

THE COMMUNITY AND CHARACTER FORMATION OF THE YOUTHS IN THE EMEKA NWABUEZE'S *LACHRYMOSE*

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Abstract

Most social vices displayed by youths are traceable to poor character formation. Since this group of the citizenry are also regarded as the greatest asset of any society, it is necessary that the right set of values are inculcated in them early enough to ensure that they display good character. Character formation is a holistic role that needs to be performed at every developmental stage of an individual. However, it is also observed that character formation is a product of many variables within the environment of the individual. In line with the foregoing, this, paper highlighted the role the community can play in forming the character of youths within its domain, as represented in the play, *Lachrymose* by Emeka Nwabueze. Using content analysis method, the paper discovered that the community is a formidable force in this quest and recommends that the community, through its various agencies should see it as a duty to direct or re- direct the youths towards a positive character display.

Keywords: Youth, Character, Community, Character formation.

Introduction

Playwrights since time immemorial have adapted the medium of play as a tool to express their thoughts and beliefs pertaining a given issue in a society. Thus, plays reflect contemporary issues within a given society. Lanre Adenekan and Ogakason Rasheed assert that “the contemporary Nigerian playwright bears a mark of ideological commitment and patriotism in his plays”(69).Drama is a presentation of life actions. The dramatist, through his works attempts at presenting a better understanding of the human nature. Nzebunachi thus observes that “elements of drama the audience to experience solidarity and commitment to basic values which in turn impacts their ethical fiber “(15). Every dramatic work therefore has a function to perform because as H.L.B. Moody observes, “ a drama speculates not only on what is bad but on what ought to be or what must not be”(31). Drama therefore is an effective means of creating societal awareness because it has a unique way of presenting events in a vivid and realistic manner.

Emeka Nwabueze is a Nigerian playwright that has used his plays to expose his commitment to the needs of the society by using “his art to make his audience conscious of the short comings of the society “(163).His reflections on art and the society in general are quite constructive. The choice of the play *Lachrymose* in this paper is based on the playwright’s unique manner of

presentation of the subject matter and his subtle manner of using characters to animate the character display of youths. To this end, this paper examines the approaches highlighted by Nwabueze that the community can adopt to ensure that the youths are inculcated with the right character so as to contain social vices among them. This study, therefore focuses on the impacting role of the community in directing or redirecting the youths in their character displays as is represented in the play *Lachrymose* by *Emeka Nwabueze*.

The Community and Character Formation of Youths

Character is the behavioural quality that distinguishes an individual from others. It is a reputation that differentiates one person from another. A dictionary definition of character states that it is “the stable or distinctive qualities built into an individual’s life which determines his or her response regardless of the circumstances. “Character therefore is not different from behaviour which is defined by Uba Emmanuel as “the exhibition of sensibility, attitudes, beliefs, skills and dispositions that render an individual morally matured”(42). Character formation therefore is the grooming of quality/qualities of behaviour that are either positive or negative. Character formation is a result of competing influences around the individual.

Psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, Albert Bandura, etc, believe that character formation is influenced by many variables which must be closely observed in relation to the character of the individual. The environment/community in which the individual domiciles is one of such variables.

The community is literally defined as a group of people who live together within a geographical location. Every community has the characteristics of providing opportunities for the youths to explore, express, learn etc, through such avenues as families, neighbours, schools, religious centers, recreational centers etc. This gives it a good position in the character formation of its members. According to Hobson and Spanglar, “the religious and spiritual activities available in the community could be means for positive youth development as they enhance association among community members... and provided sustained sources of activities for youths”(15).

Youths are believed to be highly influenced by the opportunities or constraints available to them in the community. This is because every community has rules and regulations that guide its behaviour. Detecting deviant or positive character is therefore possible because these behaviours are categorized by the community as either on the positive side or on the negative side. A community needs to view itself as being responsible for the moral growth of its young generation by encouraging them to adhere to accepted norms and values. This can be encouraged by monitoring and observing the character development of

the youths and either direct or redirect them as is deemed necessary. A popular African proverb states that “it takes a whole village to train a child“. This witty saying sums up the importance of the community in the character formation of youths.

Brief Synopsis of the Play *Lachrymose*

Lachrymose is a play that vividly x-rays the erosion of moral values in the society. Through the family of Ezennia and Ochiora, Nwabueze makes vital comments on the various influential factors on the behavioural display of youths. He uses the characters to capture the variables responsible for youth behaviour with particular emphasis on the family, the government, the peer group and the community in general. Using such themes as corruption, intergenerational conflict, deception, greed etc, Nwabueze creates a play that touches every member of the community.

Set in a contemporary Nigerian town, the play opens with the rehearsal of a dance meant to be used to welcome the dignitaries that are coming to aid the victims of flood disaster that has recently ravaged the town. The women use the gathering to voice out their opinion on some issues concerning the community. In the course of the discussion, the women realize that they are not sure of equitable distribution of the funds meant for the victims of the flood disaster, due to corruption. To abate this, some women decide to visit Ochiora to intimate her on the character of her daughter, Nkechi, which is affecting the entire community negatively. In addition to this, some pensioners also decide to effect change by embarking on a business aimed at remixing some popular philosophical musical tunes in order to redirect the thinking of the society especially the youths. However, their effort is thwarted by the kidnapping of Ezennia, one of the major contributors to the project. Nkechi and Ikenna are later arrested for the offence and handed over to the law.

Nwabueze in the play presents community as an influential factor that plays an observatory role in the character formation of youths.

The Community and Character formation of youths in the play *Lachrymose*

The playwright through the activities of the women portrays a community which regards the character display of their young ones as a communal affair. Three major communal responsibilities are brought into focus in the play. These includes establishment of rules, observation/monitoring and redirecting. The three women that paid Oçhiora a visit demonstrate this spirit of observation/monitoring..It is this observational spirit of the community that the playwright uses to avail the women the opportunity to discover the negative character of Nkechi and their resolve to redirect her by informing her mother, whom they expect to take positive action. This is seen in the conversation below:

OCHIORA: You are welcome my sisters...

OCHEZE: ..Ochiora *umu-agbala*, we are here on an important errand. We've come to speak to you about a very important matter that pricks our hearts...(18).

OMELOGO: ... We are friends not enemies, and our mission is a friendly one.

BEATRICE: ...The art of being wise is the technique of knowing what to overlook and what to amplify (19).

The conversation above is used by Nwabueze to prepare Ochiora on the seriousness behind the visit. Though the information may not be palatable, the women feel that there is need for their observation to be made known to the mother of the offending youth.

The playwright also uses the visit of the women to emphasize that character building is a communal responsibility and should not be left for the parents and care givers alone. This is also revealed thus:

BEATRICE: The wisdom of being a Christian mother is the ability to stand beside your colleagues in periods of stress and difficulty. It entails one being one's sister's keeper...(19).

OCHIORA: I'm waiting.

BEATRICE: We have come to talk to you about your daughter, Nkechi... You have an only daughter, Nkechi. Her waywardness is shameful and it is our duty to call your attention to it if you are not aware...(20-21).

OCHEZE: we are Christian mothers and it is our duty to protect the integrity of our colleague's daughter (23)

The above reveals that the women, after observing the direction Nkechi's character is going decide to embark on this task because they perceive it as an obligatory communal function that will help the young lady, Nkechi, to retrace her footsteps and desist from the observed negative character display. The women therefore use the opportunity to demonstrate their communal concern in the character formation of Nkechi,

The women's visit was initially resented by Ezennia and Ochiora but having realized the communal obligation and importance of the visit, Ezennia softens his stand and tries to convince his wife to give the women a listening ear.

Ezennia: My dear, take it easy, let's hear them out...

Although Ochiora is shocked by her husband's decision to listen to the women, Ezennia further stresses this need with the following proverb:

Ezennia: My dear, whoever sees a fowl shuffling over faeces should drive it away for no one knows who will eat the fowl's leg...(26).

The need for communal responsibility in character formation of the youths is emphasized by Nwabueze in the above proverb. He is suggesting that the character display of every child, in the long run, affects every member of the society, hence the need for all to have a sense of obligation to be part of their character formation. This means that the community should be free to exercisesome form of commitment in nurturing the young generation towards positive character formation. As Ezennia further states:

Ezennia: ...one finger alone cannot catch a louse from the head.(26).

The proverb above also gives further insight into the sentiment Nwabueze shares regarding the role of the community in the character formation of youths. It vividly supports the idea that it is the combination of the efforts of people around the child that actually contribute to the shaping his character. Raising a child in the traditional African society is therefore a collective responsibility. It is not left alone for the parents to shoulder. It is worthy of note that detecting negative character display is only possible when the characters are categorized by the community as either being acceptable or unacceptable.

Nwabueze is able to effectively establish through the characters that for the community to succeed in the character formation of youths, there should be set down rules that govern the character of the youths. It is in this aspect that the playwright offers an appealing dimension that the community should have established norms and values that are acceptable by all within the community. Thus some norms and values in the community are emphasized by the women in the play.

In order to stress the communal abhorrence of promiscuity associated with having indiscriminate sexual relationship with different men, the playwright weighs this with the communal acceptance of sticking to one sex partner even if it means eloping the person. Thus Omelogo explains to Ochiora:

OMELOGO: ...It is better to concentrate on one man...than to jump from one man to another which constitute your daughter's behaviour.(23).

The women emphasize the community's preference of Nkechi eloping with one man than having indiscriminate sexual relationship with many men. On the issue of abortion, Nwabueze reveals through the women that the community would rather prefer a girl having a child outside marriage than engage in indiscriminate procurement of abortions as Nkechi is observed to engage in. Beatrice informs Ochiora thus:

BEATRICE: ... To have a baby at home is better than aborting it. Abortion is murder. And that is the stock-in-trade of your daughter and her friends.(23)

Nwabueze uses the conversation above to highlight some vices that are not acceptable in the community which Nkechi is observed to be displaying. Close monitoring enables the community to detect any form of anti social character display amongst its youths.

Members of the community should therefore be very vigilant and make the observation early enough to be able to reverse such unwanted character. The community is also presented by Nwabueze as an advisory agent for immediate family in the characters formation of the youths. Because most of the characters of youths are displayed outside the family, the community should see it as its duty to advice the immediate family of the youths on what should be done to keep them on the right track by playing some advisory role. Thus Ugodie advises Ochiora:

Ugodie: you should teach your children to listen to elders and comply with their directions...(12)

Beatrice also emphasizes her displeasure with Ochiora in the following words: Beatrice:...We are disappointed that your philosophy crumbles when one weighs it with the actual situation of your family(20)

The women also observe that Nkechi is also involved in corrupt practices. Beatrice informs Ochiora that Nkechi also “colluding with the officers of the committee to streak and sell materials donated to the flood victims”(25). All these information are necessary to help Ochiora to bring her daughter to order in order to avoid eventualities as Ocheze warns:

OCHEZE: you may not know it but ashes are known to fly back into the face of the one who throws them...(25).

The above is to remind Ochiora that once the community, as represented by the women, is done with its duty; it is left with the immediate family to adhere to the advice given and to take positive action regarding their children’s character formation. Failure to do so, they should be ready to face the consequences. This prophecy is later fulfilled in the play as Nkechi is later arrested for masterminding the kidnapping of her own father.

Conclusion

The study is an attempt to give some insight into how the community could contribute in the formation of youths’ character. The community is presented in the play as a vital force in shaping the character of youths. This can be

achieved through their monitoring ability, insistence on adherence to set rules, and their ability to advise the immediate family of the concerned youth.

The paper therefore advocates that all hands should be on deck in the character formation of youths since the resultant effect of the youths' character affects the whole society either positively or negatively. It therefore re-echoes the proverb "whoever sees a fowl shuffling over faeces should drive it away for no one knows who will eat the fowl's legs" (Nwabueze,26).

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