above definitions of leader and leadership, Awa's leadership in the novel under examination resides in her determination of mobilizing, inspiring and incite others to revolt against the political leader, the Stagiaire. All the characteristics of a leader mentioned in the above definitions of leadership, fit concordantly the character of Awa who starts by mobilizing, inspiring and inciting people to revolt for changes. However, let us look at this feminist definition of leadership as, "Feminist leadership is a transformative leadership approach that recognizes that women and girls have had to find different ways of becoming leaders precisely because we are at the margins of systems of economic, social and political power" (COFEM 4). This definition fits the situation of Awa, a woman who is underestimated by her husband and the Stagiaire due to her low educational level and gender. This implies that most women in Africa appear not to be given the chance to demonstrate their talent in leadership, mainly political one.

Theoretical framework

As mentioned earlier, two theories are used while conducting the current research in discussing the leadership of Awa. Behavior theory and Situational theory. To start with, behavior theory, Matthew provides a succinct and clear definition of it in the following terms, "Behavior theory differs from trait theory in that leadership is described not as what leaders are like, but rather as what Leaders do their behavior and functions. Behavior theory describes leadership as being the sum of two important behaviors that great leaders seem to hold in common: getting things done and relating well with people" (5). This implies that the behavior theory

emphasizes on the actions of the leader and their interactions with the people they lead.

Situational theory suggests that behavior theory is not adequate for the complicated world of organizations and society, because specific behaviors are most useful only during specific kinds of situations (Matthew 6). He continues stating that , "...in the broadest sense contingency theory, also known as situational leadership theory, tries to define leadership through what leaders do in specific situations that differ because of internal and external forces. In this sense, leadership is not something definable without the specific context of the situation in which leaders seem to emerge" (ibid). In contrast to behavior theory, situational theory emphasizes on the context of the situation that inspires and motivates a leader's idea. Those two theories conveniently fit the character of Awa and make her a leader.

Synopsis of the novel

The novel opens with one of the tough daily social situations that Dakar lives, the power cut for six years consecutively. The whole novel describes the regime of Abdoulaye Wade, one of the Senegalese presidents. During that regime, the population of Senegal suffered a lot. Even the University lecturers were not put away from the hardness of life. Omar, a university lecturer, who initially is against the president and tries even to organize a demonstration in order to denounce the regime. Finally, finds himself as minister in the government he vies. From the beginning he seems to be the one who is going to liberate the people from the regime that oppresses them and restricts their rights. Awa, the wife of Omar, takes her husband's fight over against the regime. Despite the house tasks, the daily tough situations her surroundings days and nights which deeply trouble her and push her to think for ways out. She sets up an initiative called "la Republique menagerie" which ironically challenges the republic of the president. Through this initiative, Awa gathers people living surrounding her and raise their awareness about revolt against the regime of Stagiaire. She encounters threatening from the president and her husband Omar. However, those threatening's do not prevent her from continuing her struggle. By the end, she really succeeds in gathering a huge crowd of men, women and children who come on

the street and denounce the ills of the stagiaire's regime.

Awa and leadership

The daily social living conditions of the people living in the surrounding district in which Awa lives, worse days and nights. The Stagiaire is so far away to change till they organize a movement in order to push the Stagiaire to change with Awa at the head, "at the same time, the people living around the district organized a resistance. Awa, Omar's wife was at the head of the movement. The indoor wife, her initiatives before had been beyond the familial ring. She was distinguished with her practical sense via the meetings in the district" (Sall 138, translation is mine). The political leadership of Awa is quite distinguished from the Stagiaire's one because it is rooted from the socio-economic basis of the governed as in the following, "Awa wanted neither satellites, metro nor new highways of information, she wanted simply to live, take care of herself and educate children. She did not demand anything...we are neither in America nor in Europe...from now on, she did not want to hear politics, the Stagiaire (the president) or of this or that. She wanted to hear area, surroundings, family, foods, health, school, water, electricity, etc.... (p. 141 translation is mine). This implies that Awa's leadership is motivated by the fundamental needs of her surroundings. For a leader, he needs the sense of organizing himself and other people, motivate and raise their consciousness about conundrums that they live. The following passage highlights that clearly

Awa had found herself at the top of the citizenship resistance. She had become, due to the power of things, the vector of the struggle. Since she was the first to take care of the children, she learnt also how to organize, go to the essential and express herself. First, the first step to follow is to organize oneself, to be many in number in order to not be alone face to difficulties. An initiative that she launched in her area<<the share of the guest>>, an old tradition in Senegal that consists to keep food for the unexpected visitor. She had gotten her idea from this solidary concept and had adapted it to the current realities. (Sall 157, translation is mine).

In the above quotation, the author brings out the determination and leadership of Awa in organizing, motivating and pushing her surroundings to revolt

against the political system of the Stagiaire that suppresses them and makes their lives difficult. Her words are powerful and incite to rebel as in the following, "We are poor, but we have to stay dignified. And the dignity goes through the cleanliness of oneself and where one lives">> opines Awa during a meeting in the area with the housewives of disinfected lot. (Sall 158, translation is mine). After many tries to prevent Awa from mobilizing people against the Stagiaire's government, Awa seems to be resilient and determined to go till the end of her combat as the author x-rays out in the following, "Many past days, Awa stayed confined in her house. The power ignored that she had a handset that allowed her to exchange with outside without being identified. She coordinated and participated on live to the meetings. All this happens under the control of the police who secretly controls the area (Sall 178, translation is mine)". She sets up a political system via which people learn to help each other and render their environment clean. This happens in the absence of her husband who is forced by the Stagiaire to join his government. When Omar is back to his area, everything seems new to him as "the district had really changed: cleanliness, order, mutual aid prevailed in this area which has become the socle of <<Republique Manager>>" (Sall 180, translation is mine). The initiative of his wife has really changed the area. Omar seems at the beginning who challenges the political system of the Stagiaire in its oppressive and unjust nature. But the Stagiaire concocts a situation that politically compels Omar to join him and abandons the struggle against oppression and injustice. When he is back, he even appreciates his wife's determination and leadership despite the household tasks as in the following passage, "Awa made some goings and comings, controlled the kitchen, answered to calls in her handset that she has never left. Omar had in front of him an active housewife and responsible woman who fully assumed indoors as well as outdoors in an equilibrated and perfect sharing of responsibilities. (Sall 182, translation is mine). Through her policy of Republique Manager, Awa succeeds in motivating many people for a national march against the Stagiaire's government. This manifestation deeply frightens the president who by all means tries to prevent it as in the following, "The idea of <<Republique Manager>>

frightened the President owing to the National March for the Light. The government did all the best to hinder this to happen by making pressure on the protesters. The decision of the justice of removing the guard of the children from Awa was taken in that line. But in vain, because she succeeded to stay up for the honor and principle to the point to stimulate the authorities. (Sall 183-184, translation is mine). For that matter the Stagiaire sends Omar to hinder his wife from gathering people around her policy as in the following, "Make her mouth shut: This is from now on the ministerial mission that I assign you>> The Stagiaire had decisively addressed to Omar (Sall 184, translation is mine). When he comes home to accomplish the mission of the Stagiaire, Omar receives deep-rooted questions from the sturdy daily conundrums that people live. She addresses the questions to her husband as a leader address to his people whom he leads. The following quotation highlights the leadership of Awa who knows well the daily problems neglected by the Stagiaire that people around her experience.

Awa questions her husband who is sent by the president to stop her as follows "he (the president) tells us about digital societies, of the moon and things that have any reality for people like us. I would like to know where are our health centers, our schools, our teachers? where are our electricity, water and rice? Where the jobs for our young's? He talks about all except what is essential for us. And those billions that people talk about all the days and disappear for where we don't know? And that justice and the police who arrests only the poor persons like us? (Sall 185, translation is mine).

In her struggle for the betterment of her surroundings, the household tasks do not prevent her to pursue up, "I want to be a mother for my children, but I want also to join my voice to others' ones in order to find the strength to be heard, to make ourselves heard because human being constructs himself also by a refusal (Sall 187, translation is mine). She organizes a national march in order to denounce the ills that the Stagiaire inflicts upon them. For that matter, she invites influential personalities and organizations as in the following, "The handset of Awa continues to ring. She dialogued, advised, orders, informed different persons for the coordination of the march. She successively the call of the newspaperman, Adrien

Sagna, of general secretary of High Free Teachers, of the Rapper of Fippou group and others with whom she exchanged some short talks (Sall 188, translation is mine). During the march, a huge meeting is organized through which the influential personalities speak one after another. The way Awa looks at the huge crowd and deliberates her speech makes a leader. In addition, one of the qualities of being a leader is to acquire the talent of convincing others via the power of words. Before she starts deliberating her speech, the crowd is so silent, a thoroughly silent that even cannot hear any noise apart people's breath, then Awa begins her speech in the following terms:

I am a housewife. I am a mother of a family. It is already too enough, for without a family, nothing cannot hold in a country. What we want is a pot for all, medicines for all, school for all. What we want is to take away regularly all the waste, to uncork the tubes of canalization in order to evacuate the houseful dirty water and the rains. What we want, it is a city that breathes, a country that inhales and hopes (Sall 191, translation is mine).

She knows by heart the situations of her surroundings, that is why for each problem evoked she suggests a way out in that sense to incite people to revolt as the following passage tells us

The talks of Awa were simple, just and too close of daily life, of the needs of each one ...For each problem evoked; she proposed a simple remedy withdrawn from a good population sense:

Me I'm neither a politician nor an intellectual, but when I see that we buy rice from abroad always at a high price, whereas we grow it in Casamance and in future, I conclude that, there is a problem. When we buy onions abroad and potatoes, whereas there is enough in the region of Nia yes till we do not know what to do with a party in the year, I say that there is a problem. When I see many cars parked in the ministries and in our villages, people die, because there are not cars to carry them to dispensaries, I say that there is a problem... The crowd claps for her for a short time, she takes a breath, then she continues: I say when two thousand persons die in Sea in a ship that was known dangerous and was not repaired because of money, whereas, in the meantime the Stagiaire renews his own airplane (Sall 192, translation is mine).

The above passage highlights the leadership of Awa who not only knows the problems of her surroundings but also gets the courage to motivate, incite and mainly convince by looking them in the eyes. She demonstrates that a woman can also gather a huge crowd of persons, motivate them on a common goal in challenging the daily conundrums. Awa through her policy succeeds in mobilizing her surroundings in revolting against the Stagiaire's mismanagement of the country.

Conclusion

To conclude the current research paper, the leadership of Awa is extremely a determined and challenged one. Her character in the novel shows that even a woman as well as man can be a good political leader. Through the leadership theories applied to the novel, it highlights that the characteristics of a leader are to get an idea of changing things from bad to good, mobilizing people on one common goal, convincing them about the necessity of working together in achieving the set aim and bringing positive changes to the oppressed people. All those characteristics lead to Awa's République Manager as her policy that brings political changes in her society.

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