



LITERATURE AND MORAL BEHAVIOURS OF NIGERIA YOUTHS: A STUDY OF ADEOLA ADEBOLA'S *THE MAGIC OF DESTINY*

**Okundare, Benson Kayodeⁱ,
Agbo, Joseph Odo**

Department of Languages
The Federal Polytechnic,
Nasarawa, Nasarawa State,
Nigeria

Abstract:

Literature and moral behavior are intertwined. This is because literature is one of the disciplines that concerns itself with issues of moral behavior in the human society. It is obvious that a child's perception, attitude and behaviours are acquired from his society. Therefore, the society affects and influences the attitude and behaviour of a child. This lays credence to the philosophical argument that "*a child is a product of his society*". In the contemporary Nigeria, the most important segments of the society that have over-riding influence on a child are his family and the educational institutions he passes through. This is truly so because, the larger part of a child's youthful development is spent within these institutions. In Adebola Adisa's novel, *The Magic of Destiny*, the experiences of Kike's formative years in the family and tertiary institutions reflect an inadequacy, especially, on the failure of government institutions to live up to expectation in the moral development of the youths. This is because tertiary institutions are a complex society that offers the individual child a wide range of possible lifestyles, and social involvement in numerous settings. This paper examined how the characters in our text of study have allegorical implications on the present moral decadence of the Nigerian youths. This is a proof that literature is a reflection of the human society. The researchers examine the novel critically to discover the fictional situations that reflect the contemporary life on campus of Nigerian tertiary institutions. The researchers finally suggest some measures that could be taken to change the moral decadence of the Nigerian youths.

Keywords: literature, moral behaviour, youth

1. Introduction

There exists naturally a fundamental social contract between the government and the citizens of the country to the extent that, while the citizens remain loyal to the government in power, the government ought to protect and develop the citizens. What this means is that any responsible government has the obligation to develop her citizens both educationally and morally. This role

ⁱ Correspondence: email obenkay6@gmail.com

is carried out mostly in Nigeria by the agents of government. Consequently, tertiary institutions are training grounds for Nigerian youths. This training, apart from academic, includes moral behaviour. This is necessarily so because, good moral behaviour of students, who are the future leaders will definitely promote peace, unity, integrity, orderliness etc. which will lead to a society that is devoid of rancor and anarchy. This is why liberal scholars postulate that, the state should be seen as the institution for orderly progress of the human society. Indeed, neo-liberalists like Hobbes, Locke, and others (Cited in Member, 2011) regarded the state as a neutral arbiter in the contending social classes in the society.

It is obvious that imbibing the virtue of good moral character in the Nigerian youths will no doubt curtail the situation described by Hobbes as *"a state of nature where the strong prevailed over the weak in the society, and most often cause societal anarchy"* (Member, opcit:19), Therefore, it is the government that provides the structures through which human and resources are organized. Appadorai (1994:23) describes the government and citizens' relationship as the constitution of Leviathan that would guarantee security and liberty while engendering loyalty and support from the citizens in the society. Consequently, if these structures or institutions are not provided or not effectively utilized, the society is bound to be at the receiving end.

However, contributing to national development, and especially, moulding of good moral behavior in the Nigerian youths should not be it. Exclusive responsibility of government and its agents or institutions, individuals, families and private organizations have a role to play. It is on this perspective that this paper seeks to examine the role of literature or better still the role of writers in the moulding of good moral behaviours in the Nigerian Youths. It is pertinent to note at this juncture that writers of literary texts are not simply concerned with story-telling; rather, they set out to point out some societal inadequacies or virtues with the sole aim of addressing the issues in question. Therefore, a writer may choose to figure out certain vices such as: corruption, injustice, drug abuse, promiscuity, etc for the society to ponder over and to make amend.

On the other hand, acts of virtues such as: bravery, courage, hardwork, heroism, patriotism, selfless love, Integrity, uprightness etc. worthy of emulation could be brought to the fore in a text for the society to cherish and copy so as to foster peace, unity, progress and national development. Adisa's novel *The Magic of Destiny* (2011) falls within this preview.

Consequently, this paper seeks to investigate the thematic considerations of the novel with respect to the extent to which the author has exposed the prevalent social vices that have been the bane of the campuses of tertiary Institutions in Nigeria over the years. This exposition albeit is intended to contribute to moral upbringing of Nigerian youths as Chinweizu and Ikechukwu (1965:253) have argued: *"The major role of literary critics is.... a matter of perceiving social realities and making those perception available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in society's values and norms"*. This portends that, writers artistic exposition of societal vices or virtues enables the society assess itself in order to promote and preserve its positive norms and values or seek for change to those practices which are dysfunctional in the society. It is obvious that in order to promote good moral values among Nigerian youths on campuses the problem of the following social vices must be addressed:

cultism, corruption, rape, ritual killings, greed, betrayals, ignorance, among others. These are the core social vices that form the thematic concern of *The Magic of Destiny*.

2. Conceptual Clarification of Terms

The conceptual interpretations of the keywords are purely in relation to the context of this paper.

Literature could be viewed from different perspectives. In one sense, literature could be described as writings of a particular era, for example, The Medieval Literature, 20th century literature. In another sense, literature could be seen as writing that pertains to a particular discipline, e.g. Management Science Literature, Literature of Law, etc. Yet, literature could be seen as writings of a people, a country of a continent, for example, Igbo literature, Nigerian Literature and African literature.

However, literature as a discipline refers to the manner in which man uses language to express his experiences in the world around him. When we talk about literature as a subject of study, we mean the creative or imaginative work of art produced by a poet, dramatist or a novelist (Nwachukwu Agbada, Omobowale, Ododo and Adebisi, 2014:1). The essence of literature in the human society is that through it man expresses his past and present experiences for the purpose of building good moral values and norms in the society. This is essentially so because literary works capture yesterday, mirror today and project tomorrow. To this extent, a writer is a historian, a philosopher and a prophet in the human society. Adeola Adebola's novel, *The Magic of Destiny* mirrors social issues in the contemporary Nigeria.

2.1 Moral behavior

This implies the standard principles of wrong or right attitude within a given society. Good moral behavior therefore refers to abiding by the accepted norms and values generally accepted by people. Good moral behaviours are not static in all human society hence it varies from community to community. However, certain vices such as cultism, rape, murder, corruptions, promiscuity, etc. are regarded as bad moral behaviors in almost all human societies.

2.2 Youth

In a general term, youth is a boy or a girl of ages between childhood and adulthood. The UN defines youth as people of ages between 15 – 24 years old. However, different countries may define youth according to their unique situation. For the purpose of this paper youth is defined as young people of ages between 18 – 35 years old.

The majority of students in tertiary institutions both undergraduate and postgraduate fall within these ages. These are the youths responsible for the social vices prevalent in the campuses of our tertiary institutions.

3. *The Magic of Destiny*

The heroine of the novel for this study is Kikelomo, the daughter of Dr/Bar (Mrs) Oke. The parents were rich, and Kike was brought up in a happy, morally sound and financially

comfortable home, consequently, she grew up with an open and positive mind towards the world around her (pp. 22-23). Having successfully completed her secondary education at St. Joseph Private School (pp. 49-54), she gained admission into the university to study Estate Management. However, Kike's hitherto sweet world turns sour when she met Jude on campus. Kike fell in love with Jude (a diehard cultist) in ignorance. Though Kike had been warned by some good students who had sympathy for her innocence, but she remained adamant to the wise counsel until Jude eventually raped her after a brutal physical torture. Jude and his cult members left Kike in a coma when Ayo Crowther rescued her and took her to hospital (pp.68-71).

Overwhelmed and despondent by the rude shock and pains of unexpected rape, Kike developed a psychological complexity. She could no longer summon up courage to love any man again, not to talk of marrying any man in her life. However, after being tested negative to HIV her parents encouraged her to continue with her education. Kike graduated and observed her NYSC in Kaduna (pp. 98-104). Furthermore, she went to United Kingdom (U.K.) for Masters Degree, where she met Ayo Crowther again. Ayo made several marriage proposals to Kike which were all rebuffed. Finally, one fateful day, Ayo and Kike met, and Ayo revealed to her that he rescued her when Jude raped her. This revelation eventually brought them together as husband and wife.

4. Thematic Analysis of the *Magic of Destiny*

4.1 Torture / Rape

Rape is a central motive in this novel. Ordinarily, the issue of sex should be a pleasant romance between a man and a woman. However, when it is forced on a woman, it becomes a repulsive oppression to her. This is the situation in this novel. Kikelomo, the heroine of the text in demonstration of adherent obedient to her Anti Sambo's advice (p. 59) vows never to surrender her virginity to any man until her wedding. Ironically, she plays herself innocently to the wicked hands of a hardened cultist, Jude. Jude tortures her physically and eventually deflowers her in a most crudest manner in an open field (pp. 70-71). To worsen her predicament, the university authorities could not help her. The author exposes this incident to show her audience that the incident of rape has almost become a common phenomenon in the Nigerian society, especially on universities campuses and other tertiary institutions. This evil has been on the increase over the years without serious attention from the governments.

It is obvious that over the years, rape has become part of the working in Nigerian system. Various governments have turned blind eyes on to it and pretend it is nothing that calls for urgent attention. The executive and the judiciary arms of governments have not done anything historic (<https://www.vanguardngr.com>). However we must acknowledge that government has been making some effect to address the issue of rape, especially through her agent - National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) by bringing some rape cases to court, more action is needed to stem the tide of rape.

4.2 Cultism

Cultism is another monster on the campuses of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is an unacceptable error because universities and other higher institutions are supposed to be the citadel of excellent learning, where cultism should have no place. Unfortunately, cultism has turned our universities campuses into a deadly battle ground. To worsen the situation, some unscrupulous elements in the society finance them to be used as foot soldiers against their perceived enemies, thereby making it a lucrative business for ignorant youths. By exposing these dastardly acts, the author is advocating for its eradication from the tertiary institutions.

4.3 Promiscuity

The theme of promiscuity is portrayed in the character of Helen and the female corps members on the NYSC camp (Pp. 94, 101-2). Helen was a brilliant girl but from an unstable soldier family background. She chose to involve herself in the boys/girls campus lifestyle. Moreover, her romance with all sorts of men knows no bound. In fact, she changed men as she would change her clothes on campus (P 94). This exposes that fact that, while boys rape girls on campus, some girls also front for sex either for filthy lucre or in the name of socialisation. Other themes include but not limited to: Ignorance, greed, betrayal, corruption, love etc. But the themes of cultism, rape and promiscuity are the tripods that carry the rest of the vices on the campus.

4.4 Characterisation

There are several characters in the novel. However, this study focuses on: Kikelomo and Ayo Crowther versus Helen and Jude. These two set of characters represent the opposite lifestyles on the campus. Jude and Helen represent vices on campus - Cultism and Promiscuity respectively, while Kikelomo and Ayo Crowther represents decency and integrity. This juxtaposition of oppositeness serves as a foil, not only to highlight the evil on campus, but also to create an atmosphere of hope that all is not lost, if there are still some students who have integrity. It is a call to the authorities of the institutions to intensify effort to rid the campus of the prevalent social vices.

4.5 Literary Techniques

From the proceeding analysis, we can assume that literary text as means of delivery is a channel through which the author reaches the soul of his audience. Consequently, it is not enough for the writer to simply deliver his message but to do so in such manner that can sufficiently elicit the anticipated response from the audience.

Therefore, it is important, though in a brief, to highlight some major points about the literary techniques adopted by Adisa in the delivery of her message in *The Magic of Destiny*. A critical study of the text reveals that either consciously or unconsciously, Adisa has delved to the method of the classical tragedy in her delivery with specific reference to Aristotle's poetics. Though this is a prose text, it has exhibited the sterling qualities reminiscence of tragic poetry. It is important to note that poetry according to Aristotle include all other artistic forms of imitations. He views tragedy as, "an imitation of an action which is serious, complete, and of great magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, through pity and fear affecting

the proper purgation of these emotions" (Dukore, 1974:36). Other elements of tragic poetry according to Aristotle, which are applicable to prose fiction include: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and music.

To Aristotle, plot which is the most important element of poetry must be complete, and it must be of high magnitude. Completeness implies that the plot must consist of the beginning, the middle and the conclusion of the story with no missing link. That is, plot must consist of an incident leading to another naturally from the beginning of the story to the end without a missing gap. It must be reasonable, credible and significant to human mind, but not too complex for comprehension. Another quality of tragic poetry, according to Aristotle is that the hero must be a man like us who is upright in behaviour but through his personal flaw falls from grace to grass. It is the uprightness of the tragic hero that makes his sudden demise stir up emotion of fear and sympathy in the audience.

The Magic of Destiny exhibits these elements of the Classical Tragedy. For example, the narrative of the formative years of the heroine of the text, Kikelomo represents a significant aspect of human life which is concrete and credible. She represents an innocent, honest, kind and loving girl, who suddenly falls into the wicked hands of brute cultists, and this calls for fear and pity.

Spectacle, according to Aristotle's poetics is an exposition of bizarre and gory sights as in Sophocles', *Oedipus the King* and its metatext, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. In both texts, the hero dislodged their eyeball from their sockets on realization that they were married to the queen who happened to be their own mother.

The gory sight causes the audience to shudder with surprise and awful fear. It is obvious that the brutal torture of Kikelomo by the cult boys couple with the obscene rape at night by the roadside represent a spectacle of surprise and utter fear that such an innocent girl could be so brutalized by a trusted friend. However, the element of music does not apply in this novel.

The story is not an indictment on girl-child education; rather, it urges the girl-child to forge ahead with western education in spite of the serious obstacle against her. It calls attention to the ills on our campuses so that urgent remedies could be sought by all the stakeholders. Thus, the authorities of tertiary institutions are not doing enough to mould the moral behaviours of the Nigerian youth, more concrete actions are needed to curb the excesses of our youths.

The next segment examines our text of study to show how the failure of the Nigerian family and the tertiary institutions in the moral training of the youths has led to high moral decadence among the Nigerian youths today, especially on our campuses.

4.6 The Family

In its simplest form, the family comprises of the husband, wife and children. However, in terms of character moulding, and especially in African culture, where communal lifestyle is a common feature; the family is much more than just a household. According to Morrish cited in Akpa (2011:237) "*the family is one of the primary groups of the society, concerned with face to face relationship*". What this means is that in Africa, the child belongs to both the nuclear and extended families. Therefore, through socialization in the family, children get to learn gradually the values, norms and regulations of the society. Children are taught through daily experiences

on how to be responsible members of the family as well as the entire society. The family is the crucial starting point in moulding of good moral behavior.

From the family, children learn values such as: honesty, loyalty and obedience to constituted authorities, integrity, sacredness of the human blood and life, moral sanctity, etc. All these make Fafunwa (1974:68) to observe that, *"character training is the cornerstone of Africa traditional education"*. This means that African traditional education emphasizes social responsibility, political participation, spiritual and moral values. The family therefore serves as the avenue for cultivation of the values that could guarantee national stability and economic development of a nation.

Two characters in our text of study reflect youths that are brought up in a poor family background. For instance, Helen (Magic: pp. 93 - 95). Her father, as we are made to understand is a military officer, who is not stable in the family. The implication is that, Helen may not have proper family upbringing as the writer of our text describes her:

"...She was also cunning, though she calls it being smart... somehow these men or guy never succeeded in having more than a handshake with her. At least that was her version of the way things were... she changed her admirers as frequently as she changed clothes... she dress to kill." (Magic: p94).

The character of Jude and his cultist friends demonstrate the attitude of children with poor family training background. Children from such homes involve themselves in smoking, alcoholic and drug abuse.

*"Jude!!' shouted,
I hugged him.
'I am so sorry, baby' he said, something kept me,' he added.
Immediately he said this, I could perceive the odour of alcohol and cigarette on his breath. I did not know that he took alcohol or smoked...."* (Magic: P69).

There are many Nigerian youths, the likes of Helen and Jude, no doubt on our campuses. We have a lot of female students who dress to expose the sensitive parts of their body to entice men. Their business is to chase male lecturers for money and unmerited marks in the tests and examinations.

On the other hand, the characters of Kikelomo and Ayo Crowther portray the behaviour of youths that are trained in a good family background. They are focused in their studies, gentle and hardworking. For instance, Kike is kind to all her friends. When Ayo's marriage proposal to Kike was rebuffed several times, Ayo did not resort to anti-social action to get her by all means as Jude did.

By using these two sets of contrasting characters, the author seems to point out to her audience that the character of a youth is a direct reflection of his family background. This is a challenge to the Nigerian families to put their family in order so as to curb the atrocities being perpetrated by Nigerian youths today. Arene (2010) attests to this when she argues that,

"Nothing can be in order in this world if the family values are in disorder, or disarray; thereby lacking the main essential parenting roles of training a child". This implies that the Nigerian family has failed in her role of socializing and cultivating of moral, social and political values and norms in the Nigerian youths as Akpa (Op. cit) contends, *"The nature and character of Nigerian citizens, including her leadership, is a reflection of the nature and character of family"*. This is a call to the Nigerian family to wake up to her responsibility of imbibing moral virtues in their children/wards.

4.7 The Tertiary Institution

The primary aim of the Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions is to train the youths to be academically and morally sound in order to create high level manpower for economic and socio-political growth of the country. Consequently, degrees are awarded based on both moral and academic performance of the students. Unfortunately, the situation on our campuses today is a far cry from this envisaged objective. The universities and other tertiary institutions are being turned to centres for all sort of crimes and high-level prostitution. Both the staff and the students are involved in these evil acts. Many male students also hide under the ages of secret cult to commit all manner of crimes including armed robbery, while the female students dehumanize themselves by selling their womanhood for filthy lucre. This ugly trend is reflected in the text of our study as the products of the tertiary institutions engage in indiscriminate sex spree with soldiers and others on the NYSC campground (Magic: pp 101-102). This unholy behaviour is at variance with the objectives of establishing the scheme which were stated as:

"...to remould the youths to appreciate and practice the virtue of love, patience, tolerance, understanding, honesty, hard work, self-discipline, self-control, respect for constituted authorities, justice, good conscience, and equity." (Ekpenyong, 1998).

The implication here is that, the institutions and NYSC (National Youth Service Corps) have failed to live up to the expectation of the objectives that necessitated their establishment have not been able to play their constitutional role effectively. The attitude of Mr. Wole Philip, who also engages in sexual harassment of Kike in the workplace, also deserves to be mentioned here. He is also a product of the university. All these are clear testimony of the fact that the two government institutions have not been able to inculcate the much-needed moral values in the youths that pass through them. This is a clear indication of institutional failure in Nigeria. Therefore, the ugly manifestations of the moral decadence in our society as reflected in our text of study are clear indication of family and institutional failure. They have not been able to play their expected roles effectively in the contemporary Nigeria.

5. Recommendations

The following suggestions could help in reducing the high level of moral decadence among Nigerian youths:

- Most of the crimes committed by Nigerian youths, especially prostitution may not be unconnected with the poverty in the land. Girls from rich parents may indulge in

prostitution, because of social influence. Poverty makes young girls to fall easy prey to the money bags in the society. Idle young men became ready – made instruments for causing havoc in the hands of the politicians. Therefore, government at all levels should address the issue of unemployment seriously.

- Educational institutions, especially the tertiary institutions, should rise up to the challenges of molding the character of the youths by applying strict rules and regulations in the schools.
- Youths who engage in crime of cultism on campus should be punished severely to serve as a deterrent to others, no matter the status of their parents in the society.
- Indigent students should be given some sort of reliefs in form of bursary award by the state or the local government, so that students will not be running after people for money.
- Workshops and seminars should be organized regularly on campuses to sensitize the staff and students on the evil and danger of casual sex affairs and moral decadence.
- The promotion of African cultural values in the universities should be intensified.
- Parents should guide their children and wards on the kind of peer group to belong on campus.
- Above all, a course, “Moral virtues and integrity” should be introduced and taught at all levels of educational system in Nigeria, not only in few universities.

It is hoped that, if all these measures are taken, moral decadence In the Nigerian youths will reduce drastically.

6. Conclusion

It is a common knowledge that moral decadence is at its peak among Nigerian youths today. The root causes of the ugly development are the rural/urban migration, which has deprived Nigerian child the opportunity to grow under the strict parental care, the invention of television and the internet, and the failure of our educational institutions to inculcate strict moral values in our youths. This seems to be the argument of the writer of *The Magic of Destiny* (2011). This suggestion may be valid because the characters and actions in the text are direct reflection of the societal ills that are prevalent in the contemporary Nigeria. This study discovers that to a large extent the vices on our campuses, especially the incident of rape reflects the ambivalence, moral decadence, ethical bankruptcy, materialism, corrupt souls widespread promiscuity and hypocrisy that have characterized Nigerians over the years. The message of the text is therefore a call for consented effort by the family and educational institutions in Nigeria to wake up to their responsibility in order to arrest the increasing ugly incidence of moral decadence among the youths.

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