



Dramaturgy, Politics and Development: Emeka Nwabueze's Parliament of Vultures

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ABSTRACT

Underdevelopment of most African countries in spite of their riches is informed by interest, recklessness, and greed played by dishonest and corrupt politicians; neither religion nor ethnic geographies, because other nations like the United States of America and Switzerland exist as entities irrespective of their differences. That is why, behind the facade of democracy there are vultures that confiscate and share the countries resources into their pockets as portrayed in Parliament of Vultures by Emeka Nwabueze. Most Nigerian politicians lack conscience. Consequently, the once giant of Africa-Nigeria becomes a laughing stock while her neglected youths take to kidnapping and killing. Dramatic art, as a close observer, x-rays the society to reveal to the masses the mysteries that surround them. They disclose to the ignorant masses the impending danger created by unscrupulous and perverted politicians and suggest ways of reformation. Essentially, this paper attempts the analysis of literary influence on politics through the visionary windows provided by Emeka Nwabueze. Politics is a social experience- and social experience is to a literary artist as air is to life. Events within the writer's environment provide source materials for his imagination with which he creates enduring works of art. To this end, this paper tilts to sociological approach in the analyses of the play. It deduces and submits decisively that literature with its moral force holds much power to sway, persuade or induce, therefore cohere with politics for development of any society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed an increased swiftness in the rate of development across the globe as a result of continual progression in technology and synergy in various countries in trade and exchange. Third world countries are delineating developmental stages. Development itself is one of the dividends; an advantage or benefit of good governance in any nation. Development is expected to cut across significant sectors of a nation such as; education, industry, banking and finance, economy et cetera. Globalization has insinuated a network of influences designed to help a nation to grow without stressing effort among the League of Nations such - as the United Nation (UN). Yet some countries are still lagging behind, crawling or even stagnant. Such countries are conveniently referred to as underdeveloped. For instance- Nigeria is still referred to as an underdeveloped or a developing country as a result of her developmental velocity.

Underdevelopment, however, does not imply an absence of development but an inadequacy in the level of development as to be rated as developed. Visible features of most African countries is underdevelopment because according to Wikipedia (Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia. ([https://en.m. Wikipedia.org/underdevelopment](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/underdevelopment)) web:

Underdevelopment, relating to international development, reflects a broad condition or phenomena defined and critiqued by theorists in the field such as economics, development studies, and postcolonial studies. Used primarily to distinguish states along benchmarks concerning human development – such macro-economic growth, health, education, and standards of living – an “underdeveloped” is framed as antithesis of a “developed” modern or industrialized state. (Wikipedia)

In reference to Wikipedia: “In March 2013, Africa was identified as world’s inhabited continent”. (NP). Consequently, Africa is mostly referred to as the poorest continent because of her level of inadequacy or insufficient development. Africa lacks inappropriate or average expectancy in progressive evolution.

Dangerous situations, battles and the quest for progress are innate parts of human evolutionary process. A nation’s ability to battle with, and subdue the challenges of growth and

development what establishes her success. From the beginning, Homo sapiens have always been in the process of setting principles and philosophies to create a better society. A better society can only evolve in the presence of democratic government, where there is no inordinate crave and struggle for political power amongst politicians as survival of the fittest. That is why Godlex Ezeani [1] regrets that “democracy has suffered corruption mostly in the hands of politicians (Humanities, 125) in Nigeria. To him what “Nigeria practiced in the past decade is best described as pseudo-democracy... a type of democracy that was totally devoid of any altruistic patriotism” (Humanities,125). in Again better society can only emerge absence of physical violence amongst the leaders, cultism, domineering godfathers, wild and extravagant waste of money, financial bribery, wild propagandist falsehood, murdering of spiritual and physical voices of oppositions and above all falsification of ballot results and a host of other electoral vices.

Political process which ought to make decisions that apply to members of a group for a smooth flow of development turns out to be a process of bickering between different morbid oppositions in absence of organized control over human community. That is why a political system which is a framework that defines acceptable political methods within a society becomes unfavourable socio-political conditions occasioned by lack of accountability.

Like a referee, the dramatist watches the political process and its poor leadership, leadership malaise, leadership failure and it influences on the populace. This paper explores the ties between drama and politics. Ezeugo [2] asserts that:

The power of drama is limitless as the society of men continues to transform. It stands on a strong pedestal and cannot compete with other genres of literature in any way because it goes beyond mere words. Its uniqueness lies in its pragmatic, immediate, imitative, and interactive modes. Its physical actions create physical effects or modify responses. As a chronicler of the moral conscience of any given society playwrights become analysts, historians, reporters, and recorders (Elements of Drama, v)

As analyst, dramatists report what transpires in politics as it affects the people.

Today more and more playwrights reflect disillusionment in African leadership in new forms of expression. They explore more vividly their philosophy and positions about politics and politicians in the society. They eloquently engage not on narrative exercise but on an intellectual creative criticism of the political condition. Samuel Kafewo holds that: "The greatest dramatist, Shakespeare it was, who observed and correctly too, that, "to understand a people, it is better we studied their arts and nowhere is this more evident than in the study of the theatre and drama of any given society" (27)

Pragmatic, immediacy, and interactive modes of drama prove drama as the best tools "to understand a people" express disapproval by writing the faults of the society.

According to Bode Osanyim [3], drama "has been described variously as a slice of life, as a mirror of society, as the pulse of society, torch-bearer, and so on. If the theatre (drama) is to perform its legitimate function, it cannot but be critical" (2). (Emphasis is mine).

From its developmental stage dramatists have relentlessly continued to pay meticulous and conscientious attention to the continuous vicissitudes of all human issues especially politics, which cuts across the family and the larger society. In spite of the morbid reproaches which the exposition of such foibles can attract to the dramatist, they still delve into the exposition. Norbert Oyibo Eze [4] rightly observes that:

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, Ngugi and Rotimi among others know that if leaders live to satisfy their inner cravings, there will be trouble, even chaos. So they beam their searchlight on the activities of leaders to ensure that those who control should be above criticism in order to have the moral courage to deal with their subjects when they do wrong (Nsukka Journal,97).

It is because of wanton leadership hunger that a soldier forcefully becomes a democratic leader and operates within his inbuilt military tendencies. Most of the playwrights see the military as having poor and unhealthy attitude towards the populace as they exhibit their authoritarianism in the face of democracy. Notable Nigerian playwrights, as Soyinka, Osofisan, Sowande, Irobi, and Emeka Nwabueze [5] express such bossy, dictatorial, and authocratic tendencies of such leaders, in a ridiculous mood in most of their plays. Olisaemeka Ezeji [6] says that such aberrational

rulers; "Assert self authority, often overshoots the bounds of civility of human dignity and reduces the despot to an unsettling state very incongruous, yet laughable as a result of the foibles of a psyche gone paranoid" (Third Eye Newspapers,24).

A typical example is in a strong criticism of the African dictatorship; Wole Soyinka [7] uses his play: *The Play of the Giants* to portray African rulers who subdue democracy as a government of the people by the people and give no room for human self expression, and exploit the helpless masses. They see themselves as born to rule, therefore refer themselves as life presidents. One of his characters Emperor Rasco rudely asserts:

Power comes only with the death of politics. That is why I choose to become an Emperor. I placed myself beyond politics. At the moment of my coronation, I signal to the world that I transcend the intrigues and mundane of politics. Now I inhabit only pure realm of power (*The Play of the Giants*, 21)

It is the above arrogance that annoys and inspires the playwrights to bring their actions to ridicule therefore satirizes such actions as barbaric and fiendish. Their works are clarion calls against atrocious dictatorship as a derangement. Chimaroke Edward [8] has to declare that:

These playwrights in trying to clarify the political aspiration of masses, the necessity of democracy replacing dictatorship, depict the military as lacking propriety of conduct as brutes, who through violence, subject the masses to the rule of force in a world where human rights demand that people be ruled by their consent (6).

Politics enters literature when the writer's concern with the Public welfare extends beyond destinies of nation's or masses. As a result, dramatists have been concerned with the fate of or destiny of Nigerians in particular or Africans in general. This is evident in their continued expression of disenchantment resulting in bribery, corruption, election rigging, poor leadership, and inequities in our body politics [9].

2. DRAMATURGY AND POLITICS IN THE PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES BY EMEKA NWABUEZE

Emeka Nwabueze (2002) portrays how Nigeria once a giant of Africa stumbles and crumbles by

the actions of Vultures that confiscate and share the country's resources into their personal pockets in his *The Parliament of Vultures*. This is a show of a very vulgar factuality of political plebeianism in the country. His work is a solemn announcement and inscription of "*Mene, Mene Tekel, Upharsin*" (Daniel 5:25) to the erring politicians, the interpretation is that the days of the brute politicians in Nigeria has been numbered, yet they can hardly acknowledge it but continue to make life more and more difficult for the common man.

Parliamentarians are decision makers/law makers of a nation. Emeka Nwabueze calls them Parliament of Vultures. To associate them with vultures means that these law makers are carrion eaters. Nwabueze suggests that these politicians in spite of their pretenses of operating a democratic government exhibit terrible smell as of a vulture that has a habit of eating putrefying flesh. The appearance of some Nigeria politicians as the play seems to suggest connotes fear and hatred compared to the dark plumage of a vulture. Perhaps, that was why the story held that in ancient Greek, Vultures followed the armies in battle because they knew that they would find corpses. This suggests why Job said: where the slain are there the vultures is" (Job 39:30) Nigerians are not yet slain but they are smoldering.

Nwabueze explores some weaknesses and glaring ignorance exhibited by the politicians such as detest for education. It is always easier to develop a nation through education. At any length we go, education remains the bedrock of sustainable development but some unscrupulous politicians seem to boycott it and still desire to be at the helm of affairs. All over the globe, an educated individual is unique and stands to be useful to himself and to the nation where he exists. We should note that most educated countries consistently has better governments and more accountable whichever way we choose to weigh it. As the level of education in a country rise, so does the number of complaints against the misbehavior of the officials rise. In such cases Nwabueze's character, Madam Omeaku can hardly find her way in such prestigious position because she is a stark illiterate. Nwabueze expresses his detest for uneducated politicians through this laughable character. In the play, Mrs. Omeaku manages a roadside restaurant but gets to the top through her indecent relationships with ignoble politicians who regard education with scorn but craves for

academic titles like the tortoise that enjoys burial ceremonies but detests death. To madam, one should seek for a way to survive than wasting time and money schooling.

Madam Omeaku: Its' more difficult to learn how to survive in the modern society than obtain a university degree (Parliament of Vultures,10).The woman also arrogantly uses offensive words against her husband who has just retired from teaching service.

Madam Omeaku: You are an educated man, but you can't even maintain your family. With your education, have you ever given us a decent life? With your education, you have wasted the best thirty-five years of your life and you've nothing to show. I've worked my way into a position of authority without education (Parliament of Vultures, 10).

She also makes mockery of university education as she makes Dr.Parker, a one time lecturer of political science in one of the best universities in the USA sound foolish. She quickly reminds Dr. Parker that the parliament is not a pragmatic arena for Political Science.

The playwright also expresses their refusal to acknowledge the worth of education when they disregard academic credentials in the appointment of chairmen of the board of parastatals.

Habamero: The next board is that of Radio and Television and that is not open for nomination by this house.

Parker: Why?

Habamero: Because the party chairman has nominated no, he approved the appointment of chief Anu Mpoma to lead this organization.

Mr. Otobo: Objection, Mr. Chairman. This man Anu Mpoma was detained and tried by the previous administration for embezzlement of public funds.

Habamero; But he was pardoned. Anyway we don't really have any say in this matter (Parliament of Vultures, 58).

Because they neglect education as worthless and divert the fund meant for education to some other things and divert a position meant for an educated individual to a nonentity. They neglect Dr. Parkers but confer a professional title to a

factory worker who returns from London and gains access into their political party. The academic title conferred on him is to make their party appear intellectual. A character confirms:

Mr. Brown: Yea, Prof. Prof. He was a factory worker in London. We asked him to take that title in order to make our party look intellectual. You see, our people are obsessed with titles. He doesn't even have a certificate. After all, we haven't lied. We haven't called him professor of anything. (Parliament of Vultures, 4-5)

The play is a show of academic/intellectual strangulation of a nation so blessed.

The controversy in the selection of the above appointment is akin to the long checks and long selective process in the Nigeria's past ministerial appointments which, at last ended as parochial and sectional. Appointments to significant positions are still ruled by primordial instinct. Sectarianism and ethnicity are still rearing their poisonous but deadly heads. It is in this combustible mix that the present government presses ahead with appointments that weigh heavily in favour of one ethnic group neglecting the 1999 constitution which explicitly stipulates in chapter fourteen subsection three that the composition of government of federal or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Adherence to the above constitutional demands is expected to ensure national unity/loyalty, wage predominance of persons from few states or few ethnic or other sectional or religious groups then stop the mouth of sectionalism and Nepotism which are ancestral parents of corruption in Nigeria.

Though a close scrutiny of Nigerian situation has always revealed that all ethnic groups are not perfectly homogenous, they can still exist together. Nnolim [9] confirms that "Minor linguistic and cultural differences often exist within a group forming the axis for delineation of sub-ethnic systems" (5). It means that the small differences within sub-group can still create hatred and sectionalism if not well managed because other nation like America and Switzerland exist as entities irrespective of their differences. A onetime government of Buhari and Idiagbon arrested ethnicity, squandermania and other forms of corruption that formed the bedrock of the regime that preceded their own. They achieved it then by being disciplined themselves while their subjects have no option than to be disciplined. With this analogy, it means that

Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable [10]. America is able to be together in spite of many states because those who manage their system are disciplined as a result they have moral courage to control others. One can never give out what he doesn't have.

As a result of indiscipline, a few politicians control and enjoy the nation's resources and turn deaf ears to the plight of the people. The interview in the play granted by the president exposes the gross indifference displayed by people with powers in Nigeria.

3rd Journalist: Mr. President, the masses of this country are suffering because of food scarcity. Does your Excellency have any programme to curb food scarcity in the nation?

President: Food scarcity? There is no food scarcity in this country. Whenever I take time to travel out of the presidential mansion, I see people carrying food everywhere. I see much food that I begin to wonder how the traders are going to see all of them (Parliament of Vultures, 65)

This explains the level of his insincerity and his naïve concept of power and its management. Okolo [11] admonishes that:

The right concept of power or power as service to the people for the 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 (Squandermania- Nsukka, 86).

Squandermania, not variegated ethnic groups nor colonialism is the problem of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Some of our major problems are selfishness, greed, and covetousness. Okolo [11] reiterates that "positions and authority invariably turn out to be sources of gain, financial security – political leaders – see their time in office as a grand opportunity for over- enriching themselves at the expense of the common man" (Squandermania- Nsukka ,86). As a result of freedom to spend the nation's resources at their own will, the playwright exposes this irrationality in a situation where fake Reverend Jossy is required to wear his sauterne daily.

Habamero: Yes you wear it all the time. That's why we worked your way into parliament. Your sauterne will lend credibility to our programmes. (Parliament of Vultures, 13)

Jossy's sauterne alone costs the nation one million naira. It was followed by approval of two million naira inconvenience allowance to every member of the parliament. Another disgusting approval that followed instantly is approval of a brand new Honda for Miss Nkechi Omeaku as a compensation for her erroneous force to pull down the only two members who prove propriety and responsibility among the parliamentarians.

At a situation three point six billion naira is approved to be squandered as a supplementary budget for the parliamentary inaugural party. Before this, two point six billion naira meant for education is simply diverted for thanksgiving service in Rev. Jossy's Ministry. The gross amounts squandered in these imbecilic programmes are supposed to pay the workers and create jobs for our languishing youths. The play's satire arrow is pointing at irresponsible parliamentary squandermania.

The playwright aims at using Nathaniel Habamero, Madam Omeaku, Mr. Brown and Rev. Jossy to expose the dirty people who inhabit the political arena in Nigeria. Their rascality and their use of word prove that they are half baked and only fit to work in garages as touts. In the face of money their actions resemble a group of hungry wolves who discovered a room packed with food, then grab it in that hot frenzy. That is why some time ago, at the inauguration of National Assembly; their first move was to give each member a sum of five million naira just for furniture allowance. It has been a chronic disease diagnosed among Nigerian politicians who see themselves at the helm of affairs as an opportunity to liquidate the national treasury before the next batch comes up. Achebe recalled what Obafemi Awolowo said when he had his own opportunity: "I was going to make myself formidable intellectuality, morally invulnerable, to make all the money, that is possible for a man with brain and brawn" (ii). That is why in *The Parliament of Vultures*, Madam Omeaku rejoices at her opportunity to gulp the public money:

Omeaku: Now that God has buttered my bread, I will never allow myself to be poor again. Not in this world, nor even the world to come. (Parliament of Vultures, 68) The above nefarious opportunity is what the hunter politicians are always after even from the past regimes until the present. Alhaji Nuhu Sanusi [12], the Emire of Dutse shades light on one past president of Nigeria during his regime. "In spite of the anti-corruption crusade of federal government, corruption and financial recklessness remained

the hallmarks of administration. As such the federal government has lost the moral courage to punish corrupt officers" (3).

In the same vein, Martins Hile [13] on this present regime reports that:

Irrespective of the limited scope of the CPI in capturing the different aspects of corruption the index captures perception of the extent of corruption in the public sector through a survey of business people and other experts. In this regards, the latest TI index, which was released last month, shows that corruption and impunity in the public sector have prevailed under Buhari. Nigeria has ranked 148th position out of 180 countries and territories in 2017 CPI ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/Economy of Africa](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/Economy_of_Africa)).

Nwabueze's eagle-eye delineates a photocopy of how the politicians dispense corruption in Nigeria – the giant of Africa through manipulation of electoral figures and rigging out their opponents by the same corrupt electoral officers. In the Play Brown confirms this when he discusses with Madam Omeaku:

Madam Omeaku: Forget about Dr. Parkers. After all what was the worth of his campaign? How could've crashed like a pack of cards if I didn't stop in to rescue him. Fortunately, the Returning officer was my classmate. It wasn't difficult for me to negotiate the right figures for him as I did in my own case (Parliament of Vultures, 4)

From the above report it becomes regretful that even Dr. Parkers who represent the moral voice in the parliament came in through the window knowingly or otherwise. It all means that from the electoral officer, returning officers to the politicians, all belong to same cult while Nigeria dwell in perched land.

To prove that some of Nigerian politicians are jugglers, Nwabueze exposes how some politicians and some public officers obtain their certificate to be in their positions; the returning officer didn't even acquire his certificate by himself. Referring to him Brown reports:

Mr. Brown: The man is a friend in deed. In fact he couldn't have passed the school certificate examination if I hadn't persuaded my cousin to take the examination for him so he had to pay back in his little way (Parliament of Vultures, 4).

This 'little way' is the help offered by the returning officer to rig Dr. Parkers into the

parliament through the window. This explains why often times appointments in government are not made based on credibility but on connection and compensation. The playwright also uses the activities of Mr. Asili, Madam Omeaku's thug and Mr. Brown to expose the election malpractices practiced in Nigeria because of which the populace refers to them as hood winkers and loose trust in casting votes because wrong candidate would be injected into the system after the citizens struggle to cast their votes. And in such situation the leader cannot drive the nation forward. The incidences in the play make it stand categorically as a horrendous satire against the distressing state of Nigerian democracy.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF DECADENT PARLIAMENTARIANS

Having people of weak moral standard, great love for pleasure, money, fame et cetera at the helm of affairs in the country creates possible avenue for a person to cheat the entire society and get away with it. Since the country has not grown to the stage where the government stands firm without compromise to ask about people's source of wealth, instead we stare them with awe and reverence. As a result what determines a person's status is the amount of money he accumulates and the latest Bugatti, lambogi or porch car he drives.

When the money meant to create job opportunities for our youths is squandered or diverted to irrelevances, the result is high rate of unemployment and wrong distribution of income and wealth, coarse security, increase in poverty for those who are beside the game of politicking.

After many disappoints people become biased about politics and governmental affairs and this results to low level of social and political consciousness, increase in illiteracy, rate of poor health services, housing condition, and government's negligence of its services. This country needs a sincere politico- economic system that ensures a people – oriented government, respect for dignity of labour, and respect for rule of law especially in electoral affairs we also need a well spelt out agency that censor people's source of wealth, then there is need to encourage the youths to seek for legitimate ways of livelihood which would require a religiously pursued objective of self reliance. There is still light at the end of the tunnel. If Nigeria realizes herself today, she is still early.

4. SUMMARY

The writer's concern transcends personal boundaries. It extends to national issues. Emeka Nwabueze as a Nigerian dramatist uses the limitless power of drama to show that he is concerned with the fate or destiny of his country. He has proved this by exposing dishonest and greedy politicians with the hope of correcting the anomalies. He achieved this in a subtle but humorous technique for a better society.

The paper acknowledges the dramatist's portrayal of how Nigeria once a giant of Africa stumbles and crumbles by the actions of corrupt politicians. They are the law/decision makers but Emeka Nwabueze associates them with carrion eaters and compares them to dark plumage of a vulture in spite of their pretences of operating a democratic government. The paper depicts *Parliament of Vulture* as a show of academic /intellectual strangulation in the country judging from their parochial method of selection of appointment to sensitive positions.

The Nigerian ethnic groups may be heterogeneous; they can live together if they are well managed by a disciplined government. Therefore, neither a variegated ethnic group nor colonialism is the cause of Nigerian underdevelopment but self interests. And when a selfish man is faced with public fund, he cheats the entire society.

5. CONCLUSION

The discourse agrees with the playwright that the political operators in the country are comparable to vultures. The study confirms that true and genuine democracy is lacking in Nigeria as a result of incompetent and selfish politicians. The problem results to resource control controversy, corruption, and especially unemployment among the youths.

Finally, *Parliament of Vultures'* main aim is to inspire spirit of sound political, social, and economic development through a group of leaders who are not after their personal economic security. The dramatist achieves this through the limitless power of drama.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors has declared that no competing interests exist

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