

## Women egalitarianism in the post-independence era; bane of societal immoralities

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### Abstract:

*The Subject of parenting and motherhood in African literary writings continues to be a major concern. The quest by many African feminists and other nationals looking for equal social opportunities between men and women has become prevalent in post-independence era writings. Some considered this move as the stimulant for societal vices, assumed to be borne out of a lack of parental care and home training. Parenting/ home training is deemed not to be reserved in formal educational settings but only with parents at home. In the current age, where men and women strive for economic equality, women have no more time to play their feminine roles, thereby subjecting their children to babysitters and crèches. This article examines the effects of African women in their struggle for economic power and the lack of time/energy to instill necessary and required knowledge in these younger ones, with the probable effects on society. This paper highlights how to cope with the challenges caused by this negligence, using some available documents, novels, and articles. Through a critical analysis, the article proffers promising solutions to curb the diffuse social reality.*

**Keywords:** African women, Culture, Girl-child, Parenting, Struggle for economic power.

**\*The authors has signed the consent form and ethical approval**

**Introduction:**

In the African system, parenting is perceived to take a lot of forms which is able to lead the child to be a responsible adult. Parenting is the process of raising and educating a child from birth or before until adulthood (Self Growth, 2012). Most African parents learn parenting practices from their own parents - some they accept and some they reject. These practices, which include cultural values, have been passed on from one parent to another. This practice and norms keep every society and bind them together. The real African culture does not subject women to the present inhuman conditions where many African women find themselves. The ways and manners of life is embedded in the daily routines and being grown up with by every member of the community. Parenting then requires interpersonal skills and makes emotional demands. There are different ways in which the African parent brings up a child in order for the child to imbibe the cultural values of the land and also be a responsible adult. Some of these forms of parenting are through story telling (folktales), the extended family, traditional rites and the mother's care, attention and love. This makes the child to be considered as a responsible and responsive member of his/her society.

Parenting is therefore the act of raising and relating with a child from infancy to when he/she get married. (in the African context) The child is subjected to informal training, no formal setting and the training is not schematized. The cultural values are passed unto these young generations; s/he makes use of these trainings and also passes same to the younger ones. Parenting involves the physical, psychological and social ways, and how to react and to treat any issues affect self and others. Baumrind (1967) submits that there are four major styles of parenting; authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, permissive parenting and uninvolved parenting. According to Baumrind, majority of the parents display one of four different parenting styles. Parenting styles differ due to certain factors. These factors include culture, personality, parental background, educational level, socio-economic status, family size and religion. They determine to a large extent the style of parenting to be adopted by any family. Parenting is majorly affected by culture, cultural belief from one community differs to a large extent from the other and it plays prominent role in the way they raise their younger ones. Culture, according to Ilesanmi (2004:7), is defined thus:

Culture is the total manner in which a human society responds to an environment. It includes customs characterizing a social group; social heredity of a particular community; meanings, values, norms,

their actions and relationships; beliefs, laws, traditions and institutions; religions, rituals, languages, songs, dance, feast, living habits, crafts and equipment.

Culture on the other hand is a way of life of a group of people- the behaviours, symbols, values, beliefs that people accept, not really thinking about them and are passed by mostly communication and imitation from one generation to another.

Colonialism and globalization has turned many cultural standards into another thing entirely in Africa. Lack of adequate knowledge of our cultural standards and philosophies combined with the effect of globalization make many to consider African cultures as devilish and ancient. The cultural contact is another prominent factor that plays negative roles in this sphere of influence.

In the Yoruba societies and the entire African nations, when a young girl reaches the age of puberty she is seen as a woman. She begins to be groomed for the higher responsibilities into the future by her parents. She is given lessons on social decorum, wifely duties on how to serve her husband and everything that defines her womanhood. These instructions do not disregard her responsibility towards the society. From what she sees around her and the lessons given, directly or otherwise, the young mademoiselle is consciously aware of the position of her sex and the role she is to play in the society.

Onyemelukwe, (2001:82) opines that,

That for any meaningful fulfilment or happiness to be obtained a woman needs to live with a man and discharge faithfully her wifely and motherly duties alongside her career duties, albeit not in an inferior state but in a position of complementarity of man and woman.

These woman's resilience and hard work is therefore entrenched in the consciousness of every young girl from this stage of her life. A woman arrives the ultimate of her womanhood when she marries thereby assuming the responsibility of a wife to her husband, and mother to her children, most especially her independent role as a contributor to the socio economic wellbeing of her family and society. She also maintains the sister's and daughter's role she has been playing in her parent's family.

In Africa as a whole, women are considered as child bearer and worker in the family. She bears child and do some work, both domestic and several others. Women contribute meaningfully socially, economically and culturally/ religiously to some extent (they are restricted in some areas of the festival.) to their societies. Though African society is patriarchal, socially there are gender specific roles organized in such a way that everybody plays active roles just like

they have economically. In some cases, women are sent on serious missions to bring peace, the legend of Moremi in the Yoruba community, who bailed the people of Ile Ife from the rampaging of the Benin people is a good example. Women serve in many occasions to solve a pressing situation. Women are indispensable not because of their child bearing ability or extra income that comes through but because the society recognize them as valuable and the women themselves know their worth. Women partake in peace building through positive childcare. African traditional societies assigned to women the role of educator. Such education is the type that starts from the cradle and was effected by means of a variety of activities in which the children participated.

Women serve as the foremost instructor in the olden days before the colonial administration. “the mother is the first and most valuable school in life.” They are confined to the upbringing of the child. They serve as the first and major teacher for the child, both the nuclear and extended family constitute the teaching team. The mother breastfeeds the child for two or more years. During this period, she impacts many things in this lad consciously/ unconsciously. The child also adapts to the lessons given by the mother. The child is seen as the replica of his or her mother. This may account for Yoruba proverb that, *omo kò ní bá ipèlè ìyá a rẹ̀, kó sì aso mú*. Meaning: a child that follows the footsteps of his mother will not go astray. The Yoruba is of the view that history instills the experiences of the olden days in the new generations, thereby expect them to be wiser in their activities. After this stage, the mother teaches the child the ways to behave in society amidst colleagues or elders. In the Yoruba society, a child should not talk when elders are talking. It is not allowed for any child to partake in any discussion that involves the senior ones.

Women trained their daughters and sons, appropriate comportments and the tenet of society, and impressed on them the importance of such values as honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise. As such, women have always been active promoters of harmony in the community, which can be referred to as a culture of peace” Chinwe Nwoye (2005:6).

Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003:18) observe that:

It was primarily the mother that had responsibility for the upbringing of the children. Children, especially when very young, remained with their mother, who would look after both boys and girls until they reached a given age (for boys, until the time when their father took over the responsibility). There were strict rules to be

complied with on how to dress, speak, eat and even walk and sit (especially for girls).

The relationship between men and women expressed through literature and their roles in societies has led us to the assumption that those interactions may vary, and there is a tendency to identify the roles of women in society.

When referring to the relationships and expectations within the family, we notice that there are some specific rules that are established in accordance with the traditions of each society. While boys are prepared for hunting procedures, the types of animals to hunt and the type not to kill, especially the pregnant ones. The manners of shooting. The girls are made to understand the ways of motherhood, how to behave in the matrimonial home. The manner of greeting the extended families of the husband, his friends and co-workers is made known to these young ones. Girls' education was based on practical and moral training. It turns to a disgrace for any child to be referred to as, *à bí ò kó*, meaning lack of home training. This is an insult on the mother or the entire parents/family, while an insult to the child when s/he is referred to as, *à kó ò gbà*. Meaning stubborn child that does not take instruction from parents.

### **Mother and girl child**

The care of a female child is considered as the most burdensome and somehow challenging. The girl child rest with the mother and assist her in the domestic works. At the age of puberty, a young girl is seen as a woman and at that level she begins to be groomed for the higher responsibilities ahead of her. She is given lessons on social etiquette, how to dress, pregnancy, child birth and parenting housewifery, and how to serve her husband and everything that defines her womanhood. The girl is exposed to the manner on how to cook, sweep, greet and the type of dresses at different circumstances. It is the duty of the mother to educate this lady on sex education. With the types of dress put up by women in Africa, *ìró and búbá*, the mother teaches her girl-child on how to sit not to expose herself to the public. In Africa, before the advent of western education and the influx of culture, virginity is a pride for the lady and the family. It is a pride for the bride to be a virgin. On the wedding day, the new wife that is discovered to have lost her virginity before that day is a disgrace to her family. Such an act is a bad omen and humiliation to the lady and her parents. It is the responsibility of the mother to impress it on her daughter such an implication. She engages in watching her child as she starts her monthly discharges, how to keep

herself appropriate and the attached implications. Such an implication is unwanted pregnancy and the resultant effects.

### **Use of language**

Language is considered as the tools for communication. Language plays a dominant role in disseminating information. Language appears as a system that reflects ideology of the user. Effective and appropriate use of language is considered necessary in any given milieu. When any member use insulting and abusive language, it means such a person is a poorer and lesser breed and quality. Dirty language is meant for untrained and uncivilized in the society. Useful, helping and comforting words are for the civilized and trained people. It is the duty of woman to educate the girl child on the words selection in each appropriate situations. While the woman is occupied with the girl child, the education of the male child is exclusively reserved to the father. The girl is cultured on the domestic duties by the mother. The boy is trained on the farming, hunting or any other profession of his family by the father. The variety or types of words differs. Men are known with succinct words; female are for elaborate and subtle words. The boy will be educated on how to be a responsible man in his family and how to hold family together. The girl is on how to be and respective wife. The girl child is not expected to show deficiency in the use of words, she should be polite and modest in her selection of words. Appropriate use of words by a spouse brings additional glory to her family.

### **Use of folktales**

Many African women make use of the long existing parables, fables, proverbs and several other oral literary genres to educate their wards. Akporobaro (2006: 62) opines that a folktale or fable is a traditional story which is told for entertainment and not meant to be believed and handed in oral form primarily and later in written form. It is a brief succinct story that features anthropomorphised animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature that illustrate a moral lesson with the aid of human language. A fable is a literary genre which takes the form of a short allegorical tale and intends to convey a moral lesson. Folktale teaches good morals which helps in parenting the child so he/she will learn to be a responsible adult. A folktale in traditional setting is an effective means of inculcating the virtues in children. It inculcates the norms and mores in the younger ones. Folktales is a means of teaching the youths how to be attentive and to bring out the main subject matter in any given tales. Mothers play significant roles in the disseminating of this cultural aspect. Folktales are usually in prose form and told for night time entertainment. It is so



much a part and parcel of village life that the old and the young virtually live on it. Folktales are for nights after the day's work when people retire to their houses in the open or during the cold nights when groups of men, women and children sit near the fire-place and listen enthusiastically to folktales. Folktales feature human beings and animals, either separately or collectively. They are often employed for social commentary and instruction and also serve as a potent means of affirming group values and discouraging antisocial behaviours. It also encourages shared organization and collective conscientiousness. This could assist in building a peaceable, self-reliant and progressive civilization. Conclusively, folktales period is such a time children and the youth will have a good listening ear for advice and what is ahead of them as they climb the adulthood ladder. This literary genre remains one of very vital means of inculcating morals in the African society before the influx of foreign cultures. Women are the major narrators of fables in the African settings. Let us examine this particular fable whose main objective demonstrates obedience of a wife to her husband.

#### **Dog and tortoise**

In those days, tortoise and dog were intimate friends. They did things in common and they appeared uniformly. As nature would have it, things changed and tortoise could not get food to eat. There was scarcity of rain and all agricultural products dried. During this time, dog was feeling fine and robust. Tortoise then called on his friend not to allow him to die of hunger. Dog then warned him not to let the means be exposed. Tortoise agreed to this instruction. Later, dog invited his friend to a yam farm. On getting there, dog uprooted very few tubers that he could easily carry. He did this in a twinkle of an eye. Tortoise, on his own part, wanted to carry everything home. Dog warned him to be quick. To avoid being caught, dog carried his own and set to return home. Tortoise, seeing his friend leaving burst into a song:

Dog wait for me, if you fail to wait for me, I will inform the farm owner, if the owner hears, he will catch you and you will be put in chain.

When the dog heard this, he waited for his friend, tortoise, but the load was heavier than what the dog could assist him to carry. Dog finally decided to go home, without waiting for tortoise. Not long, the owner came and met the tortoise with the yam tubers. As the farmer saw tortoise, he was so enraged. Tortoise asked the man to be patient with him as he had a mission of assisting the man. On hearing this, the man listened attentively. Tortoise then requested for a big fowl and

ordered the man to be ready to carry those tubers of yam to his residence, the man agreed. Tortoise then narrated the whole incidence and that, he was ready to take the man to where the thief was residing.

Tortoise led the man to his friend, dog's place of abode. On getting there, dog was not available at home, but his wife was inside. Tortoise left words for dog through the wife. When dog returned, the wife delivered the message to her husband. Dog quickly called on his wife and children to gather firewood for him. This they accomplished, he set fire on the firewood and covered himself up with many clothes. He places himself close to this fire camp. Dog directed his wife to inform any visitor that he is sick.

Tortoise advised they report to the king, this they did. The king sent his messenger to dog with annoyance. On getting there they met the dog's wife who inform them of the ill-health of her husband. These king's messenger went inside to see for themselves. They met dog on a sick bed. They could not do anything than to return to the palace. When they informed the king, he asked them to go and carry him down to the palace. Before their arrival, dog had directed his wife to get him two eggs. He puts these two eggs in his mouth, one in the right side and the other in the left side. As the messenger arrived again, he was forced to follow them to the palace. There had been many people in the palace who wanted to see the thief and to make jest of him. When the dog arrived, the king asked tortoise and the farmer to re-present their complaint. Tortoise gave explanation that he was a friend with dog and he was invited to the man's farm but as he could not take others' property dishonestly, made him to report to the owner. The king asked the farmer for his own side of the case. 'He had said all, the man held'. Those in attendance wanted to be making jest of dog, but the king asked them to listen to his own version.

The dog thanked all and said he was a friend to the tortoise but for almost a month he had been on sick bed. The dog claimed having a whole farm where he had yam, but due to his ill health, he had not been going out for over a month. While saying this, he pressed one of the eggs hidden in the right side of his mouth and he poured it down. He continued, as he talked briefly again he pressed the other egg and everybody felt pity for him. The king asked him to stop that it was genuine that his health was poor. As this was going on, tortoise had disappeared. The king then asked his men to return dog to his house. Everybody pitied dog and saw tortoise as a liar. The king then ordered the farmer to be vigilant on his farm that dog could not and was not responsible for the theft in his farm. Farmers have since then started using setups in their farms against unwanted visitors.



From this fable, the total obedience and submission of African wife to her husband is clearly shown. Dog's wife conformed with her husband's instruction. This is to show how women teach their daughters to be submissive and collaborator to their husband. African women narrate fables to inculcate morals in their children. Despite the entertaining roles of fables in African society, the moral aspect is also paramount.

### **African Women in the post-independence era.**

At the moment, mothers are not often seen in the house as they used to be. It must be emphasized that the involvement of more mothers in the modern labour force, deprives the children as well as the whole family of the daily love and care so necessary for proper child rearing, moral upbringing and development. The financial implications of this present era requires a lot of money, therefore the woman and the husband need to be engaged in a way to bring something to the table. Meeting the financial obligations of the family seems to be more than what the husband alone can shoulder. Despite this, proper upbringing of these younger ones should not be compromised with the state of economy. There are several women who have been doing wonderfully well with their profession without much hindrances on their respective families. But the present trends and the way things are going calls for urgent attention to avoid more damages to the coming generations.

During infancy, before the colonial era, the child is breastfed for a longer time as compared to this modern time. Thus, it is believed this will develop a bond between the baby and the mother. As the child grows, he/she sees the virtues being exhibited by the mother and all of these enhance good parenting. In the current dispensation, mothers hardly breastfeed their children for six months before they return to their various places of work. They resort to keeping their breast milk in refrigerator. The nannies will take care of the child to the best of her patience and ability. The busy schedules of parents nowadays have influenced private schools to organize so many activities for the children that they are not able to socialize properly and also stay home and learn at the feet of their parents. The care of the child will now be defined by the generosity of the parents. Proper care will be given to the child of any parents that gives additional incentives.

At the early stage many children are sent to boarding schools. This will allow the mother to attend to her schedule duties. This new setting comprises of heterogeneous characters. Available facilities in many school is not commensurate with the numbers of the staff and

students. The house masters in these hostels are not always available to cater for the need of these children. In some cases, many atrocities that are to be corrected are left as fashions to these wards, thereby vices are introduced to the society.

In the higher education level, many parents are solely concerned about the finances of their wards, they have no time to visit their children. They lack what it takes to be a responsible adult. During holiday many parents find it difficult to send their children on errand just because he/she is from higher institutions. The children are left to be busy with phones or films on television. This accounts for these children becoming another being in their school days.

Parents should find time to visit the school of their children occasionally, this will to a large extent moderate their behaviours. During holidays, children should be made to perform domestic duties. The ways and manner of addressing the teachers of these children by the parents should also be considered. Many parents talk harshly to these teachers. Cursing and using foul words or swearing in front of these kids should be avoided by women. The approaches of mother towards teachers directs further attitudes of kids in schools towards the teachers and all other areas of daily endeavours.

In Africa, dressing constitutes an image of appraising anybody culturally and morally. The way a person dressed determines how s/he will be treated by others in African society. Many children dress shabbily could be traced to the ways their parents dress at home. Women should dress decently and dress normally for their children always. Putting earrings by the male should be discouraged by the parents. By so doing many licentious dresses in the society will be reduced or eradicated totally.

Nowadays, many parents will bribe or promise a reward before sending their wards on errands. This constitutes a menace in the society. These children grow to demand for gratification at all cost before they render any service. This idea they call the new age, 21<sup>st</sup> century. No century should rub us of our moral and cultural values. We should build on the decorum that binds us together at every time.

The case of Ramatoulaye in *So long a letter* is fresh in memory. The problems encountered by the family after the separation of Modou Fall with Ramatoulaye. The single parent of Ramatoulaye could not afford her of taking care of her child, this results in these girls engaging in smoking, wearing of trousers, and at the end became pregnant for unserious school boy. These constitutes part of the agony suffered by Ramatoulaye. From this novel, it is evident that single mother cannot alone take appropriate care of children. Ramatoulaye

looking for economic survival of the family could not take adequate care requested for the children. Time and physical presence is a must in building a decent home.

### Conclusion

The role of women is non complimentary in every society, most especially in Africa. They are the major educators of the children. The domestic duty of female is strictly attached to the mother. The mother also learnt these duties from her own mother, consciously or unconsciously. The way to relate with others in the family and outsiders is known through the mother or the extended family. How to take care of self during developmental stages of a lady is made known to her through her mother. How to behave in the family setting and the changes expected of a wife in the marital home is exposed to the girl-child by her mother. The present urge of many women towards taking political position is a welcome development. The end product is more than the benefit; the children will lack the necessary parental training. An engaged woman will not have time to play her mother's role as expected of her, this will destructively affect the children. A child that does not receive the required home training may result to hooligans. The Yoruba adage that *omo tí a kò kó nì yóò gbé ilé tí a kó tà*. Meaning an untrained child will sell the house built by the parents.

This era of information communication technology has brought many developments which involve many things, the dress, behavior, comportments and mode of writing. The internet can be a scary place for the youth. Every parents should be ready to check their children phones from time to time. They should also try to censor the films to be watched by their children. Many of the films watched by these youth institute their behaviours at home and school. Nowadays women don't have time to monitor their wards, these children are left for themselves, thereby misuse the opportunity which results in atrocities of varying degrees.

The so called free world should not be introduced to family and parental issues, parents should take the usual responsibilities and correct their children as at when necessary. The parents of yesteryears would not tolerate their children to partake or make any talk when the elders are talking. Nowadays, the children talk freely when elders talk. This attitude is considered as being bold and clever by the parents, whereas it is an unscrupulous attitude and uncultured way of life. To build a cultivated society where ethics and etiquettes are retained and respected, women should plan their time not to be totally carried away by the foreign cultures. The care of their family should be paramount.

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