

THE PLACE OF ARTS IN THE INCREASING BURDEN OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

One of the dynamics of human society is power tussle alongside intricacies associated with the game of power. It is often said that the overall essence of politics and governance is to allow healthy and robust competition democratically within the civil society in all spheres of life and human endeavour. But key players in the political game over the years have neither the patience nor the will power to establish such. In contemporary period, insecurity of lives and properties have become a global concern in Africa, and in Nigeria so much so that it has become a recurring decimal. Terrorism, rape, abject poverty, starvation, diseases and extreme harsh conditions are threatening to exterminate the human population. In the light of these excruciating circumstances, coupled with the surging number of literature, music, films that decry the existing high level of insecurity and the paradox of power tussle; the place of Arts in the increasing burden of governance becomes a necessity. This paper takes a critical look at the leadership saga in Nigeria as captured in some selected Nigerian literary works, films and music and argues that a purposeful repositioning of the arts industry is a sure way of improving human and investment capacity

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which in turn reduces the burden of governance. It suggests a way forward using Arts products and productions.

Key Words: Arts, Empowerment, Governance, Industries, and Re-positioning.

Introduction

The thrust of this paper navigates towards the views expressed in Chinua Achebe's book, written over three decades ago, titled *The Trouble with Nigeria*. In that book, Achebe put it squarely that Nigeria's major problem is leadership. Indeed, leadership is not only a problem in Nigeria, but in the whole of the African continent. The burden of leadership manifests itself in three (3) major ways in the continent. First, in political office holders who refuse to relinquish power even at the point of death. A few examples will suffice. Robert Mugabe was a Zimbabwean President for 30 years, (from 1987-2017). At 93 years, it took combined internal and external forces to force him to resign. Liberian Samuel Doe became president in 1980, and for ten (10) years, he was still clinging to power. An effort to out-stage him led to a regrettable civil War in which many innocent African lives were lost. Similarly, the obnoxious regime of benignant Idi Amin of Uganda, a military despot that massacred his people in the 80's left a huge scare in the hearts of many people from that country.

Leadership, power and authority are tripartite umbilical cords, dictating the tempo and direction in any given human society. Whether we ascribe to the argument or not, "power is the ultimate

determinant in human society,” (Rodney, 271). Every form of leadership is bestowed with power of some sort. That is why it is important to invest power on an individual with extraordinary political skills, wisdom and ability. In this wise, Chinua Achebe, in his book, *There Was A Country...* explains, “Nigeria needed to identify the right leader with the right kind of character, education and background. Someone who would understand what was at stake – where Africa had been, where it needed to go (244)”. Obviously, many Africa leaders either because they lack character or the education required for the exalted position of leadership have remained a clog in the wheel of progress.

Perhaps the most incredible characteristic of most of them is “intellectual poverty”. A good number of African leaders appear not to be educated as they lack character and wisdom. A good example is Idi Amin of Uganda who thought that the country’s Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Income can be improved by printing more of the country’s currency. Even in the second millennium, it is only in the African continent that we have leaders who did not know whether or not they sat for secondary school examination. In a nutshell, Africa, as it stands today, needs a leader who understands the operation of modern micro economy, in line with global best practices. Femi Shaka, in his assessment of leadership in Nigeria recalls that “the concern for responsive and selfless leadership has attracted the attention of many African writers such that in work after work, writers on the continent have treated this theme even from different perspectives” (12). Continuous debate and criticism on the nation’s leadership and governance is a pointer to abysmal failure in piloting the ship of

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leadership. Kukah once remarked that “Our so called transitions of Democracy were actually transitions to feudalism and autocracy more of than not leading to dead ends” (3).

It is amazing to note that while writers from Europe, America, and some parts of the Asian continent concern themselves with consolidating the gains of modern breakthrough in science and technology, especially in the areas of “new media technologies”, Africans as usual, continue to lament about poverty, insecurity of lives and property and bad governance. Pondering on the African dilemma, Achebe, in his parting piece, *There was A Country...*, affirms that; “having grand ideas was fine, but their execution required a strong leader. And clearly, Nigerian’s principal problem was identifying and putting in place that elusive leader” (244).

The second point on the burden of leadership in Africa is linked to poor economy. Africa has poor economic structures and of course, a dwindling economy. The first problem of leadership is linked to this. The indices of development and growth in any nation are often measured on the per capital income. Nigeria, for instance, has in the past decades continued to witness retrogression in this regard. It is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria has become a failed state. Many existing socio-economic and structural factors are setbacks to Nigeria’s development. In the opinion of Charles Soludo;

Among a host of debilitating impediments to Nigeria’s growth and Competitiveness, one issue rests at the very root: a resource exploitation allocation and consumption pattern that is sustainable with over 90% of export earnings and

government revenues dependent on hydrocarbon based primary products entirely generated from a single region of the country. The pillars of Nigerian economy are extremely weak, and continued economic viability of the state, as a self-sustaining entity, is perpetually at risk (25).

Soludo went further to elucidate on why economic development has remained a mirage in Nigeria's economy. According to him, over dependence on oil and negligence of harnessing other economic resources, coupled with what he terms "an entitlement culture" (27) are multiple setbacks. Some of the constraints can be linked to successive failure of leadership to pursue positive economic plans initiated by previous or successive administrators in government. The second Niger bridge appears to be a case in point, although the media has reported recently that work has started at the site. All these are challenges militating against economic growth. Ideally, "social change is better effected by people who understand the passion and sentiment of the lead personage or advocate of the change, people who can elaborate on these sentiments, give them structure and transform them to practicability". (Hans Kelson as cited by Oge Ezeajughi, 2009). Nigeria is blessed with many men and women of mission and vision but the nature and form of leadership tussle and struggle, often makes it difficult for such people to venture into politics. thereby creating room for visionless and incompetent candidates. In line with this, Osarliemen posits that "one essential condition for the achievement of economic development is to maximally utilize the available human capital" (18).

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The Development of human capital is energy and resource consuming but unfortunately, with the growing unemployment rate occasioned by incompetent leadership, the nation is experiencing underutilization of her human capital, forcing a large number of her labour force to seek greener pastures elsewhere. The situation in Nigeria is very worrisome as a large percentage of youths including intellectuals continue to migrate to Europe and America in large numbers. Indeed, Nigeria has become an exploited nation and a product of its own making. Today, extermination has begun with impending anarchy orchestrated by Boko Haram insurgency, persistence killings from Fulani Herdsmen as well as ritual killers and almost indiscriminate kidnapping. The Continuous depreciation of the naira, coupled with low economic growth, which recently led to economic depression are all indices of underdevelopment. An enormous poverty wave seems to be moving in the country. Ikenga *et al* expressed deep concern that “despite various well designed and articulated economic reform programmes, such as vision 20:20 and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), the part to economic growth and development remained a far cry” (50). The reason for this is not far-fetched. Political instability is a great enemy of economic growth. Political unrest discourages investments in both private and public sectors of the economy. Insecurity is the bane of development. Agatha Nwanya, in her contribution lists different categories of insecurity as health insecurity, food insecurity, social insecurity, political and religious insecurity. She concludes that with the high level of insecurity in the country, positive growth and development will

remain a mirage to the nation (17). The greatest challenge on the road to Nigeria's greatness is inept and corrupt leaders who rather than improve the lots of the people, take the country backwards through their inactions. For instance, during Obasanjo's regime in 2005, the Paris Club wrote off Nigeria external debt at the tune of US\$18 billion. The debt relief wiped off about 60% of national debt which resulted in the utilization of US\$ billion savings from the Excess Crude Account (ECA) to buy back the rest of the debt of 25% on dollar, after paying off accumulated interest arrears (Okonjo-Iweala, 21). With this, the total Paris club debt of US\$ 30 billion was wiped out. Barely 12 years after, Nigeria is saddled with a total debt stock of N22.7 trillion, (about USD 80 billion). Apparently worried about this development, the People's Democratic Party, (PDP) Vice Presidential candidate in the just concluded 2019 Presidential Election, Mr Peter Obi argued at 2018, Vice Presidential Debate that

Nigeria used over 50% of her revenue to service debt. According to him, Mexico's GDP was over USD 1 trillion and its GDP per capita was over USD 8,000. South Africa stock market capitalization was USD 900 billion. While on the other hand, Nigeria bank loan is made up of 15% of GDP. In addition, Nigeria had the highest number of the poor at 87 million growing by six persons per minute.

Nigerian artists such as the great Fela Anikulapo Kuti have been involved in exposing Nigeria's political and social crisis through their music. In his album, "Teacher, don't teach me Nonsense" the Afrobeat musician Fela sang;

*Let us face ourselves for Africa
Na all the problem of this world*

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Na him we dey carry for Africa

Problems of inflation

Problems of corruption

Of mismanagement

Stealing by government

All over Africa

The crisis of leadership is such that it appears as if it is a vicious cycle. While African leaders are busy grabbing the common wealth, the masses who wallow in abject poverty, look the other way and sometimes even defend and justify them. The politicians achieve this feat through a method of recycling. Even without any political ideology, a leader moves from one position of authority to another, and can remain in government as many years, as he wants without achieving anything. Some have graduated with the title “Life Presidents” according to Fela in his album, “Army Arrangement”.

Election story nko,

Obasanjo plan am well well

The same old politicians wey rule Nigeria before

Obasanjo carry all of them

All of them, dey there now

Few people dey fight for bigi money

And the rest dey hungry.

Na wayo government we dey O

E gb mi o!

Na arrange man government we dey O.

Agatha Njideka Nwanya & Bridget Onochie, *Ph.D*

Though this particular album was released in the 80's, its relevance has remained classical as history seems to be repeating itself. The current All Progressive Congress (APC) Buhari led government appears to fit into fela's classification considering many of their antecedents. Corruption has continued to stink to high heavens in Nigeria's democracy with mediocrity, unbridled nepotism, bloodshed, ineptitude, poverty and extermination staring the people in the face. Now let us turn to Humanities. What can Arts and Humanities offer on this regard?

Between Theory and Practice

Inept and corrupt leadership practices are well documented in many African literary works as well as critical dramatic works. From Soyinka's *Death and the King Horseman*, Kogi's *Harvest*, to Osofisan's *Birthdays Are Not For Dying*, and from Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures*, to Asigbo's *The Reign of Pascal Amusu*, as well as Dandaura's *Venom for Venom* and Ojo Bakare's, *Rogbodiya*, the thematic pre-occupation is the burden of leadership in Africa. In Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures*, for instance, the nation's third arm of government – the legislative organ, is portrayed as a conglomeration of corrupt and insensitive leaders. Most of the political personnel are characterized as vultures that eat up human carcasses. These vultures are seen in the character of Madam Omeaku, a roadside food seller, recruited into the hollow chamber as a legislator. Others include; Mr. Brown, Rev Jossy and Habamero who scavenge in the legislature. The voice of genuine legislators like Dr. Parkers is often muffled because he stands in the opposition. By the time, Osofisan wrote *Midnight Hotels*, there was a little sanity in politics. At least, contract negotiators like Awero

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still have the decency of “negotiating contract with the opposite sex in a hotel room” other than at the hallow chamber. But, nefarious activities of characters in Nwabueze’s drama are very scaring. In the character of Madam Omeaku, we see a disparaged, illiterate legislator, wallowing in self-pity. The scenario painted about the political landscape is similar, whether in military regime, or in the so called democratic dispensation. Asigbo lends a voice to radical approach against corrupt leaders. For him, “mutiny” is necessary in order to purge the ailing Nigerian nation. Examples of corrupt leaders are seen in his dramatic texts, *The Reign of Pascal Amusu*. Sasha Sasha and Pascal Amusu are corruption signified. Obasanjo established Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) and used it as a weapon against perceived political enemies. *The Reign of Pascal Amusu*, is an attempt to showcase how Nigerian ruling class exploited and impoverished the masses and the “mutiny” that occurred in the end is a radical statement.

A further look at the entertainment industry shows serious commitment on the part of artists. The Nigerian entertainment industries are booming even when it appears as if government is not providing the enabling environment. Today, many Nigerian young artistes like Davido, Flavour, D Band, Wizikid Tuface have become international stars in their chosen careers. They make their millions either through musical performances, modeling or advertisement with big companies like Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN), GLO, Nigeria Brewery, (NBL), and other beverage industries. Similarly, the Nigerian Film Industry (Nollywood) has

contributed its quota to national development through orientation and conscientization.

Unarguably, art can create unimaginable wealth for a nation when properly harnessed and it has the capacity to speak to individual and collective consciences. For instance many art designs and logo can enhance quality productions in both textile and ceramics industries. Why do we draw patterns and tattoo? We do so because we love them. Many years ago, art works, such as sculptors, beads and paintings are of high demand in Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State. It was fashionable then, for people to erect sculptors or engrave the image of their parents on the wooden doors at the entrance of their homes as marks of honour. Such art works cost thousands and millions to erect. What has happen to this thinking? There is need to manage these kind of creative overtures. Through good management, the nation can systematically create public wealth using arts, craft, pottery and other aspects of the people's cultural heritage. In the *Guardian Life Spotlight* of October 10, 2018, it was reported that sometime in 2017, Njideka Crosby Akunyili, the daughter of Late Professor Dora Akunyili won the Mc Arthur Genius Grant which made her ₦225 million richer. In 2018, she designed the mural at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In the month of October, 2018, she made history when one of her works, *Bush Babies* sold for ₦1.2 billion instead of ₦289 million. It became the most expensive art work sold at an auction cost of \$3.4 million, that is an estimated ₦1.2 billion. At the moment, over 20 art museums have been put on the waiting list for her works. The lesson from all these illustrations is simple. Let the government at all levels create the enabling environment for Art

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works to flourish and such works will generate instant and huge revenues while still acting as mediums of communication.

Cultural Tourism is another tool that leaders can harness and utilize in ensuring good governance and good quality of living for the citizens especially in a developing nation like Nigeria. In many countries of the world such as France, USA, China, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, etc, cultures have remained very important goods marketed in both local and International markets. Unfortunately, marketing of cultural contents in the third world counties of Africa has remained abysmally poor. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Colonialism suppressed African cultures through the policy of assimilation and association, forcing the natives to look down on their cultures as inferior, archaic, barbaric, fetishism and obsolete. Fannon puts it more succinctly; “colonialist, has never ceased to maintain that the Negro is a savage” (170). This explains why many African cultural values including festivals remain untapped. One of the greatest challenges of the Nigerian State, appears to be how to harness and re-package many cultures to meet modern tourist tastes. Amidst terrorism, war, increasing unemployment, economic meltdown, starvation and the recent move on global integration, cultural tourism has become more attractive. Research on tourism and hospitality has revealed that well packaged tourism is a great boast to a country’s economy. For instance, it was reported that in 2013, that China's Tourism industry accounted for 9.5% of the global GDP, contributing 3.1% of the global economic growth that year. Indeed, China was said to be the third top tourist destination in the world and this has changed the economy of the country.

Nigeria, the biggest African country has a lot to offer in terms of tourist attraction. Awaritefe 2005 (as cited by Jiboku and Jiboku 2010) identified eight tourist regions and ninety-nine tourist attractions in Nigeria. Some of the tourist sites are Igbo-Ukwu museum, Ogbunike Cave, Agulu Lake , Oguta lake in the South East Region; Oluma Rock, Eri-Ijesha Water fall, Osun Shrine in the Western Region and so on. Tourism enhances both social and economic development and fosters unity and social cohesion among people of diverse cultures and interests. Festivals and carnivals which are aspects of cultural tourism contribute significantly to economic growth in countries like Brazil Trinidad and Tobago. At this period of economic uncertainty in the nation, the need to develop local tourism has arisen in order to boost Nigeria's economy earnings. Jiboku and Jiboku in 2010, argue persuasively that the reason why the tourist sector is not well developed in Nigeria is because tourist resources have remained untapped. They argue further that investment into the sector will make it more attractive and this can open up a new window of job creation and employment for the country.

Conclusion

This paper derives impetus from the failure of leadership in Africa and interrogates the triple effects of corruption and poverty which has created unmitigated misery and frustration for the common man. The paper has examined the portrayal of leadership and governance in some Nigerian plays and Music and concludes that through the use of satire, ridicule and criticism of insensitive leadership, Nigerian and indeed African writers have exposed the Nigerian political elite and their acts of subjugation, humiliation,

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and dehumanization of the masses. The study has also attempted to justify the necessity of Art in a democratic space in relation to job creation and revenue generation; arguing that a new orientation towards improving patronage of art works as well as deploying arts as tools for social change can initiate a positive economic turnaround. Through concrete examples, The paper has also demonstrated how artistes of various shades increase the country's Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P) using their talents. The paper envisages high expectations and points to grey areas that can be strengthened to lessen the burden of inefficient governance in Africa, reduce youth unemployment and enhance sound economy.

Recommendations

1. Government should strengthen existing Arts centres and Villages to meet contemporary standards.
2. Construction of cultural centres and public theatres will give a boost to revenue generation in the field of arts.
3. Funding is a major challenge to young talented artistes. The government can establish a kind of grant that can be assessed by young artistes.

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