

SAFEGUARDING THE CITADEL: SOCIAL DISILLUSIONMENT AND THE MORAL QUESTION(S) IN IKECHUKWU ASIKA'S *CORD OF LIFE*

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Abstract

Writers, undoubtedly, use their pen to create awareness on all that is happening in their society to the general public. A writer is, therefore, an educator, a diviner, a seer, moulder, a spokesman as well as a preacher. As a preacher, a writer writes to criticize and moralise the evil vices in the society. Hence, his aim is to correct these ills via his writings. Research has shown that there is a gross reduction in the moral standard or values with which the youth especially the students operate in our universities today. This work shows that the moral standard in our society has deteriorated to the point that our students no longer care about the consequences of living a non-conformity life style. The gut with which they display these clandestine behaviours is one to be questioned using *Ikechukwu Asika's Cord of Life*. This paper is critically examined through moralistic theory. The work serves as an insight to all the mayhem being carried out in our universities today as well as the aftermaths of such behaviour.

Keywords: Moral, Awareness, Students, Consequence, Society

Introduction

In recent time, writers basically convey their message(s) through their writings. It could be either they want to inform, educate, interpret, instruct and preach the general public on the issues of national, social, political and moral concern. Unethical behaviour among our students in our present day varsities is quite perturbing to the parents and society at large. For this and more playwright largely feels that it is within his power to cause a change in his society. Hence, the social significance of a dramatist can never be over emphasized since all he has in mind is ambition to cause his audience to react appropriately to the social, economical, political and moral issues in his society.

If the words of Ama Aidoo is anything to go by the crux of a dramatist borders on social responsibility. In an interview she had with Maxine McGregon in October 1967, at the Havard International Seminar in the United State, she said: "I cannot see myself as a writer, writing about *Lovers in Accra* because you see; there are so many other problems... I feel a responsibility and feel that it is the same type of responsibility I think black people all over feel" (19). Rather than practice art for art sake knowing full well how drama stimulates – dramatists thought of being socially responsible to speak and to frown at clandestine behaviours of our today's youth – through their work of art. It is pertinent to point out that so many other unethical practices and social problems of social and moral concern such as cultism, kidnapping, abduction, drug abuse, corruption, rape, and underage abortion are very common among our students and they are portrayed basically, to call attention for correction.

Asika Ikechukwu's *Cord of Life* is a call among many others that has portrayed the above mentioned attitudes as actions leading to a decline in the progress of the society at large and the individual involved in particular. When a student leaves what he/she goes to school to do (his/her goals) and

then engages in other negative activities or unvalued lifestyles that are detrimental to himself and people around him, of course, such student constitute a definite pointer of outright failure both to himself/herself and the society he/she belongs to. This work, therefore, projects playwright as a realist for he does not write outside what is happening in the society which he populates. Certainly, Literature is a mirror of totality of life in its reality. Duranty sees “realism as incestuous child of materialism that has a lot to answer concerning public morality” (Asoo, 2006).

Public Morality here is not different from social values, norms, etc. Society tends to align itself with systematic way of living, a conformity living. When one individual misbehaves, he/she is out rightly judged by the already existing standard of laws and regulations. Our African society, specifically Nigeria society has code of conduct which everyone irrespective of age, status, class, race conform to. It is very disheartening that our students in most of the universities have gone wired in their behaviours. They no longer listen to the advice of their parents or elders, neither do they think before taking certain awkward actions. They are also not doing what their parents did. Instead they have recreated and generated their own actions of negativity. They leave one to marvel at the gut with which they display all these unimaginable atrocities which are disappointing and disillusioned to the people.

The question now is: Is there really a standard moral code in the society these days? And the answer is yes. Yes, while most people follow society's law they are abide by certain social mores which are governed by morals. While morals tend to be driven by personal belief and values, there are certainly some common morals that most people agree on such as: one should always tell the truth, one should not kill fellow human being, underage abortion should not be encouraged, abduction, kidnapping, child trafficking, immoral sexualities and so on, these are typically Africa values. It is unfortunate that today's youth especially our students have shun our values and now do all source of evil things. Go to our schools today, the students kill; they practice cultism and are involved in drug abuse; they kidnap, abduct, smoke, sleep with their opposite sex in one roof, and so on. What a pitiable situation we find our student in?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this work is moralistic theory. A moralist is a person who behaves in a morally commendable way. And of course, moral theory is a theory of how we determine right and wrong conduct. Also, moral theory provides the framework upon which we think and discuss in a reasoned way, and so evaluate, specific moral issues. Morality has to do with matters of taste, personal preferences, or subject attitude and opinion. Muraino and Ugwumba State that: “it is believed that morality socially upholds principles, concepts, ideals and actions, rules and regulations that culture deems reasonable, correct and appropriate and under which members of community are tied” (Muraino and Ugwumba 2014).

Also, Mark Timmons opines that; a moral theory is a set of statement used to systematise and codify our judgments concerning standards of conduct or behaviour” (Timmon 2002). So, moral theory provides us with an account of what we should do (i.e duties or obligation) what is good worthy of pursuit (i.e moral values) what is fair or just, and how we should live our lives. It is therefore, the interest of this playwright Asika Ikechukwu that our student all over the nation should abide by the societal moral standard values and save the society from aching from their recently clandestine behaviours. For the youths they said are the leaders of tomorrow.

Students and their Unsatisfactory Acts in Ikechukwu Asika's *Cord of Life*

Playwrights specifically, have a unique way of molding their cast to enact and imitate situations in their environment via their work of art. Societal moral/values have recently deteriorated to a pitiable

and worrisome level. Our youths are no longer disciplined. They have shunned the pleasing past life of decency and have embraced the “new normal” modern life which they tagged “jet age” where they stage all source of atrocities.

Ikechukwu Asika's play *Cord of Life* is one among many plays that depicts the level of moral decadence in our varsities. To think that students feel indifference as to the result of their clandestine behaviour and its aftermath poses a great worry to the members of the society. Asika Ikechukwu did not miss words in portraying to the public the terrible life style of most of our contemporary students in our present day varsities. Asika's *Cord of Life* tells the story of a once decent village girl, Nnedimma who was admired by all for her beauty, intelligent, moral decency but upon her entering into the university become a different story all together, a sorrowful one at that. The playwright's striking description of her early personality states that:

Her name is Nnedimma, beautiful like goddess, tall as Okeosisi from Awgbu Clan, fair like Queen Apunanwu of Okigwe town, slender like Nwanyioma... She blossomed into perfect beauty. Her journey through her early education was with beauty, elegance and pride. Our hopes were high as we borrowed, and gathered all we had to send her to a university since education now rules the world (7)

What a remarkable description. Her story unfortunately, changes when she gets admission into the university and gets associated to (bad company), wrong peer and so does her name for she now bears Natasha.... This is typical of most of our students, some students are not known with their real name. If one goes to the universities today, one will be hearing some funny names like: Starboy, Greencity, Blackstar, Macky, Sundot, Diehard, etc. The playwright stresses that upon entering to the university; Natasha forgets her goal and focus of interest and then starts to pursue shadows that lead to her destruction.

To start with, all the “miss” awards in the campus were given to her as the playwright succinctly puts it:

MC: She is bomboclat dance hall queen; her steps are unrivalled, unmatched and unequalled! I am talking about the former Miss Fresher of the campus, the former Miss Valentine Eastern Region. The former Miss Campus Queen of this University and Current Miss Hot Legs International. Ladies and gentleman give it up for best, the most beautiful, the fairest one of them all, Miss Natasha Williams! (13).

Here is a typical example and life style of what we witness in our varsities today. Our students in most cases forget why their parents send them to school to do while clamouring for a quick and immediate fame among themselves. Natasha is a gut. She lives with her lover Poker Man in the same roof. Lust, lost and forgotten, she involves herself in all sorts of evil activities; Poker Man being the master planner as well as a bad influence. In most varsities, most of our young female students squat with their male counterparts in the name of being lovers. Such thing should not be encouraged because they only end up being married than the married couple. It is not also a new thing that some bear names different from the ones their parents give them. Natasha is of course no different from such group of students.

The playwright also pictures some fake students that exist and operate in our modern day universities. The writer actually wants to brings to fore that some of the students are not registered student, some face one type of personal problem of lack of seriousness, while some have overstayed their “congratulations” of being a student in the university. He pictures this group of students in the character of Poker Man as he says:

Poker Man: ... your words always melt the man in me. You know I should have graduated some years back but a voice kept telling me to wait. I never knew I was

waiting for you. Those boring days are over, my love. This is Poker Man. Forget your classes, assignments, exams. You have me, you have everything. You know poker man, you know everybody. I am the only exam you should bother about, the only quiz you have to do and the only attendance you need to achieve (15)

Poker Man is a typical fake student found anywhere around varsities across the nation. His statement that: “he should have graduated some years back but a voice kept telling me to wait” (15) is a clear evidence that his studentship is an illusion. He is in the school to trap other real students and make them go down with him or rather drop out of school like him.

Poker Man piloted “the flight that crashed them”. Having aborted 4th pregnancy for him (Poker Man), the 5th was born and was sold off to Doctor Ekeh, according to Poker Man's arrangement. It was a deal and a signed business between Doctor Ekeh and Natasha as well as Poker man, the lover being in the picture through it all and the playwright puts it thus:

Doctor Eke: Are you done signing the papers?

Natasha: Yes, the agreement is sealed (hands over the signed document to the doctor).

Doctore Ekeh: (takes time to survey the document till he is satisfied). Yes, that is okay. I hope you know and should remember that with this signed agreement you will not lay claim to this child ever again it belongs to us now. Hope you understand that dear?... (Fishes out a cheque). Here is a cheque four 1.5 million naira as agreed (25-26).

What an act of wickedness? Imagine a mother selling off her own blood, her child! A sheer wickedness. This is decay in morality. Our youths have sold off their conscience. They do not think about the future. There is this adage that says “who knows the head that will be crown a king”. No, this is not part of their thoughts. They are not in line with their ancestor's that propagated the saying. They are actually living their future now. To think that the young man, Poker Man, who double as the lover and father of the sold infant engineered everything and followed it up through till the end.

His involves as the finally receiver of the cheque is pictured in this manner as the playwright. Says:

Natasha: (Beams with smiles as she collects the cheque and inspects it for confirmation). Thank you doctor thank you, you are an honourable man (Hands the cheque to Poker Man who has been silent waiting for the moment (26).

The playwright pictures these groups of youths who in their bid for selfish interest encourage immorality, underage abortion, prostitution, drug abuse, murder, child trafficking and so on.

Nwabunwanne is the name of the child Natasha and her dubious lover sold off. Ochiora becomes his foster mother. Nwabunwanne is being taken care of until upon the death of the foster parents who adopted him as their son. Before her (Ochiora) death, she traced Natasha and Poker Man and handed their child over to them with some huge amount of money for his upkeep and education. Though they collected the money, yet they still abandoned their son to his fate. Because he has no one else to care for him, he suffered a great deal. Eventually towards the end of the play, Nwabunwanne succeeded by providence and also by hardworking, having suffering for so long.

After kidnapping and receiving of ransom and attempting to murder white man, Mr Dennison, Natasha and Poker Man were napped by the police. Here, the playwright wants to let us know that no evil goes unpunished. They were caught up by law for all the crimes they committed. As the playwright captures it:

Police Man: Do not make any attempt to move or I will shoot. You all are under arrest for kidnapping one Mr Dennison and attempt on his life among series of other charges connected to you. In your best interest, I advise you to remain silent or

anything you say or do will be used against you in the court of law (police handcuff them and lead them away). (85).

The life we live will come back staring at us, no doubt. The youths should know that too. Alas! Nwabunwanne becomes the judge to decide their case at the court of law. Having been trained by hardship and circumstance of life to be straightforward and honest, he was straight and honest to his call (duty). Here, the playwright displays his inequity as a great and upright judge; hence no one is really above the law, not when the person actually committed the said crime. His parent (Natasha and Poker Man) were made to face the penalty of the crime they committed. He did what many will fear to do. Pronouncing judgment to his parent as the law demands asand the playwright says:

Nwabunwanne: ... Here is my judgment Mrs. Natasha and Mr. Clifford Idris and other co-defendants, I have evaluated all the evidence proffered against you and defenses proffered by the defense, I found you guilty of all thirteen counts against you, prima facie case having been and ingredients on offences established by prosecution. The court found that your actions contravened the provision of section 312, 321, 324, 361, 364, and 419 of the criminal code Act. You are distinctively sentenced to 14 years imprisonment on charges of abduction, 7 years imprisonment on charges of obtaining by force pretense, 10 years for kidnapping and terms of life imprisonment for the attempted murder of Mr. Dennison of Global Oil Company. The sentence shall run concurrently. It is in finding that you were involved in most nefarious acts perpetuated in this city in the past. This should serve as lesson to your likes in the society. (96).

Here the playwright unequivocally depicts that what one sow one reaps. It is also on record that in the course of their serving punishment, his father Poker Man dies and his mother falls sick. Hence, their attitudes as students do not bring honour to their parent or to the public rather it brings a high level of disillusionment to all and sundry.

Conclusion

The message Ikechukwu Asika's *Cord of Life* is passing across is to advise the students against the unworthy, unhealthy and unacceptable way of behaviours and at the same time warn them on possible repercussion of such negative attitude. It is worth to point out that there is always a payback time, that is, whatever one planted, one shall definitely harvest. You cannot plant wicked and harvest peace, hence, wickedness begets destruction. This is the case of the playwright two major characters: Natasha and Poker Man. They were serve their own 'dish' prepared with their own hands. Good a thing the playwright pin points also that there is dignity in hardworking for their son Nwabunwanne is handsomely rewarded for being honest, upright and hardworking. This is a call to awaken the consciousness of our students to desist from any negative action that will impaired their growth and that of their society in order to avoid had I know.

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