

## FAILED LEADERSHIP OBLIGATIONS AS PRAXIS: DRAMATURGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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### **Abstract**

*This paper analytically looks at Esiaba Irobi and Emeka Nwabueze's attempts at dramatic portrayal of failed leadership obligations in Africa and precisely, Nigeria. Drama as a performance art is a recurrent phenomenon. This paper examines the leadership perspectives of characters presented by the playwrights in their failure to accomplish their required obligations to the proletariat. Thematically, the paper desires to prove that Esiaba uses his Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh to criticize the criticizers as they engage in class struggle. He proves that even the African literary leaders lack sense of fairness, honesty, and justice. The paper discerns from the characters that there is no difference between literary leaders and politicians who steal ballot papers and rig the elections in their bid to remain on top. The study also discovers as illuminated by Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures that the law makers as they exploit the masses are metaphorical large birds of prey that feed on the putrid remains of humanity they vowed to protect. The two plays look at the philosophy and quality of interaction in academic and political spheres as man struggle in the world of power control. In the spheres of life projected by the authors, there are class struggle, exploitation, and failed obligation. Therefore, this study adopts Marxist approach. The paper encourages resistance by the exploited against the exploiters.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Obligation, Drama, Perspectives, Struggle.

### **Introduction**

Africa was highly influenced by the entrance of the Europeans who came to Christianisation, civilisation, and of course for commercial purposes. To the Africans, their intrusion also brought in exploitation and other negative influences such as amalgamation. But the nation should not continue in complaining stupor. She should not continue to live in the grief and pains of the colonial past. Ibenegbu confirms that colonisation of Nigeria was not the best experience for Nigerians... the main negative impact on economy was slavery (Legit) At this age, independent nations of Africa are expected to stand on their own like other continents that suffered colonialism but are already up and going without blaming anybody. It is time to rise from quagmire and stop being the dreg of the universe whose citizens run to other nations to serve them just to have a day's meal. Amongst other causes, the primary cause of this ugly situation in the country is simply failed leadership obligations by our rulers.

In most African countries especially Nigeria, the situation has come to a point of combustion and if nothing is done there would be catastrophe. There are failures in almost every dimension and are traceable to inadequacies in Nigerian leadership caused by poor ideology, electoral malpractices, highly rated corruptive practices, no rule of law especially by

men at the top, lack of accountability, and so on. With the above problems, a country can hardly wriggle out of developmental challenges that are hinged on inept and incompetent leadership.

At this point in time, what ought to be at the back of everybody's mind should be how we can change this country for the better by being introspective within ourselves, the responsibilities and their supposed obligations to the laid down national principles. Efforts are expected from every quarter to eradicate mismanagement, maladministration, corruption and other numerous social vices which have continued to wear down the nation.

Nigeria is a place where the ruled serve the rulers instead of the other way around. Part of the obligation of the rulers is to consider the people under them. If we consider the amount of money, for instance, a legislator collects and lavishes every month and compare it with what people like them collect elsewhere, one would not be constrained to call them 'vultures' as insinuated in one of the plays under study. Many workers in the country can hardly collect in their lifetime what a legislator earns in a month. The worst is that these monies are banked abroad enlarging foreign banks while our banks continue to merge or even fold up. These inadequacies create a chasm between the rich the poor and because of the level of immaturity and ignorance people just accept situations as they are without agitation.

The country is blessed with resources because apart from petroleum, Nigeria's other natural resources include natural gas, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone niobium, lead, zinc, and fertile land. We only need skilled hands who can harness these resources for the benefit of the nation. Most salient is the need for our leaders to live up to expectation and fulfil their manifestoes. To improve our skills, our educational system must highlight skill acquisition as against only acquisition of reading and writing skills all through primary and tertiary schools. There is no more 'hand work' in schools while we buy products from practical works by children from other nations. That is why the youth have excess time to waste and indulge in crimes and overuse the social media. Educational system itself should live by example and stop graduating students who are saturated with corruption. This can be attainable when those at the head accomplish their obligations.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to pass a valid evaluative interpretation on the works of art under study, Marxist theory has been chosen for an objective consideration. This literary theory focuses on representation of struggles and conflict in human relationship. In Marxist approach to literary appreciation, M. H Abrams explains that:

According to Marxists and to other scholars in fact, literature reflects those social institution out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a particular ideological function. Literature reflects class struggle and materialism: think of how the quest for wealth traditionally defines characters. (149)

To Ifejirika Echezona, "Marxists also see literature as a powerful instrument for social criticism and transformation. So Marxism from the point of view of literature, is a sociological literary approach that views works of literature or art as product of historical cum political forces..." (188).

*A Parliament of Vultures* under study hinges on the nation's legislators. And the legislature as one of the three arms of government is primarily responsible for law making in Nigeria but

they use their position as a panacea for abuse of powers, exploitation of masses, and violation of human rights. From some of their conducts as evidenced in the work, they lack public accountability and transparency in governance. They fail to pursue public good as to enhance responsible and responsive government. That is why there is need to enforce strict compliance of obligations of public officials with rules of governance and the management of public resources, thereby curbing corruption. Still referring to Ifejirika's stance that Marxists see literature as product of history, Nwabueze's play stands as a record of real life historical realities. Furthermore, in view of the historical poise Asika holds that a critic "evaluates the work of art from the point of view of historical evidence available for deeper understanding of the underlying meaning of a work" (336). Nigerian nation shows a unique form of underdevelopment because Nigerian leaders fail to comply with their obligations.

The second text under study, Irobi's *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh* also displays relevance to Nigeria cum African intellectual arena as they display power tussle in academics. Irobi uses his work to expose the unequal and unhealthy relationship between the ruling figure in Nigerian literature and his counterparts. The two works raise questions on both political and intellectual integrity of characters in those works and their symbols. The paper seeks to offer meaning by investigating the political and intellectual contexts that gave life to playwrights' imaginations. To that effect, Onukaogu et al hold that a critic "seeks to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts that produced it" (429).

### **Leadership**

Leadership simply means the act of leading a group of people or organisation. Gary Yukl defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives." (8) This definition is close to Eke's opinion who aptly holds that leadership is "the process by which an individual influences the behaviour and attitude of others." (18) To them leaders should bear unique features or prowess as to be a driving force of an organization. Gary Yurkl's opinion also holds that the followers must agree with the leader and in their collective effort they accomplish an objective(s). In furtherance, Omafume Onoge defines leadership as: "control in certain types of situations, actual or potential, and fellowship is relative helplessness in those same situations. The amount of skill experience and understanding that a person has in a situation determines the role that he may play- leader or follower" (quoted in Fafowora et al, 45).

### **Types of Leadership**

There are types of leadership as there are leaders. Tunde Adeniran highlights conventional types of leadership:

1. A dictatorial leadership that defines, determines and decides policies from a perspective of personalised authority – be it exploitative and autocratic or benevolent.
2. A democratic leadership which operates on the principle of representative participation in the policies and decisions of common concern, thus promoting confidence and encouraging commitment and a tradition of popular consultation.
3. A laissez-faire or "free-rein" leadership that exercises no control over the system and its operators. The subordinates, in this case operate without much co-operation and uniform direction. (quoted in Fafowora, 302-3)

A careful reading of Nwabueze's work portrays a dictatorial type of leadership where those at the top define, determine, and decide policies from their own perspectives personalised authorities at the detriment of the ruled.

### **Leadership Traits**

However, whatever method a leader decides to adopt, he ought to be aware of where he is going because "being a leader is a difficult role to play, but it is also enthralling. It demands particular characteristics for success..." (Duruaku ABC, 157). Besides, a man who does not want to turn to be a villain at the end of his leadership should be a visionary leader who takes into cognisance the future of a group. He acquires an eagle eye to see the prospective events, "sets people free to innovate, experiment, and take calculated risks" (Goleman Daniel, Primal Leadership). Such are characteristics, traits or qualities that can make a leader a hero since the compendium of a nation's development depends solely on the leader. A strong leadership is a prerequisite for the development of any group. This is confirmed by Ikupolati who said that "leadership is by far the single most important factor in determining the effectiveness of a team or group or organisation." (17) It is expected that a leader must trust himself, his powers and abilities. Without self-assurance he cannot face challenges from opponents. Satell Greg rightly said that "leaders are unrelenting, revolutionary and unwavering..." (4 Kinds of Leadership). And it is his steadfastness and his constancy that prove his self-confidence.

A leader must have personal charm that would arouse people's loyalty and enthusiasm. This would quench any form of repulsion from his followers. If he lacks it, he must build it and achieve it because it is a prerequisite price he must pay. In light of this, William Shakespeare stated long ago that "some are born leaders, some attain (achieve) leadership, some have leadership thrust upon them" (Brainy Quote). Moreover, Namath submits that; "to be a leader you have to make people want to follow you; and nobody wants to follow someone who does not know where he is going, in this regard, leadership" (Quotation Book).

A good leader should be modest without an excess of pride. Although he is successful, he should have a feeling of insignificance, inferiority, and subservience. This is the quality that will make him a good arbitrator who cares that the fortunes of his followers are better than he met them because it is "the obligation of an individual...to account for activities, accept responsibility for them" [the followers] (Business Dictionary. com).

A leader must inculcate trust by making good political decisions and executing them properly. By this he inculcates confidence in his leadership and engenders trust in his followers which will subsequently lead to his success. Trust is achieved through honesty and when the two are blended together, "accountability consequently comes naturally" (Brain Tim, The Seven Leadership Qualities of Great Leaders).

Good leaders must be courageous in tough times. He must be able to do something that is difficult or dangerous by possessing both mental and moral strength to persevere. Winston Churchill deems courage as "the foremost of the virtues..." (On Courage). A leader shares his goals among his followers, (democratic) it would help to involve them and determine their potentials and use them to achieve success of a group since "the validity of leadership rests on the reality of followership" (Duruaku, 159).

A promising leader should practise the law of his group. The values and obligations of the group should be at the core of his life. If he desires his group to succeed, he would not go contrary to the law he has created. This virtue strengthens his character, strengthens leadership

and makes his followers to obey him without relying on coercion. Nye submits that: "Strong leadership gives you the power to get what you want without coercion; that must continually rely on position, regulation or procedure in order to compel action isn't leading, (it is) merely giving orders"(17). Moreover, it would be helpful if he rewards exceptional achievement/behaviour sharing the good news of exceptional achievement/ obedience which would motivate others.

Leadership requires transparency and accountability. This ensures that public officers are answerable for their actions (Transparency – initiative). If this is practiced well, it would promote freedom of speech, create friendly atmosphere, loyalty, and help to achieve collective goal(s). Accountability in question has different faces. Robert Behn indentified four of them viz., "accountability for finances, accountability for fairness, accountability for the use of power, and accountability for performance" (317). Characters in the works of Irobi and especially Nwabueze are lacking in the four types of accountability; as a result, there is conflict. There are many more to a successful leadership and deviation from such standards spells danger and it would amount to what Peter Obi calls "progressive degeneration of leadership in Nigeria" which, according to him, has resulted in the backwardness the country has been witnessing (Punchrg.com). It is pertinent for a leader to be abreast of time. He must be informed of new developments and changes, seek opportunities in those changes, and should not be overtaken by events.

### **Obligation**

The notion obligation may not easily be defined. Nevertheless, it exists where there is a relationship between an individual or body, and the rendering of tasks or function by that individual or body have influence to another's life. Obligation is a course of action that someone is required to take, whether legal or moral.(Obligation-Wikipedia). Olivia says: "I think leaders have moral obligation. As a leader it their responsibility to set example for those they are leading and to always do the right thing" (Youth Voices) Collen Sharen asserts that powerful leadership is about really caring about something and seeing that it has greater meaning... (The obligation of Leadership). Again, Vince Molinaro identifies five core obligations that all leaders must understand, internalise and live up to: obligation to one's customers, obligation to one's organisation, obligation to one's employees, and obligation to one's communities. He reiterates that if a person is truly aware of what his /her obligations are as a leader, he/she never loses sight of them while leading. The person will better be able to manage the inherent tensions that will arise (Willey Online Library). Moreover, legal obligations are those in other contexts such as etiquette, social obligation, religious and political obligations. These obligations need punitive measures on the part of the leader if they fail to be accomplished and that is the only way we can assure its performance.

### **Obligation in Governance**

Obligation directs the actions of public officials to their promise or vow through their course of action. This promise or vow is the objectives contained in their propaganda. This can stand for something such as formal contract, a promise or the demand of conscience or custom of a place which obliges on a course of action. Obligation is one of the bedrocks of leadership because it directs one on something one is bound to do: duty and responsibility. According to Orluweme Ozy, political obligation for instance is two sided, namely, obligation on the part of government and obligation on the part of the governed. (Political Obligation, bepress) Nevertheless, Leadership should contain trust between leaders and followers. And a nation's leadership is dependent on the abiding principles of political obligation.



Regardless of the above opinion we should be acquainted of this fact that obligation should not be left to the leaders alone, rather everybody in society should be involved, this would effectively challenge the actions of the leaders and pressurize them to fulfil their promises. That is why an office that enforces the obligations of the leaders needs to be established. Such office would look like the Economic and Financial Crimes and Commission (EFCC). Just as EFCC is established to rid Nigeria of economic and financial crimes such as advance fee fraud (419 frauds) and money laundering, (Nigeria: EFCC), this paper suggests that a similar agency is required to check the excesses of Nigerian leaders. This agency would be expected to check and balance political agency taking care of responsibilities for actions and the consequences of the actions taken. For above suggestion to work, there would be clear definitions of responsibilities, and promises contained in the propaganda and appropriate legal demands of a leader.

#### **Dramaturgy and Portrayal of Failed Leadership Obligation**

Drama has always been acknowledged as an artistic creation of life using mimesis and performance. This graphic illumination conveys life experience in immediate but pragmatic way. This is a way drama embarks on human reformation. In that way, it performs different purposes and numerous functions. This present essay advocates that drama can be used as a tool for propagating leadership concepts because a dramatist is committed to creating positive consciousness that will enable man to strive for perfect leadership. Dramatists are always at alert to warn the populace whenever there is derailment in the obligations of the ruler and the ruled. Hence Bamidele holds that: "the artist warns the society of an impending disaster" (28).

Right from the earliest historical period of drama in Nigeria, artists have always illuminated and attacked Nigerian leadership. In the forties, Hubert Ogunde started writing plays that were nationalistic and anti-colonial in outlook. He wrote *Worse than Crime*, a play that portrayed political leadership though embellished with Yoruba dance and ancient folk songs. His other play titled: *Strike and Hunger* was inspired by the general strike embarked on by labour union against failed obligations of the government of the time. After the independence, Wole Soyinka used his muse, Ogun in his plays such as *Kongi's Harvest*, *Opera Wanos*, *The Beautification of Area Boys*, and *A Play of the Giants* to show his distaste at the ridiculous show of affluence by most African leaders at the detriment of their subjects. The second-generation playwrights such as Femi Osofisan could not fold their hands and watch merciless Nigerian leaders defecate on the altar of the ruled. Osofisan launches his attack with his *Morountodun Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, *Midnight Hotel* and many others. Ola Rotimi protested with his *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled*, Tess Onwueme fought with *Reign of Wazobia*. Ahmed Yerima used his *The Silent gods* to warn the populace of the impending doom if the leaders do not redress their ugly steps. Right from the colonial period, to independence till date, dramatists have been engaged in issues concerning leadership and its obligation.

#### **Emeka Nwabueze**

Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* is an enduring work of art. Since the publication of this humorous play whose title must have been adapted from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, critics have been using it to disparage several dimensions of Nigerian society. The play bluntly displays the very portrait of Nigeria's history of political arena. It is in consonant with what Achebe hammered as 'trouble with Nigeria'. Scholars have continued to refer to this Achebe's popular assertion that:

The trouble with Nigeria . . . is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is unwillingness or the inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership (10).

The above assertion made by this Igbo philosopher is the totality of what this paper wishes to explore, that is, the unwillingness of Nigerian leaders to lead by their life examples in accomplishing their expected obligations. From the title, the playwright depicts the parliamentarians as metaphorical vultures, that is, large birds of prey that feed on ignorant or totally dead animals. The play is a simple display of chairman of senate and his members as they manoeuvre the country's finance into their respective pockets using what one would term imbecilic excuses because there is no critical social analysis nor effective checks and balances. Their characters reveal the history of leaders that do not know the road to leadership or the destination. Their attitude is contrary to Uzodi's assertion of what a leader's conduct should be. He holds that a leader is a person:

Who stands in front of other men explaining to them what all ought to do. He leads and directs them into doing what they should do for the greater good. He organises them to attain group objectives. He must find methods by which he can tell people what to do or else they will not listen to him (90).

The president in the world of *Parliament of Vultures* explains that inflation is as a result of people buying too much, he then gives the traders order to lower prices. To mollify the situation; he tells the journalist that if things are too expensive, the people's anger should be directed at traders, not the president. When another journalist said that there is food scarcity, the president says that whenever he passes through the market there is food everywhere. This is a portrait of an imbecile on the throne. This type of leader needs to go back and learn two letter words. Such a person creates complex problems instead of solving them. As a result, characters created by Nwabueze are bunches of irresponsible men who lack knowledge, excellence, truth, and justice but are demoralised, debauched, and perverted then eat like vultures.

To digress a moment, what the playwright made Madam Omeaku to do in the play is questionable. Women have contributed to leadership failure in Nigeria, but their percentage is too slim as to make Madam Omeaku commit such atrocities in the play. Her position and activities are over-bloated because she seems to be at the root of every problem in the parliament.

However, the main crux of the matter is that most of the characters presented can pull a continent down because they have no any plan for building of roads nor encouraging our indigenous engineers to do that; they have no plan of building businesses nor encouraging the youth to do same; instead they import every single material for their party from overseas and our indigenous industries are folding up. Serious precaution is required to free the country from being trapped another colonization. We do not need to depend on the West, not even China who may be getting ready to suck the remains of what Britain left over. We don't even know what we import as canned food into the country from them. Nobody knows their new colonist agenda for Africa if we judge the stories that surround the Corona virus pandemic on Africa. We do not train our youths because of myopia and failure of the rulers and those in charge of education to perform their obligations.

**Esiaba Irobi**

In his *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh*, Esiaba Irobi satirises the characters and the impulses behind the works of African celebrated and prominent playwrights, poets, novelists, and their critics. These distinguished writers in their exceptional legends are expected to be models of leadership but they turned out to be portrayals of people worse than the politicians they are always disparaging and criticizing through their plays, novels, and poems. African writers' convention as depicted in the play is expected to be attended by prestigious intellectuals, critical and disciplined minds, but what we see are the category of people we see among the politicians if not worse. Their innate intent is to pull down the next person and take over his position. The African convention becomes a place of recounting personal achievement in bombastic language.

In the play, Professor Elderly-Bones, the chairman of the convention designed punitive measures to be meted on the defaulters of the debate, but he is not bold enough to face Professor Ogunyemi Ogun with the same rule because of his Nobel Prize for literature and his intimidating bombastic language. He is afraid of the professor's verbose reproaches. When his conscience discerned that he has fallen short of his position as a leader, he hides his cowardice in the words of the pig who controls the government in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others". This comment is based on the hypocrisy of a government proclamation of absolute equality of their citizens but give power and privileges to small elite. This is exactly what the chairman did when he refers to the Nobel Laureate winner as the godhead of our continental literature and defends himself with a cautious declaration that "all animals are equal, but some are more superior to others. He still goes ahead to provide Professor Ogun with two members of the convention who would interpret his obscure words to his fellow intellectuals.

Irobi tactfully uses his work to criticise the critics and more so advise them to be less esoteric since they are writing for the public because even the interpreters' language was not accessible in their bid to assert their ego as they struggle for supremacy. This is in semblance to what he witnessed among African writers. In this confusion, one of the characters in *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh*, Achebiri said:

...Things have fallen apart because of the language we borrowed. Is the English Language not the fuzziest and haziest of the languages? ...Brothers suppose we were writing in our various vernaculars- Swahili, Yoruba, Igbo, do we think these problems of misunderstanding would have risen? (Irobi, 57).

The convention is attended by men of literary integrity but some of them prove to lack sense of fairness, honesty, and justice. This is contrary to Osuji's submission which states that: a leader is a rock model. Whether he knows it or not, people must use him as a standard by which to live, therefore a leader must be honest and always live above board in all his dealings... a leader must be virtuous in all his dealings with people (36). Osuji's stand is in opposition to the lives and actions of Kariuka and Nwogu as they steal the tape recorder when Chikwas, Izuwa, and Madike interview Prof. Ogun. They want Ogun to win and attain a new title of "Literary Guerilla of African Literature" in addition to his former one when they know that he is not qualified. This proves the fact that "all human life and struggle in the world is hinged on material acquisition and power control in all ramification." (Ifejirika, 186). Their action is in the same axis with the dishonest politicians who steal ballot papers and rig the election. It means that in every way Nigeria is laden with hopeless leadership. Okolo helps to explain that:



The right concept of power or power as service to the people, for protection and promotion of their good is little known and rarely practiced in Nigeria. Rather, it is often wielded for self and equally against others positions and authority invariably turn out to be sources of gain, financial security– political leaders see their time in office as grand opportunity to over-rich themselves at the expense of the common man (Okolo, 86).

It all means that the educated men who are decision makers in the play failed to accomplish their obligations therefore the convention could not reach the expected destination.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has contributed to one of the urgent and momentous talking points in Africa especially Nigeria, that is poor accomplishment of leadership obligations. It anchored on the portrayal of poor leadership fulfilment portrayed in *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze and *Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh* by Esiaba Irobi. Their clamour is that the country's problem is that of the leadership which Achebe has hammered before now. He said that our problem is the inability of our leaders to perform their promised obligations and be led by their good personal examples. Achebe's opinion is in consonant with the irresponsible behaviour of the characters that lack both focus and locus as displayed by the playwrights. It is expected that those who desire to lead the country should possess leadership traits and be ready to accomplish their obligations. The paper simply challenges the unethical behaviour, poor management of resources, squandermania and corruption which are resultant effects of failed leadership obligation. It therefore encourages philosophy of resistance of the masses or the exploited against the exploiters or oppressors.

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