



## **SUSTAINING NATIONAL HARMONY IN NIGERIA THROUGH CHILDREN'S AND YOUTHS' LITERATURE: AN APPRAISAL OF *IHE ONYE KWERE* BY EZEJESI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, writers have explored many issues that affect the Nigerian society. Recently, the wide spread of war among the ethnic groups, hate speech, immoral behavior, violence and kidnapping, have awoken interest of African writers, especially Nigeria writers. Good values and moral qualities are fast eroding our contemporary society. They derive joy in hate speech, kidnapping and corrupt practices. This is the outcome of neglect to literature, which will later affect national harmony in Nigeria. In literature, good characters are praised and honored, while bad characters are made to suffer, to show the citizenry that no evildoer will go unpunished, including the people that will cause disintegration in Nigeria. The moral lessons after reading literature will serve as a guide to children's and youths' behaviours. This paper investigates the role of children's and youths' literature in sustaining national harmony in Nigeria. This is a survey research. The theory adopted is realism. This study educates the masses on the meaning of literature, realism, national harmony, the role of literature in molding of children's and youths' behaviours, the role of literature to national harmony in Nigeria and the analysis of *Ihe Onye Kwere* by Ezejesi through the critical lens of realism. It was realised that ills in children's and youths' behaviours can be corrected through literature. The study suggests that literature as an elective subject in secondary schools should be reviewed, and made compulsory for all students from secondary to undergraduate levels irrespective of one's career choices because, literature does not only entertain, it educates and informs about the past, which help to build present and the future.

### **Introduction**

Literature has succeeded in documenting various social issues, that affect the living condition of Africans especially Nigerians. Many writers have dedicated their literary energy in pleading the case of national harmony in Nigeria. Currently, attention is paid to the wide spread of corruption in Nigeria. Cases of lack of national harmony eventually are rampant in Nigerian society. Many literary artists have written to document the existence of such as a social problem, which hindered the unity and peace of Nigeria. Recently analysis of the problem of national harmony is more in Nigeria, than other part of the world. However, writers have dedicated their



literary energy in documenting issues. According to Odinye and Okey-Umeh (2016:79) “In Nigeria today, some of our youths and children lack basic knowledge they ought to acquire. Some are deeply involved in social vices they come across while sourcing the internet. ” This is as a result of poor reading habit of literature. The writers of literature are the watch dog of the society. They do this by exposing the socio-political and economic structures of the society for the masses to see their relationship and condition. Oguamalam (2014:394) says “writer’s narratives maybe painful or joyful, but the issues remain that he has conveyed the message to the reader”. However, literature remains the bed rock. In literature, the writer projects both moral and immoral behaviour. The characters created by the creative writer in the world of novel, who is of good moral are praised and honored, while the characters with immoral behaviours will be made to suffer. From this, the children and youth will know that no evil doer will go unpunished, through this, people will like to live in harmony. Therefore, role of literature in national harmony cannot be over emphasized.

### **National Integration**

The word national is an adjective of another word, nation. To understand the meaning of national, one must first know the meaning of nation. Nation is a tricky word to define. It yields different meanings depending on the side from which it is approached. Majorly, the definition of nation is approached from three perspectives: the cultural perspective, the psychological perspective and the political perspective. Wellman's definition captures these three perspectives in the definition of a nation. According to Wellman, "a nation is a cultural group of people who identify with one another, either have or seek some degree of political self-determination. Obasi (1987:4) and Gyasi (2019:134) in Wellman(2003:267-268) state “the cultural aspect of a nation demands the common possession of certain cultural elements like language, dressing, values, etiquette, traditions, crafts, mores, history, etc. The psychological aspect emphasizes the consciousness of these possessions and the collective identity which they foist on all possessors. On the other hand, it is the political aspect that calls for self-determination. The major purpose of establishment of National Institutions, is for national integration. It is a very crucial issue in Nigerian education. Chiakwuelu(2012:74 ) says “in order to promote this, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 promulgated National policy on Education section 1, nos. 4d and 5b. This section stresses the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria, and the complete integration of the individual into the community respectively.”

### **Harmony and Human Existence**

Every human existence carries conflict and harmony. Conflict in the society involves disagreements or outright quarrels between an individual and another individual or between a group and another group in the society. Conflicts are natural where two or more people stay together especially if they have something in common, as common interests lead to conflicts. Conflicts that are not well resolved can lead to fights or war. Conflicts can occur among members of the same family, state or country. Awugosi & Chukwumezue(2015:60) state a lot of things that can cause conflict in an otherwise peaceful society such as “common interest: If people have a common interest there can be conflict when their interests clash, dispute over a property, deprivation of rights: when people are deprived of their rights they react negatively leading to a conflict, maltreatment by the leadership: When the leaders are treating their subjects badly”. When conflicts are resolved it leads to harmony. Harmony is a state of peaceful existence and agreement. It is a situation or period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country. Nigeria is a country with people of different



cultural and religious background. National harmony deals with ability of Nigerians from different geo-political, religious and ethnic groups to come together, work and above all, tolerate one another.

According to Argungu (2012) "the factors that are responsible for the promotion of national harmony in Nigeria are religious tolerance, political tolerance, appreciation and respect for each other's culture, ethnic marriages, positive use of mass media and sports activities". However, these factors mentioned above by Argungu cannot be fully achieved without Literature. In literature, these factors were analysed using characters in the world of novel. Reading literature is a powerful instrument for National harmony. Every child and youth is expected to begin from cradle to know about literature, because of its importance. Children and youth are expected to be exposed early to literature because they are the future leaders of every society.

### **Children's Literature**

Children can be seen as young human who are not yet adults. Hopefully, they are the people to correct the ills of the Nigerian society. Every child requires the knowledge of literature. Literature teaches a child what he needs to know about his culture and country. Many children's literature have African background (Igbo example). Some Igbo literature writers are; Goddy Onyekaonwu, Tony Ubesie, Chinedum Ofomata, Inno Nwadike, Chibuike Okebalama etc. These writers write for children and youths. They have seen the need for culturally relevant books, for Nigerian children and youths. These Igbo writers in their literary work preach peace, harmony, tolerance, love etc among all ethnic groups in Nigeria. Children after reading literature can learn to live in unity. When all the ethnic groups in Nigeria live in unity, citizens will experience national harmony and development. Every culture preaches peace. It is necessary that a writer includes the culture of the people in his literary works. According to Osa (1987:18) and Segun (1996:208) in Onuko and Ezeuko (2002:128) "obviously, these writers felt that there was a need for Nigerian child to have a balance between what he learnt from foreign books, and the socio-cultural realities of his own people". They see it as their duty to decolonize and rehabilitate the minds of the Nigerian children of whom Segun remarks "had imbibed Western ideas and were brainwashed, into believing that everything traditional was "bush" and wrong while everything Western was "civilized and right". Considering these points, one feels that more literary texts with good cultural values should be made available to children and youths in Nigeria. In fact, moral and didactic implications of literature cannot be over-emphasized. It is a fact that literature entertains, and at the same time enables the reader to imaginatively project himself into the world of other people. However, literature based on the child's background exposes him to strange and interesting phenomenon in his own socio-cultural milieu.

### **Youths' Literature**

Youths as a social group is usually defined in terms of their chronological age, and the spectrum of youths has been defined by different author. The National Youth Development policy (FGN, 2001) see youths as "people aged 15 and that they make up about 40 percent of the more than 140 million people in Nigeria". According to Anasi (2011) in Okoroafor (2018:159) "the youths occupy a prominent place in any society, and outnumber the middle aged and the aged". This critical age, is the right time to teach them the concept, principle and theories of reading literature. This is because



the youths of today automatically will become the leaders of tomorrow, and for tomorrow to be more fruitful, one must give them proper education and training.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is realism. In literature, realism is the portrayal of life with fidelity. It is not concerned with idealization, with rendering things beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting them in any guise as they are not. Realism began sometime in the 1830s and had gathered momentum by the 1850s. Cuddon (1977:591) says “an artist should concern herself with the here and now, with everyday events, with her own environment and with the movements (political, social, etc) of her time”. Realism is a literary technique that attempts to create the appearance of life as it is actually experienced. Characters in modern realistic plays, speak dialogue that we might hear in our daily lives. These characters are not larger than life but representative of it. According to Meyer (1997:1064) realism “seem to speak the way we do rather than in highly poetic language, formal declarations, asides, or soliloquies”. Realists attempt to open their audiences' eyes; to their minds, the only genuine comfort is in knowing the truth. Many of their literary works concern controversial issues of the day and focus on people who fall prey in different societal institutions.

### **The Role of Literature in Molding Children's and Youths' Behaviour**

Literature is an exciting and interesting subject. It is always the simplest way that the culture of a people is handed down to the younger generation. Literature books reflect the norms and values of the society. Generally, literature is the mirror of the society. It gives the reader the opportunity to travel in his mind's eyes to different parts of the world mentioned in the literary work. As he reads, he acclimatizes with the characters whose lives differ widely from his own. He even sheds tears when he comes across a situation where unfair treatment is meted out to a character in the story. Meludu (2013:122-123) points out that “Literature portrays society as it actually is, by satirizing the bad aspects of society”. This serves as a deterrent to evil doers. It influences society by creating awareness of social problems and creates means of solving them. It teaches people to learn how to adapt to situations and learn how to behave. Good deeds of society or their attributes are portrayed and praised. These serve as history for future generations.

Literature is very vital in the life of every individual. It awakens one's spirit and inspires one to think deeply so that one could through one's imagination, create pleasurable effects that will appeal to and leave lasting impressions on the minds of the readers. Literature enlightens the young ones about their past traditions, focuses at the present. Obi (2009:65-66) in Meludu (2015:120) says “Literature as a school subject has the potential of building up future leaders with good conscience, who will care for the welfare of the citizenry. Not such leaders who will see their position as an opportunity to amass wealth, imposing confusion and unimaginable poverty on ruled masses”.

### **The Role of Children's and Youths' Literature to National Harmony in Nigeria**

Musa (2019:15) says, “the knowledge of literature helps in preparing and grooming of future leaders by providing citizens with the required behavioral orientation for patriotic leaders.



Through literature, children and youths will be provided with right attitudes such as patriotism, honesty, dedication to duties, respect for Nigeria constitution and respect for elders.”

Children’s and youths’ literature however, ensure maintenance of peace, rational stability, national unity and need for every citizen to play roles demanded of him/her. These duties and responsibility are assigned to every citizen and can lead to national harmony.

Through children’s and youths’ literature, people will know that one have right to move to any part of the country and live peacefully, irrespective of ethnic or tribal differences.

### ***Ihe Onye Kwere***

Ezejesi a renowned writer as well as a social critic, satirizes the ill plaguing the society. The centre of Ezejesi ‘s work is on selfishness, corruption, impatience . In this Igbo novel *Ihe Onye Kwere* , Ezejesi portrays Okoli as being selfish. Okoli is a wealthy man who married three wives with many concubines. Every incident in the family is none of his business, whether good or bad. He does not care for his wives, nor the children. And each time his last wife Nwabugwu ask Okoli for money, Okoli will threaten to marry more wives in addition to the three wives.

Okoli siri Ọ bughị na ị maghị etu m siri chụta gị?

Ọ bụ na ị maghị na ndị nwunye m,  
Na-eji aka ha akpara onwe ha nri? Gị adu  
chie nti, lụwa m. Etu ahụ m siri hapu  
Mgbeke na Nwanyinkwo ka m ga-esikwa  
Hapu gị; labatakwa onye ọzọ (page 15)

Okoli said to his third wife, you know quite well

That I am a married man. My wives cater

For themselves and the children, yet you insisted in marrying me. I will abandon you; the way I abandoned Mgbeke (first wife) and Nwanyinkwo (the second wife) to marry additional wives. (page 15)

The notable feature of Ezejesi is that he chooses the type of crime that is rampant in the contemporary Nigeria society. One can observe that what happened in *Ihe Onye Kwere*, is similar to what one sees in families nowadays, where married men have many wives and many concubines. Some of these selfish married men happened to be our leaders. Many of our leaders are morally empty. They forget that charity begins at home, there is no harmony in their different families. There is need for children’s and youths’ literature, so that the ills in Nigeria today can be corrected.

Ezejesi describes Mgbeke the first wife of Okoli, and Nwanyinkwo the second wife as being materialistic and impatient. Because of Okoli’s behavior, their children indulged in



prostitution which resulted to their female children having (HIV) and unwanted pregnancy. Nkechinyere says to her mother Nwanyinkwo;

Nne ọ kwa mụ agwala gị na ha dị ụmụnwoke  
ise tūwara m ime. Ọzọkwa, Ada gị nwanyị  
Ebutekwala ọrịa obirinajiocha. (2015 :76-78)

Nkechinyere told her mother ; they were  
Five men that impregnated me. Again, your  
first daughter is now living with HIV Virus. (2015:76-78)

This is similar to what one experiences in Nigeria, where majority of people refused to work hard, believing that they can use their body to get what they want. As one sees in Ezejesi novel. Therefore children's and youths' literature will enlighten the children and make them to know the implication of ill behavior.

Ezejesi made the attitude of Nwabugwu, Okolis' third wife and his son Ajoka worthy of emulation. Nwabugwu refused to join her co wives in prostitution even when Okoli asked her to do so. Nwabugwu says;

N'olu ákwā, Okoli i chọrọ idowe m n'ọndu  
i dowere ndị nwunye gị abụọ ndị a. ( page 14)

Nwabugwu in a crying tone, Okoli you want to keep  
me in the situation, you kept your other two wives. ( page 14)

Ajoka engaged in petty trading to pay his school fees. After his graduation, he made first class and was retained as a lecturer. In this novel, children and youths will learn to be patience in the time of trouble, so as to sustain harmony in Nigeria. When there is harmony, bright future is assured to all and sundry.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

School curriculum should be re-structured to make literature compulsory to all students in Nigeria. The moral lessons learnt from literature can help in sustaining national harmony in Nigeria.

Children's and youths' literature play a vital role in bringing peace, integration and national harmony in Nigeria. The federal government of Nigeria should re-structure the school's curriculum, and make it mandatory for the teaching and learning of literature, at all levels of education and to all students, irrespective of their career choices. Children's and youths' literature will change our country Nigeria into virile society where peace, security and national harmony will reign.





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