

**THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION IN CONTEMPORARY
NIGERIA: A STUDY OF OLA ROTIMI'S
IF--- A TRAGEDY OF THE RULED AND OUR HUSBAND
HAS GONE MAD AGAIN**

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Abstract

The neglect of leadership, be it political or military after the advent of the white missionaries who came to administer or govern Nigeria after its amalgamation can be traceable to the lack of clear cut political ideologies of rulership from the period when Nigeria gained independence to the present day. The study is aimed at viewing this leadership misdemeanor and good governance in Ola Rotimi's If--- a tragedy of the Ruled and Our Husband has gone mad Again. The focus is on the subjugation of the masses and the electorate and the efforts undertaken by the playwright to educate and emancipate the populace from this dreaded cankerworm called corruption, neglect and lack of foresight that have eaten deep into the fabric of those on the corridors of (political) power.

Introduction

Truly, it is not the elite that matters in leadership. It is the people themselves. But the elite often direct the people in their various actions. That is why there are so many variables in political leadership especially when it carries the stigma of partisan elements.

- Charles de Gaulle

One challenging problem nagging every nation is that of leadership. Out of the fifty two years of rulership in Nigeria by both the Civilian and the Military, the leadership situation has been lacking, if not totally dwindling in all facets. This is due to the infiltration of ethnicity (North and South dichotomy) segregation (based on fatherhood by birth or sisterhood by religion) political instability and religion. So many have aspired to occupy the foundation of power through political leadership, some in their hasty bid have failed to achieve their aspiration to occupy the leadership fortress in course of their different ideology. Others have been hasty to snatch the ticket of their parties while for some it remains a mission impossible.

Quality leadership requires not just equality of the citizenry but also freedom from starvation, ignorance and early death. If all African countries, including Nigeria, hold to the goal of an equal non exploitative democracy and a free and fair desire to aspire to leadership positions, the problems of uncertainty of life and property would be solved. It is this abuse of power arising from ineffective leadership, lack of positive ideology and political tyranny which is treated satirically by Ola Rotimi in the plays earmarked for study with the intended aim of inducing behavioral change in the populace. Observably, leadership on the Nigerian political scene is erroneously applied as a means for personal aggrandizement instead of being used as a platform for championing the aspirations and needs of the electorate.

In treating this cankerworm that has bedeviled the society, Rotimi has written in the two plays presented with the

consciousness of his society and the likely impact it could have, while also reviewing the problems which have ranged from irredeemable level of corruption from both the ruled and the rulers, to lack of a viable system of government and ineffective leadership (which has resulted to misrule and profligacy)

Chinua Achebe (1986:1) in lending voice to Rotimi's stance has stated that

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or any thing else.

The only solution to the above problem in the view of John' Ebimobwei Yeseibo (2002:2) lies in

The evolution of a selfless leader, a leader who will have the welfare of the generality of his people – the ruled at heart, a leader who understands the art of state craft.

If such a leader emerges, the problem besetting the Nigerian society will be ameliorated. Expectantly, this emergent selfless leader will evolve policies aimed at improving the economy. The question then is if the problem with Nigeria are crystallized into ineffective leadership, which to a large extent is responsible for her under development and dependency. What then is the solution to these problems? The solution lies in the ideal leadership proffered by the playwright in *Hopes of the living Dead* and *Akassa Youmi* characterized by Harcourt Whyte and King Koko, which will

lead to economic growth through self reliance.

The Leadership Question in Ola Rotimi's *If ... A Tragedy of the Ruled and Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*.

Leadership denotes the occupancy of status and the active performance of a role that mobilizes more or less organized collective and voluntary efforts towards attainment of shared goals and objectives, Bernard Cyril (2004:88) refers to it as:

The quality of the behaviour of individuals where by they guide people or their activities in organized effort.

On the other hand, Robert MacIver (1998:25) describes the leader as:

One who possess the established rights within any social order to determine policies, pronounce act as a leader or guide to other men.

The art of leadership as it is usually seen, is the same with power and influence. In autocratic governments the leader is merely a head performing the duties of headship. His influence is so much that he may not go through any legal sanction from his members. His rulership is aided and guided by laid down rules and laws. Leadership juxtaposes, with politics (which originated from the Greek word "Polis meaning "a city State), which, according to A. Appodorai, (1980:2) is:

The science concerned with the state and of the conditions essential to its existence and development.

Corroborating these (2001:8) assertions Abdur Razoa Bamidele sees leadership as:

The most delicate and sensitive venture that the wise shrinks from, the intelligent rather passes by it in a dignify manner. Heaven and earth including the mountain from the earliest time have uncompromisingly renounced it.

The reason for such attitude towards leadership is the severity, thoroughness and the rigour of accountability of the last day. The art of leadership is synonymous with influence and power. Power may on the other hand be assumed by the leader by merely arrogating it to himself as it is the case of an autocratic system of government. He rather demands absolute obedience. Ola Rotimi's two plays *If ...* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* discuss the ugly situation and trend which relate to the social, political cultural, educational and economic life, of Nigerian's. This has greatly jeopardized the peaceful co-existence and smooth development of the country. The main thrust for thought in the play is the political and leadership life of the Nigerians. This exposes the game of politics and attitude towards leadership by its citizens.

In *If....* Rotimi portrays an indictment of the political depravity that engulfed West African States (Senegal, Libya, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali as examples) in general and Nigeria especially. The play dramatizes the frustration in terms of leadership and politics of the educated elite under a Machiavellian ruling class. The elite class is represented in the characters of Hamidu Gidado, a youth Corper from the Northern part of Gongloa State serving at the Emohua General

Hospital in the outskirts of Port Harcourt, Banji Falegan, a lawyer, Papa the Old educationist, Tekena Dokubo, a Professor of medicine, Chinwe Ejindu with a first class honours degree in mathematics, and of course, the young Onyema.

The playwright has in the play tried to make the electorate choose their leader through their votes but this dream is turned into illusion by characters like the Land Lord who uses his house to force the electorate to put him into power:

Which reminds me it's not too late yet for those of you who haven't gone to the polls. And remember it is the Patriotic Peoples Party PPP. Your party my party. The only party to save the nation from perpetual misery, perpetual backwardness. (Rotimi 1978:43)

The landlord's failure to convince his tenant in voting his party after his rude interruption of mama's birthday celebration led to the arrest and incarceration of Garuba who not only challenged him but, also in spite of his handicap (deaf and dumb) situation proved that he is a unwanted.

This unwarranted action to humiliate the common man by the landlord also led to the death of Onyema who was circumstantially abandoned by Betty to accompany Garuba to the Police station to effect his release.

In *If* Rotimi is concerned basically with the socio-economic consequences of false electioneering promises and leadership in a society that lacks direction. According to Rotimi (1978:25),

A blighting of future for Nigeria as a whole and the young generation in particular, Onyema personifies that future and its helplessness if the Nigerian electorate herself seeking political opportunities resurfaces

He sees leadership as not dependant on ethnicity or religion hence the names Amadi, Fubara (representing ethnic groups in Rivers State; Ahmadu (Hausa) Okon and Okonkwo (Cross River and Igbo). Despite the conscious efforts, the PPP won a landslide victory over the obviously more dedicated parties like the FLP with a good leader (politically) and ideology. This implies a further perpetuation of capitalism and its attendant brutalities thus widening the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" This handicap is against Hamidu's assertion of a good leader. He believes that:

To any political leader who aspires to a successful rule of this nation, I say, the fundamental secret to that success is this, discipline your disciples, and you will control the country: (Rotimi, 1998:31)

He criticizes the corrupt nature of politicians and believes that honesty and fair play should be the watchwords of all leaders and politicians alike. The playwright criticizes vehemently the nature of leadership which he views as an autocratic one that takes general decision without the consent of the ruled. Through the various characters he shows the effort made by the electorate in creating a more desirable and purposeful leader that will be exemplary.

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* which Rotimi wrote from experiences he gathered during the 1979 Nigerian

Election, he makes a caricature of the political leader in the character of Lejoka Akinjide Brown. He employs in *Our Husband* ... an extravagant political figure rather than politics itself, through comic and absurd situations in polygamous marriages with an attendant cultural conflict and the crucial but descriptive influence of women in politics, power, social prestige and society. Sikira's nomination as the political leader of NLP in place of Lejoka Brown proves that women can assume the leadership position as well as men. A leader in this case should not be determined by his sex or educational background but by his loyalty and dedication to the nation. According to Rotimi (1976:74) a leader:

does not have to go to the University before he can become a leader. The qualities of a leader is committedness and selfless leadership.

The playwright's aim in *Our Husband* is not to present an ideal leader in the person of Sikira but only to prove that women can be leaders too, if given the chance. The playwright sees in Sikira some of the qualities of a leader like understanding, forgiveness and humanitarianism compared to Lejoka Brown who sees leadership politically as follows:

Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, make you want to be famous? Politics you want to chop life, No, no-you want to chop a big slice of the National cake? Na politics?(Rotimi, 1978:4)

The playwright shows the level of literacy of most leaders who aspire to head a nation comprised of elites, when Lojoka attempts to correct the BBC Correspondence on the

spelling of "polls". He mocks at the decision of party members in choosing their leaders. Lejoka Brown sees leadership as a war where only two alternatives is basically obtained – the destroyed and the destroyer. Lekoja Brown and his likes in the leadership race reminds one of the enemies of society as revealed by Onyema and his brigade. In his view, the enemies of our land are:

The political profiteers, the intellectual swindlers, the foreign business puppet, the men in high and low places who seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country permanently divided and poor so that they can remain in power as V.I.P's of waste and decay, the triabalist, the nepotist, those that make our motherland look big for nothing before the world, and all who try to put the social, economic and political calendar of Nigeria back by their words and their deeds, those are our enemies

(Rotimi 1978:57)

The playwright seems to posit that the country has not succeeded in producing any able leadership and seen in *Hopes living Dead* and *Akassa Youmi* to engender a spirit of self reliance.

Conclusively, my analysis of the two plays has mostly been influenced, by the various definitions on leadership as enunciated by the various theorist. From the study of the plays, it becomes clear that Rotimi's perception of the ideal leader in a democratically elected government is far from what is presented in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* or the role model found in *If ---*, which is characterized by Onyema but

could not be alive to lead his generation successfully due to the dehumanized nature the individual finds himself in society.

Rotimi in *If---* has focused our attention on the unpalatable relationship between the oppressed and oppressive classes in our society. Through the opportunity provided by Elkanah's lack of discipline, the playwright exposes to condemnation the leadership for misdirecting government priorities and her divisive principle of Federal character. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Rotimi's reason for writing the play seems to be to focus mainly on the leadership trend which could be said to have been more obvious in the play especially in the contemporary, social and political aspect.

On the whole both plays are informed by the same socio-political events. Both centred on imminent elections and on political charlatans as leaders. The plays are an indictment of the newly emergent political elites as leader present in our contemporary Nigerian society. Papa and Onyema as leaders are able to contain the populace through their ability to give a vivid notion of the Nigerian political leadership situation that has been characterized by the bourgeoisie and how they could felicitously use their votes. Papa's ability to harness the allegiance and trust of his people despite initial doubts within the people enhanced the play.

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