REDUCING CRIME THROUGH THE THEATRE: AN ANALYSIS OF FOLUKE OGUNLEYE’S JABULILE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the connection between family conditions and the criminal behaviours of children. Over the years, drama has been used to address the socio-political, economic and security challenges in different societies. The goal of these dramatists is to chart the way forward for a harmonious political, economic and social system. It is in this wise that, Foluke Ogunleye used her knowledge of drama to address serious issues affecting the progress and stability of the nation. This study finds that the explosion of crime in the nation is linked to the fragile family system surrounding the children’s upbringing by their respective families. This paper analyzes one of Foluke Ogunleye’s plays, Jabulile in an attempt to educate Nigerian families on what is expected of them as far as the issue of national security is concerned. This is done with the recognition that the family is the first unit of socialization. This study recommends that proper socialization of children by their parents is therefore a stepping stone for a harmonious socio-political system.

KEYWORDS: Crime, Security, Deviance, Family, Juvenile Delinquency, Socialization

INTRODUCTION

The family is recognized as one of the major socializing forces in children’s life. During the early stage of their life, the parents help teach children to delay gratification, to control unacceptable behavior, and to respect the rights of others. Conversely, families can also teach children antisocial, aggressive and violent behavior. In adults’ lives, family responsibilities may offer an important stabilizing force. According to Kevin Wright and Karen Wright “Given these possibilities, family life may directly contribute to the development of delinquent and criminal tendencies” (1).

A review of the literature on the role families’ play in the delinquent or criminal behavior of their offspring shows that there are multitude of theoretical models and analyses linking family structure to subsequent delinquency and later criminality. Aondowase Boh says that “the family characteristics that are associated with delinquency are parental criminality, ineffective
supervision and discipline, familial discord and disharmony, weak parent-child relationship, large family size, and psycho social disadvantage (107-108).

Scholarly evidence suggests that at the heart of the explosion of crime in society is the loss of the capacity of parents to be responsible in caring for the children they bring into the world. Wright and Wright say that “Children who are rejected by their parents, grow up in homes with considerable conflict, and are inadequately supervised are at greatest risk of becoming delinquents” (1). This loss of love and guidance at the intimate levels of marriage and family has broad social consequences for children and for the wider community. This empirical evidence shows that too many young men and women from broken families tend to have a much weaker sense of connection with their neighborhood and are prone to exploit its members to satisfy their unmet needs or desires. This contributes to loss of a sense of community and to the disintegration of neighborhoods into social chaos and violent crime. If policymakers are to deal with the root causes of crime they must deal with the rapid rise of illegitimacy. Boh says that:

the propensity to commit crime develops in stages associated with major psychological and sociological factors. The factors are not caused by race or poverty, and the stages are related to the normal process of growing up that every child confronts as he or she gets older. In the case of the future criminals, these process, in the absence of complementary parental love and affection, is perverted, thus frustrating the child's psychological needs and stunting his normal moral growth and social adjustment. The stages are as follows: early infancy and the development of the capacity for empathy, followed by early school life and the development of peer relationships based on mutual cooperation and a sense of social awareness. There is also mid-childhood stage and the experience of a growing capacity to learn and cooperate within the community as well as the stage of adolescence, preparatory to the final stage of adulthood which completes the socialization stage. This stage is also the intimate sexual union and the integration of others into the family as the smallest social unit (231-232).

The slightest disruption during these stages brings about a tendency for criminal behavior that leads to the fatal consequences for the society through a threefold process.

First, the broken family is one of the conditions to predispose children to criminal activities. According to Alisha Parks, “The majority of research finds that youth from broken homes report increased levels of delinquency” (7).

Second, children who come from these broken families are more likely to have negative community experiences. This increases their chances of involving in criminal activities. For example, they are more likely to face rejection from other children, join bad gangs and struggle in school. Criminal youths are more likely to live in high-crime neighborhoods. Each reinforces the
other in a destructive relationship, spiralling downward into violence and social disorder. As early as the age of five or six, small children who are denied of parental affection, love and supervision have become hostile and violent and, therefore, have serious difficulty forming friendships with normal children. This violent behavior also undermines their academic performance. Professor David P. Farrington's Cambridge University study finds a high connection between school adjustment problems and later delinquency: “Youths who dislike school and teachers, who do not get involved in school activities, and who are not committed to educational pursuits are more likely than others to engage in delinquent behavior.” (220).

In all of these stages, the atmosphere of rejection or conflict within the family diminishes the child's esteem and he fails to see the home as a place of love, affection and devotion. As this happens, according to Boh “Such a child is compelled to seek solace outside the unhappy home, and most frequently finds it among others who have experienced similar rejection, with whom an unhealthy alliance is formed” (232).

Historically, drama has been used to address the socio-political and economic problems in the society in attempt to bringing about change for the progress and development of the society. Playwrights have mirrored these societal conditions for information, enlightenment and education of the members of the society. Christensen and Feinberg say that:

Drama is the art of make-believe. It captivates children and adults from all societies and walks of life. Make believe consists in part of acting out events that happened or that we imagine happening. Drama consists of representing those actions for the pleasure of others. The primary ingredients of drama are characters, represented by players; action, described by gestures and movement; thought, implied by dialogue and action, spectacle represented by scenery and costume, and finally, audiences who respond to this complex mixture (1).

Therefore, the primary task of drama is to sensitize the members of the society in order to effect positive socio-political changes in the society. Achebe Chinua says that “…an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant- like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames” (113). It is on this note that, Foluke Ogunleye does not want to keep silent on the issues of crime, a canker worm that is a bane of progress and development of the nation. Jabulile is used by the playwright to enlighten, educate and inform the society on the factors that contribute to crime especially at the family level. Ogunleye uses her creative dramatic ingenuity to reflect the family conditions that encourage crime in the larger society and calls for the condemnation of such. As a guardian of the society, playwrights represent happenings in the society and offer a solution to the nascent socio-political problems. In line with Utoh-Ezeajugh,
Tracie and Nneka Ibeli’s quotation of George Thomson as quoted by Nwabueze “The poet speaks not for himself only but for his fellow men. His cry is their cry which only he can utter. That is what gives it its depth. But if he is to speak for them he must suffer with them. Rejoice with them, work with them. Fight with them.” (318-319). This gives credence to why Ogunleye choose to use the medium of drama to sensitize the Nigerian families on the family conditions that encourage criminality in the society. Osita Ezenwanebe, for instance, has used the medium of drama to condemn the quest for ill gotten wealth which most of the times lead people to commit serious crimes in the society. It is in attempt to point out the role of drama in crime prevention that this paper undertakes a critical analysis of Jabulile which is an ideal theatre for crime prevention.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social learning theory will provide the foundation for the analysis in this study. The fundamental premise of Social learning theory is that, behaviour is learned and that crime is a product of learning. The theory offers a good explanation to the problem of crime as its family members. This theory is put together by Edwin Sutherland who asserts that crime is a function of learning process that could have an effect on anyone in the society. To him, learning behaviour is a socialization, not a political or legal process. Beirne and Messerschmidt, agree with this opinion, as paraphrased by Uya that: “...skills and motives conducive to crime are learned as a result of contact with pro-crime values, attitudes and definitions and other patterns of criminal behaviour. Therefore, the act of drug use and crime among the youths, is socially constructed” (107-108).

Early in life, children are socialized by their parents. The behaviour or attitude of parents to a large extent influences the attitude and behaviour of the children either negatively or positively. Criminal acts by the children are learned from close associates. This means that criminal acts just like other learned behaviours are passed on from others. The act of learning criminal behaviour takes place within intimate groups such as parents that indulge in it. Children that grow up in homes where their parents commit criminal acts tend to view such behaviours as socially acceptable. Another theory that helps to explain the topic of discussion in this study is the social control theory which analyses social behaviour in a controlled society, focusing on its effects in crime reduction. It upholds that crime is merely the result of unsupervised anti social behaviour which can be reduced with some sort of control. In this way, society plays a significant role in curbing crime. The various types of social control are:

1. Indirect control by quick identification of deviant behaviour by the family or others.
2. Direct control where all wrong acts are punished and right actions receive rewards from family or state authority.
3. Internal control by the individual who tries to control deviant behaviour through the strength of his conscience.
4. Control through satisfaction. When all needs are met, the individual will not be tempted.

DRAMA AND CRIME PREVENTION

It is a well known fact that most Nigerian dramatists use their works to reflect the socio political realities of our times in an attempt to bring about change. According to Chinua Achebe as quoted in Utoh- Ezeajugh and Ibeli: “Any African writer who ignores the social and political issue of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant” (391). This means that African dramatists must show commitment to the problems bedevilling the progress and development of African society in their works. Juvenile delinquency and crime are one of such problems.

Drama reflects to reflect the reality of issues in the society. Drama in this regard, does not only enlighten and educate parents but also provides a support system to enhance parent’s knowledge of ways that can support the development of children. Lack of ability to manage the family and communicate effectively can make effective parenting difficult; this will in the long run affect the growth and development of children negatively. Drama can assist parent by providing education and training in communication skills. Through the cause of and effect of dramatic actions, families can transfer skills to their children and this will possibly prevent delinquency and the eventual life of crime. Drama’s role in crime prevention cannot be overemphasized. Right from the times of the Greeks (classical period) to the present, drama has played vital roles in reshaping man and his environment for the good and wellbeing of man. Crime in no way benefits man and so drama has over the years been used to trumpet the dangers associated with crime for the sake of man.

Dramatists have been able to do this because, they are members of society, so naturally their artistic projections are shaped and sharpened by the socio-economic contradictions and happenings of their time. The issue of crime is obviously on the high scale in the country today this therefore attests to why dramatists have channeled their creative energies to deal with the problem. Plays are written to reflect the family conditions that contribute to crime. The audience whom the plays are created for usually watch or read the plays, as the case may be, to help them change their lives.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN CRIME PREVENTION

The family unit is usually seen as an important socializing agent in a child’s subsequent involvement in crime. From a criminological perspective, factors that contribute to the criminal life of a child are: the severity of discipline administered to a child; criminal life of the parents; parental abandonment of their responsibilities and abuse; inadequate parental monitoring and
supervision; the parents’ age at time of child birth; violence; attitudes of parents towards violence; drug use by parents; size of the family; parents’ history of mental illness; educational background of parents; socioeconomic status and parental/child separation. A negative family characteristic such as poor monitoring and supervision of children by parents is usually referred to as a risk factor for future delinquency or crime. Boh says that:

Children who come from such backgrounds are believed to be at greater risk and are more likely to commit criminal offences than children who do not have such family backgrounds. The reverse is the case for a child that grows up in love, and support of home/parents. Such home/parents could be looked upon as being protective as they promote child’s resilience or protective provide barriers against the onset of criminal involvement even in the light of adverse conditions (113).

Crime prevention comprises any scheme which helps to reduce victimization by crime or violence. It involves the initiatives by parents or other family members to reduce fear of crime as well as reduce the effect of crime on victims. According to Boh:

For crime management/prevention to be effective, parents and guardians must be ready to lead their wards by example, through such approaches like: Promoting the wellbeing of the family members (children) and encouraging pro-social behaviour through social, economic, health and educational measures with focus on reducing the risk and factors associated with crime. Change the conditions in neighbourhoods that influence offending, victimization and insecurity that results to crime. Prevent the occurrence of crimes by reducing opportunities, increasing risk of being apprehended and minimizing benefits. The onus of this rests on the dramatists to sensitize the public on this all important phenomenon. It is against this background that, dramatists over years and in recent times have looked at the family unit as being a substantial force in the fight against crime and criminality in the society (113).

It is on this note that this study takes a critical look at Foluke Ogunleye’s Jabulile in relation to the role of parents in ensuring a crime free society.

THE NIGERIAN DRAMATIST AND CRIME PREVENTION/REDUCTION: A STUDY OF FOLUKE OGUUNEYE’S JABULILE

The play is set in modern Ghanaian society. It opens with two important female characters-
Jabulile and Sindi, her mother is seen packing a luggage when a knock is heard on the door. Shortly, Aunty Dudu is introduced to us as Sindi’s elder sister. She is a true representative of all that is repulsive in women—greedy, pugnacious, abusive, arrogant and rude. Aunty Dudu screams at Jabulile, who delightedly welcomes her to her parent’s house. With a condescending and scornful expression of hatred directed at Jabulile, she rubs in the rudeness with the punch line “stop shouting in my ears, I wonder why you are so mannerless. Is that the way to welcome somebody of my age? Scallywag (6).

The extreme anger and aggression of Aunty Dudu towards Sindi and her family is reportedly caused by their father’s choice to train Sindi in the University at Dudu’s detriment as she claimed. As the story of the play unfolds, we find out that this is a wrong notion, because, according to Sindi “You cannot blame our father in that respect either. He was ready to see you through school. You were the one who decided to drop out in primary five” (8).

Undoubtedly, Dudu is envious of her sister, who she considers to be on top of the social ladder as a result of her education and a reputable family. However, more trouble erupts when Sindi and Sipho, her husband died as a result of a ghastly automobile accident. Dudu seizes the opportunity to actualize her scheme. Ogunleye’s Jabulile treats some of the issues that encourage and reinforce crime, subjugation and violence against women especially in this part of the world. Dudu in the play is not an epitome of a good mother for the family unit. She makes the life of Jabulile- whose name ironically means Joy – a nightmarish one. Jabulile's chances of being educated would have been endangered but for the fact that she is brilliant and that Vusie, Dudu’s husband, secures a scholarship for her. Jabulile, the eponymous heroine, is driven by a situation beyond her control into the restricted space of the home without remuneration. The burden of household chores like cooking, washing and ironing clothes and cleaning the house becomes her lot. Dudu's repugnance for Jabulile rubs off on her daughter Phindile.

Dudu lacks the qualities of a good mother and wife, as she is only after money and does not care about what happens to either Jabulile or her children. Dudu does not take the future of her children seriously. She is a woman motivated by power and wealth. She sees her daughter, Phindile as a means to an end. In her search for economic power, she completely ruins her daughter’s future.

It is recorded in the play that she owns a bar, where she sells alcoholic drinks infused with Indian hemp to her noisy customers. Vusie reprimands Dudu on her parenting skills, during one of their discussions “You are bent on destroying this family. What is Phindile doing at almost 2:00am in a shebeen? Is this the right kind of atmosphere for a teenager? She has to be at her desk in school by 8:00 am. Do you think she will be able to keep awake in class?” (19). This is a clarion call on parents to be conscious of what their children do in life and what they do to them. It means parents must be interested in the way, behaviour, manner of their children and the activities they
indulge in. Vusie informs us of this fact when he reprimands his wife. Ogunleye, the playwright insists through Vusie that parents must have the future of their children at heart. The fact remains that, the future of our great nation, Nigeria, is in the hands of Nigerian children. To this end children must be taught to imbibe social values that will promote their future and that of the nation. Vusie is right when he directs Dudu’s attention to her duties.

The man of the house, Vusie wants his wife, Dudu to stop her “devilish business” which may end up destroying their family life. As a result of her new found role as the breadwinner of the house, she refuses to be submissive to her husband. Dudu is vehemently accused by Phindile for not doing what is expected of her as a responsible mother. She says “You have given me legacies of jealousy and hatred” (62). Phindile’s hatred for Jabulile culminates into the organized gang-rape that infects Jabulile with the dreaded HIV/AIDS disease. She says:

I really hated her. I thought, how could she be going around as a virgin, while I was as good as a public utility vehicle? How could she be so intelligent and beloved by everybody in the village and I so utterly despised? So, to destroy her glory, I arranged with Manqoba to have one of his friends rape Jabulile. I never knew it would be a gang-rape, because Manqoba also participated. If I had known, I wouldn't have cared anyway. One of them infected Jabulile with HIV, and I was affected too. That is why Jabulile died and that is why I am going to die also (61).

This clearly shows that, when parents fail in their responsibilities of socializing their children appropriately the children will grow up to indulge in criminal activities in the society. This lack of maternal guidance makes Phindile to remain an unintelligent and a dim-witted student abhorred by her teachers. She says “It is not a matter of studying hard. No matter how hard I study, they always fail me. You have to come and bribe them as you always do” (33). This statement establishes clearly that, Phindile’s mother is responsible for ruining her daughter’s life and has contributed in making a criminal out of Phindile. To Vusie, his wife, Dudu, has refused to face the reality but has continued to live in falsehood which is responsible for Phindile’s roguish nature. Phindile failed her exams on several occasions but her mother in person of Dudu uses her wealth to bribe her teachers. Dudu’s irresponsibility makes Phindile, her daughter to become a hardened criminal and a prostitute. Sexual pleasure in exchange for grades becomes her only hope for realizing her dreams. Instead of concentrating on her studies so as to acquire skills and knowledge for her own personal advancement, Phindile leads an artificial life of pageantry and show, “hanging” out with campus cult boys, using intimidation and “bottom power” to earn cheap marks in exams. She does not succeed for too long before nemesis catches up with her. She got infected with the deadly AIDS virus and died. This is unlike Jabulile, her cousin, who through dent of
sheer hard work attain a greater height. Education is believed to be highly responsible for this great achievement. Things turn out fine for Jabulile as she is honored with various awards and scholarship to her credit. Jabulile becomes famous and wins a scholarship. Phindile, still wallowing in her wickedness and arrogance, accuses Jabulile of being the agent of her misfortune and plans for revenge. She complains bitterly about Jabulile “I really hated her. I thought how could she be going around as a virgin, while I was as good as a public utility vehicle? I arranged with Manqoba to have one of his friends rape Jabulile (61).

Vusie complains that Dudu, his wife is responsible for their daughter’s wayward behaviour. According to Boh, “Many parents are the brain behind the bad behaviour and acts that their children exhibit in the society” (119). This is presented in Phindile’s response to the supposedly caring and loving mother she has in the person of Dudu: “Ah mom, you are being unfair to me. At least Father has told me many times that I inherited your brain. So, if I’ve not been able to pass exams, it is your fault” (36).

Ogunleye in Jabulile advocates for a good moral orientation which is the basis of societal peace and harmony. Neither Dudu’s nor Phindile’s callousness deter Jabulile from excelling in her chosen career. She is seen in the play doing so well in her studies even to the extent that she is awarded a scholarship. It should be noted that the playwright does not only make Jabulile to excel in her studies, but she places her in a position of authority that is enviable in the vocational centre, where she empowers other women in the community. These women were able to change their undesirable conditions through unity and cooperation. Mamba tells Jabulile “It has been a miracle for my daughter, Zandile to be able to settle down and face something serious in life. Ever since she had to stop schooling due to my poverty, she had almost become a prostitute in the village before you came with the idea of this vocational centre” (42).

The death of the two girls calls for the re-examination of parents’ roles as it affects the life of family members and society at large. The inability of Phindile’s mother to caution and discipline her paves way for her criminal life and her subsequent death. Phindile’s as well as Jabulile’s death would have been averted if Aunty Dudu did something to caution Phindile when she was going astray. Ogunyele’s plays, according to Taye Awoyemi are always about “…the girl-child; her plays have an uncanny empathy with the category of young girls who are sexually naïve and, at times, get themselves into trouble because they are innocent victims of society. Taye Awoyemi says that “The girl-child can be helped to discover herself and achieve the standards set by the likes of Wollstonecraft craft” (209).

Ogunyele’s Jabulile, to some extent calls for self-purgation, self-examination, self-evaluation and self-reformation; the need to prod and probe into the conscience, to establish the role of parents in ensuring a safe and an organized society that is free of criminality. Part of parents’ responsibility to their children is to love, provide food, education, shelter, medication and general wellbeing. The situation whereby parents become more aware of their public image and business
at the detriment of what their children do and what happens to them can lead such into a life of crime. The playwright clearly points out this through Phindile’s speech. The writer, Ogunleye, is saying that, parents should be conscious of their children’s future and teach them good moral values, in order to make the society a healthier place to live in. This is well captured in Phindile’s world view on parental obligations when she debunks the views of her mother who thinks she has taught her how to love a fellow human being. This clearly indicates that the way and manner children are brought up by their parents is vital in what the children will end up doing when they become adults. Parents have a role to play in the upbringing of their children; however, many parents do not pay serious attention to this important aspect of life.

CONCLUSION

The task of the dramatist is to recommend possible ways by which crime can be reduced in the society. Jabulile is therefore a play text that shows a particular kind of family structure that can encourage family members, especially children to commit crime in the society. It is therefore the duty of the readers, who are members of the society, to stay away from those criminal actions and to do what he or she can to reduce crime to the minimal level if not totally shun it. Foluke Ogunleye has clearly captured in the play that, the issue of crime prevention is the collective duty of both parents to live peacefully with each other and take full responsibility of the upbringing of their children. To do this effectively, parents must be ready to discipline, and be responsible for the actions of their children. Even though in real life there are no definite ways for ensuring that parents and their children will be totally free from the life of crime. However as parents, they can make a positive difference through a number of approaches. Parents must not involve themselves in criminal acts so as to effectively discipline their children and ensure that they live a crime-free life. Just like other playwrights, Ogunleye has used her play as a tool for societal reform. In Jabulile, Ogunleye has clearly shown how the criminal attitudes and behaviours of parents have rather encouraged criminal acts in the society instead of reducing it. These criminal acts are depicted in the play with the aim of bringing about self evaluation among Nigerian families, with a view to promoting both human and material development.

Ogunleye is saying that, for a harmonious society, parents should pay serious attention to their parenting jobs. They should not only love themselves, but teach their children how to love their neighbours. The love of the parents for themselves can be extended to love for the children who will in the long run make the world a better place to live in. Apparently, children that grow up in a conflict-ridden family are always associated with antisocial behaviours of which crime is among. It is this realization that the playwright concludes the play with a call on the family unit to be united so as to make progress and development.
On the contrary, where parents do not love themselves, and are more concerned with material things, their children will go astray, the result of which will be their engagement in criminal activities like harlotry, theft, cultism, which will lead to their untimely death as it is portrayed in the person of Phindile. Ogunleye clearly shows in the play that a family that is beset with conflict and crises cannot succeed in building a crime free society. The play is therefore a clarion call on families to be united with a common goal of bringing up children that will be free from a life of crime. The fact remains that if the entire nation as family reasons in this manner, most of the problems facing the society would be avoided.

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