Peaceful Home and Character Development: the Womanist Impression for Nation Building as Expressed in Nwapa's *Efuru*

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Abstract

The first social environment a child finds himself or herself is the home. Every child imitates and emulates what he or she sees or hear from the parents particularly the mother. The child spends most of his or her time with the mother at infancy. The interactions at home especially the attitudes of the parents, their belief and dispositions to issues and situations generally go a long way to mold the character of their child (ren). This paper examines the womanist submission about nation building considering the fact that how people behave what people do in the public are reflections of what they are back home. The opinion is that the home should be made conducive (peaceful home) for desirable character development. African women play vital role in this regard. This is the impression of Nwapa, Flora as presented in Efuru. The conclusion is that, human deficiencies should be forgiven while virtues should be appreciated. So, husbands and wives should co-operatively work and pull resources together to achieve results and ensure peaceful homes which in turn make a peaceful nation.

Introduction

A popular Yoruba adage goes thus: 'Ile la ti nko eso rode'. The Hausa equivalence is 'Itace tun yana danye ake tankwasa shi'. Igbo would say 'Esi n'ulo mara mma wee puo iro'. The English version is charity begins at home'. This implies that the home plays a significant role in the life of every individual that makes the total being living in a nation. The home as a matter of fact, is the first social setting where a child finds himself or herself. First impression, they say last longer. So, every child grows up in the midst of his or her father, mother, other siblings and perhaps other members of the extended family. The home comprises of the father, the mother and the children in a nuclear sense.

A child who later becomes an adolescent, youth or adult member of a nation later in life starts his or her growth and development in a particular home. He or she starts to know what are good and acceptable set of behaviours and the undesirable ones right from the home. In this regard, the ways and manners in which the parents portray themselves and each other, goes a long way to determine the character of the child. It is equally important to note that what the child sees and hears from other members of the family (nuclear and/or extended) and members of other homes around him or her plays a significant role in the character development of the child.

The Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (1995) defines the word 'peace' as "a situation in which there is no quarrelling between people who live or work together". While character is viewed as "the particular combination of qualities that makes someone a particular kind of person". It is the character of a person that speaks when people describe such as 'good' or 'bad'. This remark is not without recourse to the culture and norms of the society they live in.

A child gets acquainted with the culture and acceptable norms of his or her society first in the home. The mother plays a very significant role in this regard. When the home is peaceful it becomes a very conducive environment for the child to develop an acceptable character such that is needful for nation building. A peaceful home that is "free from oppressive and unpleasant thought and emotion" (online dictionary, 2018) affords a child the opportunity to develop a desirable character which helps him or her to be useful to himself or herself and contribute meaningfully to the society he or she belongs.

Such a child learn to live in harmony with other people either of the same background or not. The state of the home is violent free when such home is peaceful. Both parents take their time to watch their behaviour to ensure that they pass down to their children the kind of training that will make their characters on acceptable ones both at home and the society at large.

A Womanist and the Home

A womanist is somebody usually a woman who sees the problem of society beyond what could be regarded as sexism or simply put, male chauvinism or what Adebayo (1996:1) describes as "male hegemony". A womanist sees the struggle for equality between male and female sexes (feminism) as highly inadequate to solving African women problem. A womanist believes in the concept of womanism which stipulates a desire for "man and woman" to "be in harmony in the home, and the society at large" (Adam 2012:81).

The desire for harmonious living at home particularly between husbands and wives explains the relevance of a womanist in the present discussions. A peaceful home implies harmony and atmosphere that is free of violence. The tranquillity experienced in such a home makes it a conducive setting for real character development. A child that grows

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in such an environment lives a fulfilled life and develops a character that is desirable for nation building.

So, a womanist desires a home that is peaceful. He or she preaches co-operation between the man and the woman (husband and wife) with a belief that both should jointly work together and pull resources together to achieve the best. The opinion of a womanist in this regard is that, the man cannot do it alone. It emphasises further that the wife if given the opportunity could be more useful than expected having recognised the man as the head.

Womanism as a social concept is purely African. The African woman as observes by Adam (2012) has the home as the centre of her experience. For Adam "no matter how much an African woman fights for equality and acceptance in the society, she, at the same time, tries to maintain her home – making sure that there is love, unity and peace in the home".

A womanist recognises the home as an integral part of society or a nation which must not be broken. The African woman believes so much in her home and does everything possible within her capacity to defend it and make it reasonably attractive. For example, a

Yoruba woman will occasionally say 'mi o le je ki enikeni le mi ni idi eru me'. (I do not want anyone to drive me away from my property). The home is paramount to the African woman. This is better preserved in womanist ideology.

A womanist does not attack the man. Instead, he or she feels that certain aspects of the culture particularly patriarchy should be redressed with the aim of correcting certain human defects and excesses which are common in society vis-a-vis the attitude of male to female and the way woman are being treated generally in societies dominated by men. Most of the attempt are well pronounced in literature particularly those authored by females, the example in *Efuru* by Nwapa, Flora.

The intension is to attain a society that is free from oppression, deprivation, discrimination and subjugation. The focus is mainly the home. That is, the interaction and interpersonal relationship and dealings in the home particularly between the husband and the wife. The usefulness and the relevance of the woman (wife) at home is stressed by creating a woman character who is highly virtuous and has desirable character. The excesses of the man (husband) are in a soft manner addressed.

Both are placed side by side for the audience (readers) to reject one and admire the other. The aim is to ensure a peaceful home which will in turn produce people of good character that will make a nation that is free of unpleasant emotion.

The Womanist Impression for Nation Building as Expressed in *Efuru* by Nwapa

Nwapa is one of the foremost African women to take a grant step to publish women experience in a male dominated society. As a woman elite (African) Nwapa denies being referred to as a feminist. For most African female writers, feminism is considered as a Western ideology imported from America. The concept (feminism) for them is "a destroyer of homes" (Aidoo, 1981). Nwapa in *Efuru* presents her story from the Igbo example in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

Nwapa joins her voice with other womanists who believe that a home that is free of violence makes for good character development and desirable nation building. Anifowose (2011) considers violence as a "concept often serves as a catch all for every variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn". This impression shows clearly that no meaningful development can exist in an atmosphere of violence as experienced in the Nigeria of today. The likes of bokoharam, Filani herdsmen, kidnapper to mention a few.

Nwapa presents the story of a beautiful, well behaved, and hardworking woman who is generous and loved by everyone. Efuru whose name double as the title of the novel is admired for her kindness and cheerfulness. The unfortunate visits her marriage and she faces a lot of violence simply because she could not give birth to children. The only one she has (Ogonim) dies of "attached of compulsion" (*Efuru* 68). The experience of Efuru (the major character in the novel) tallies with what Oyeshola (2005:73) describes as domestic violence which for him is "perpetrated by an individual in an intimate relationship". The "relationship may be duly committed as manifested by cohabitation or marriage". In the case of Efuru, the perpetrator is particularly her husband (Adizua).

The generosity and kindness of *Efuru* are not able to safe her from series of embarrassment both at home and outside the home particularly those meted out on her by Adizua: the first husband. As

admirable as she is, she is unable to secure a peaceful home because of bareness which obviously is not her fault. A fact that is known to almost everybody in the village.

The pieces of advice from people especially her mother-in-law and Ajanupu is that she should endure and wait for better changes. The father (Nwashike Ogene) does not have a different opinion. Efuru admits and decides to bear the incontinences and the discomfort in order to keep her home. This is a conscious creation of Nwapa. The intension is to create the impression that the society is the picture of the various homes there in. The characters and attitudes exhibited by people in a society are reflection of the home they come from. To really make a good nation, Nwapa prescribes a peaceful home.

Efuru endures the violence and the inherent hardship and psychological tumult just to keep her home. She determines to always allow the sleeping dog to lie each time Adizua inflicts suffering on her. She considers it "a difficult task" (*Efuru* 58) for a woman "not to love" her husband. Efuru will always complain: "He treated me the way that only slaves are treated". Other women like Ajanupu and Efuru's mother-in-law will always advise her to be patient and endure a little. The sole aim is to ensure that the home is sustained.

To really ensure that a broken home is avoided, Ajanupu tells Efuru

My advice is this my dear child:
be patient and wait.
It is only the patient man that
drinks good water...(*Efuru:*58)

Ossai the mother-in-law adds no different voice. She says "It pays to be patient" (*Efuru* 59) she equally narrates her experience to Efuru pointing to her how she too endures only to have a good home. Nwapa presents these experiences in the novel so that her readers can actually see the efforts of the African woman to create a conducive atmosphere for the needed peace. This is a requirement for character development. The intention is to establish the fact that a nation is a product of the individual home in her. Good home, good nation. When the various homes are peaceful, the whole nation will be peaceful. The emphasis at present is that the woman is significant in this regard. She plays certain roles and endures lot, to ensure that things do not get out of hand.

Nigeria as a country is at present facing a lot of violence. There is insecurity

everywhere. The economy is bad. Nothing seems to move. There is no job especially for young graduates. Bokoharam today, herdsmen tomorrow. All these are fall outs of bad characters. Nwapa presents Adizua, though in a soft manner, to represent many men in the outside world who are not responsible and do not value chastity, honesty and uprightness. It all starts from the home. Echoes (2004) in Oyeshola (2005) defines violence as "an encounter with life-threatening forces that affect millions of persons in their individual and family lives in the lives of their communities and in the global economy". The situation in Nigeria at present illustrates the opinion stated above. Most Nigerians wake up daily and move about encountering various "life-threatening forces that affect" their lives, their communities and the entire nation. The perpetrators are members of one home or another.

The position is that, it all starts from the home. There are so many "Adizua" in the various homes that make the nation (Nigeria). Adizua will not eat the food made by Efuru (her wife) for no just reason. He keeps late night. He stays away from home and does not care neither for the wife nor for their only daughter.

According to Ossai (his mother), Adizua takes after his father. (*Efuru* 50-61). Series of indiscipline and anti-social behaviours in society are reflections of how people (male or female) are, back home. The voice that Nwapa is trying to lift up in her novel (*Efuru*) is that, it is the home first. If we keep our homes, the nation will be a safe place for all and sundry.

In the novel, Nwapa through the characters of women like Efuru (the heroine), Ajanupu, Ossai and Nwabata presents to her audience the kind of virtue in African women. This virtue, if adequately tapped and given desirable respect will go a long way to build desirable character to build a peaceful home in particular and a peaceful nation at large. Their kinds in the real life situations are living evidences to justify the crusade that more importance should be given to women and should be given the same opportunity as opened to men.

The author of the novel equally places side such women and by side men like Adizua, Nwosu and Eneberi (Gilbert) so that her readers can take a better look at society and re-define certain aspects of the culture particularly the social system called patriarchy. The impression is that not all women are bad. The obvious is

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equally pronounced that not all men are good. The prayer is that both men and women should work together so that they can help one another to really address problems that are identified and proffer solutions to them without much emphasis on human short-comings. The first place to effect this is the home. The character developed by individual from infancy translates to the realities display in adulthood. The youths are not left out.

Conclusion

A child grows to know the parents and other siblings perhaps the elderly one as people to imitate and/or emulate. The child sees the parents as his or her role model. The child develops his or her character based on what he or she hears from the parents and what he or she sees them do. The parents play a significant role in the lives of their children especially in the aspect of character development. The home is particularly significant in the lives of individuals that make the larger society. Every member of a society comes from a home. The practice, belief, religion and situations generally in the home go a long way to determine the character of people in the home who in turn constitute the total population in a nation. The relevance of the parents is very critical in this regard particularly the mother.

The importance that the African woman attach to her home and the love she has for both her husband and the children give credence to the importance of a woman in the home. She endures and does everything humanly possible to ensure peace and harmony in her home. No matter the involvement and prosperity of an African woman politically, socially and economically, she still tries to keep her home. The African woman irrespective of her social and economic status (high or low) tries to maintain peace and tranquillity at home. She still makes sure that there is unity in the home. In times of trouble and trials, she opts for patience and toes the line of hope. She is fully optimistic and courageously manage the situation while she anticipate brighter tomorrow even when everything proves that there is no hope. This is the example Nwapa presents in *Efuru*. The impression is that when the home is serene, it becomes a conducive setting for character development which consequently results into proper nation building.

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