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The Condition of the African Woman in *"C'est le Soleil Qui M'a Brûlée"* by Calixthe Beyala

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Abstract

This article talks about Calixthe Beyala who is a popular Cameroonian writer and author of many books. It focuses on the condition of the African woman. In one of her books " C'est le soleil qui m'a brulée " which is our texte for this article. She exposes the inhuman and very disturbing condition of the African woman. She presents the African woman as victim of rape and violence of all sort, husband battering, exploitation, divorce, genital mutilation in the name of cultural preservation and protection of virginity, incest and the practice of abandoning both wife and children by men. In her works, she presents the man as the problem of the woman. She strongly believes that with the man out of the way the woman's world will be peaceful. The work also suggests the urgent need for traditional institutions to take urgent steps to stop these evils like rape, incest, husband batter ing , genital mutilation, sexual molestations of female children, divorce, and all forms of child abuse by men. It also calls on government to enact harsh laws that will protect women and children and offenders should be made to suffer the heavy weight of the law.

Key Words: Condition, African woman, inhuman, victims, rape, genital mutilation, violence, oppression, patriarchal, exploitation, molestation, cultural practices.

Introduction

Calixthe Beyala, a very popular Cameroonian writer and author of many books focuses principally on the condition of the woman, particularly the African woman. Her works exposes in detail the inhuman condition the African woman has suffered, her works also brings to public knowledge, the unpleasant situation the woman has been made to go through.

According to Beyala, the woman has been a victim of rape, whether as a child or as an adult. The woman has also suffered divorce, exploitations of all kinds, genital mutilation in the name of cultural preservation and protection of virginity, spouse battering, and incest, sexual molestation of female children, which is a very common occurrence in Africa, discrimination of all sorts, emotional tortures and neglects, prostitution and all sorts of violence against her. The African woman has always been happy being a house wife, taking charge of the entire domestic works at home, going to the farm, or doing petty businesses, taking care of the children at home and satisfying the husband sexually being a full house wife, but all these have changed with time. These changes are due to education which is greatly helping to sharpen the thinking of the woman and also helping to stimulate her consciousness.

According to C.H Bruner, 1950s was a period of African prose writers. It was also a period when African literature written in English attracted public information and attention in Europe and America. However during this period in question, very few African female writers published any literal work or were engaged in any serious academic exercises for several reasons in the whole of the African continent. One of the major reason was that a lot of women then where not educated, in other words, the level of illiteracy in women was far more than that of their male counterparts. The privileges of travelling from one place to another, having access to education and public services were very limited to the woman and in some places did not exist at all. According to E.D Jones, African female writers were rejected in books publishing, journals, and critical works dominated by men until the end of 1960. This was largely due to the fact that, only few women were writing then. J.F.O Barr stated that female literature started gaining grounds and flourishing from 1970, due to the fact that before now, a lot of them where not educated

DEFINITION OF A WOMAN: There are many definitions of a" WOMAN".

But we will take a few of them. According to Webster, a woman is an adult female (b) a woman belonging to a particular category as by birth, residence, membership or occupation. For Wikipedia, a woman is an adult female. Before adulthood, a female child or adolescent is referred to as a girl. Portrait of a middle aged woman. While Collins dictionary defines a woman in American English (The female human being distinguished from man. (2) An adult female person. (3) A female attendant to a lady of rank. (4) A wife. A woman can also be defined as the opposite sex of feminine gender, sisters. A girl that will someday grow to become a woman. A lady, a wife to a man who will bear children for him or already has children, A grandmother too is also a woman but aged.

METHODOLODY

This will involve means considered necessary to help us achieve the objective of the work; analysis of some of Beyala's literal works, and others literal works that will help us understand the topic in question, we will also get some information from the internet on literature reviews of other authors and commentaries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this work is Radical Feminism which aims at fighting and resisting all forms of oppression or any action considered unjust or improper against the woman.

DEFINITION OF FEMINISM

Cambridge dictionary defines feminism as the belief that women should be allowed the same rights. Power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this State. The vocabulary English dictionary also defines feminism as a movement that advocates equal rights and opportunities for all. If you think that a man and woman doing the same job should get the same pay, then you believe in one of the basic principles of feminism while human right careers believes that women deserve equal social, economic and political right and freedoms. **The condition of the African woman in *"C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlee"*** This is the story if Ateba, daughter of a prostitute called Betty born to an unknown father and abandoned by her prostitute mother. The story tells us the harsh and very unfavourable condition she had to go through as a child. She was no better than an orphan. The story

also tells us about the kind of life and things that happened, in the slum and ghetto where they live called bidonvilles. A very immoral and lawless setting where all forms of violence and crime is committed against the woman/girl child. In this ghetto/slums where they live the women were regular victims of husbands battering, molestation, a situation where husbands beats their wives after getting drunk and taken all manners of weeds and stimulants, leave wounds all over their bodies. Women were constantly raped, molested and brutally treated.

Bidonville (slum) as presented by Calixthe Beyala in her book " C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée" is a very lawless and immoral setting devoid of any form of moral and cultural value or presence. Here is what Ateba's grand-mother guided by her age and wisdom says about the drama in bidonville.

> (Elle disait à qui voulait bien l'entendre
> que les nation du réel et de l'irréel du
> bien et du mal, les distractions qui
> reggissaient l'ordre de l'univers sont
> totalement embrouillées. (28)

According to Ateba's grand-mother, nobody is interested in listening or knowing whether what is going on in bidonville is real or unreal, or whether it is good or bad, normal or not making it very difficult and indeed complicated to understand the happenings around the world.

Another very important thing to take note concerning the condition of the women in Calixthe Beyala's ***" C'est le soleil qui ma brûlée"*** is how she described in very clear terms the woman as a victim of oppression and inhuman treatment: even in her physical position of squatting on her knees: She says.

> A genoux, le visage levé ver le ciel....
> la position de la femme fautive depuis
> la nuit la nuit des temps ... assiste accroupie,
> à genoux ... dans l'etat actuel de l'histore quoi
> quelle fasse, quoi quelle dise, elle aura
> toujours tort. L' homme c'est lui. (36).

The citation clearly explains the difficult and uncomfortable condition of the woman; On her knees, with her face facing the sky from beginning, the difficult and very uncomfortable situation the woman has been. No matter what she does, no matter what

she says, she will be always wrong, just because she is a woman. It further explains the position of the woman in the face of the African culture and other practices of the African tradition where the man is given all the privileges. The man can marry as many wives as he can, but the woman is expected to marry only one husband at a time. The man has the power to make all the decisions at home, but the woman should just take instructions from the man. A man can go out whenever he wishes to but the woman should always take permission from the man before she goes anywhere. When the husband of the woman dies, in so many African tradition, the wife is made to barb her hair, kept indoors for a particular period of time, 6 months and in some extreme cases, one whole year or even more. The woman will be made to mourn the late husband, but if it is the man, like we have seen in so many cases, many men can hardly wait for just three months, before you start seeing them with another woman. When it comes to sharing of properties of the late husband, most African traditions gives special preference to the sons and forgetting that the daughters are also children and human beings. They tell them clearly that they do not have the right to any properties according to the African tradition, just because they are women. What a tradition! And indeed what a culture!

Obioma Nnaemeka clearly states that the problem of submission and oppression of the African woman is a daily reality for women. She went further to say that women are victims of multiple forms of oppression generated from cultural practices and beliefs on one side and inequality on the other side.

There is also the issue of sexual violence against the woman, several cases abound in Beyala's work but let us concern ourselves with ' Ateba', in " *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée"* , which is the text for our work. Sexual violence is one way men want to show that they are not only stronger that the woman but that the woman is their property. Sixty percent of women or even more suffer from sexual molestation and harassment from men, for some women, they keep it to themselves for fear of stigma, Only a few women and girls make it public and fights for their defence like what Ateba did in " *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée"* . hear her,

> Lachez-moi !
> Non. Chère amie! Pas avant t'avoir aimée.
> Elle tente de se liberer, il agrippe plus
> fort. L'oblige à s'allonger sur le lit. Il s'abat
> sur elle, elle le frappe, il s'attaque à son
> slip, elle le mord, elle ne veut pas (132)

In the citation above we see how the victim tried to rape her and how Ateba fought to defend herself, these are things happening on regular basis in many slums and ghettos found in many African cities and town. Let us also look at the issue of genital mutilation still practiced in some places in Africa, the one they call female circumcision. According to Jean Pierre Ombolo's anthropology essay << Sexe et société en afrique noire >> he writes that there is a particular tribe in Cameroon called "Beti" To ensure the virginity of the girl is intact, this ugly practice is carried out by the old women inserting an egg, a finger or even an unripe banana stick into the private part of the girls, if any of these objects does not enter which means, the girl is still a virgin and has not known a man sexually.

While Ateba was undergoing her own virginity test, the pains she went through reflected in the condition of her tone which reflects the state of her spirit.

> << Son coeur déraille, ses sympans
> sifflent, ses sens dérapent. Et si durant
> la nuit un esprit m'a emprunté mon
> corps>> et si en me caressant je me
> suis sans m'en render compte et <<Si...
> >>(67)

The thought that ran through her head was an evidence of the pain and anguish she was subjected to just to fulfil a cultural requirement. The woman as presented in *"C'est le soleil qui m'a brulée"* by Calixthe Beyala is indeed a victim of oppression, abuse, and man's inhumanity to man.

SUGESTION

African traditional institutions should take urgent steps in putting to an end some of these dirty and violent practices against the woman, like the issue of rape, husband battering the wife, mutilation of female genitals, abandoning of children particularly female children and even prostitution.

Government should enact very harsh laws that will bring offenders to feel the heavy hammer of the law. Government should also devise a way of helping the poor and financially weak people in the society particularly women to take care of their children; this may be in the form of free and compulsory education from Primary one (1) to either JSS 3 or even SS3 as the case may be.

There should be soft loans given to women to help them boast their small income business or soft loans that will help them start small scale trades so that they can be of help to their children when it come to provision of every day feeding, the issue of health care, clothing and other basic needs of life

CONCLUSION

From the evidence presented by Beyala in her book *"C'est le soleil qui ma brûlée"* it is evident that the woman is going through a lot of abuse, molestation and all forms of violence. We have also seen clearly the cases of rape, child abuse, genital mutilation, cultural and patriarchal oppressions the woman is subjected to. Indeed if Africa must advance any further, our value system must change for the better, women also must be given their rightful place to occupy because the man cannot and will never be able to do it alone. The man must get to understand that he cannot be born as a man without being carried by a woman in her womb. So he should also know that a man needs a mother, a sister, a wife, and also a daughter. They don't only make life beautiful but also make life worth living and interesting, that is how God did it and man cannot change the status quo.

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