

# INTERROGATING THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION IN NIGERIA: A DISCOURSE ON EMEKA NWABUEZE'S *A PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES*

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## **Abstract**

*This paper posits that good leadership is an important contributory aspect to the development of every society. It stresses that the success or failure of any society, politically, economical or otherwise depends on the type of leadership quality and principles adopted and practised. It centres on Nigeria democratic setting and adopts the eclectic theory to deduce leadership motivation for Nigeria political leaders using Emeka Nwabueze's **A Parliament of Vultures** as focus. The finding shows that most political leaders seek public office for personal gains. These corrupt government officials are an orientation of leaders that slipped the country into economic recession without measures in place to correct negative economic flows. It thus recommends the servant-leadership approach and adoption of its values as a core motivation for those seeking public office for the socio-political and economic development of the society. This would also enable the leaders to take preventive measures to correct economic contraction (recession) for the benefit and welfare of the citizens.*

## **Introduction**

Leadership is an important aspect of every society. This is because, the success or failure of any society, or country politically, economical or otherwise depends on the type of leadership principles adopted and practiced. Leadership is present in every setting, whether religious organisations, pressure groups, schools, nation-states or native tribes and families. Irrespective of the political system of government practised, whether democratic, totalitarian, dictatorial, monarchical or feudal; there is a leader whose quality of governance is unique to his/her system of administration. It is in line with this notion that Richard Bolden asserts that "it is argued that in this changing, global environment, leadership holds the answer not only to the success of individuals and organisations, but also to sectors, regions and nations" (4).

In democracy, leadership becomes particularly important because decisions are made by the people and for the people. Daryl Hoobs and Ronald Power state that, "leadership is to democracy as water is to plant growth. It is vital" (1). This assertion is of utmost importance in a democratic setting because, effective leadership must be backed by good

followership so that decisions can be people-oriented. Efficient leadership can be best measure depending on the situations; the political system and motivation for leadership positions.

According to the Greek statesman, Pericles (459 BC-429 BC), democracy is a system in which power lies in the hands of “the whole people”, “everyone is equal before the law”, and public responsibility (political leadership position) is determined not by class but by “actual ability” (Habib 13). This position questions the statement that, “leaders are born, not made”. But the environment in which leaders function influences his/her leadership styles and types of leadership practice. This is because we are all born with certain innate mental and leadership potentials that can only be ignited by learning important leadership skills (Hoobs and Power 2). The concept of leadership itself defies definition. It is similar to other well contested concepts such as power and authority. In an attempt to define leadership, Stogdill states that there are “almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (qtd in Bolden 4). However, Hoobs and Power opine that, “leadership is interpersonal influence, exercised in a situation and directed through communication process, toward the attainment of a specific goal or goals”. The uniqueness of political leadership in a democratic setting is based on the notion that the will of the people is of utmost importance to leaders themselves. Kellerman posits that:

Leadership is not a moral concept. Leaders are like the rest of us: trustworthy and deceitful, cowardly and brave, greedy and generous. To assume that all leaders are good people is to be wilfully blind to the reality of the human condition, and it severely limits our scope for becoming more effective at leadership (qtd in Bolden 4).

This notation brings to attention that leaders are at one times followers and they are susceptible to errors. What are the motivations for political leadership in Nigeria democratic setting which may have domino-effect on the economy? This is the backdrop of this enquiry. The purpose of this discuss is to investigate the political leadership principles and motivation for the position of leadership as enshrine in Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* in relation to economic recession. It also focuses on the leadership orientations and motivations in Nigeria democratic environment. According to Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN):

Recession is a business cycle contraction, and it refers to a general slowdown in economic activity for two consecutive quarters. During recession, there is usually a decline in certain macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, employment, investment spending, capacity utilisation, household income, business income, and inflation, with the attendant increase in the rate of unemployment (1).

There is no doubt that the above affirmation defines Nigeria economic outlook in 2015/2016, a situation that affects economic activities adversely. BBC online business

news on 31 August, 2016 confirmed that: “Nigeria slipped into recession after the growth figures shows the economy contracted -2.06% between April and June, 2016”. RTC Advisory Services Limited; an economic advisory organisation outlines some of the factors that resulted to recession. These include slow sovereign saving, fiscal leakages, corruption, policy vacuum and wrong policy choices (25-26). It is postulated by economists that preventive measures such as saving and good economic policy would have prevented such economic shrinkage. CBN highlights that, “instruments of monetary and fiscal policies can be used to counter recession and bring about economic growth... injecting money into the economy to stimulate (economic) activities” (19).

Theatre has not been silent on the type of political leadership in Nigeria and motivation for those that assume position of authority. The leadership quality at any particular time affects both the literary theatre and performance theatre either negatively or otherwise. The type of political leadership in existence at a particular time reflects the content of theatre at that time. Using Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* as a benchmark, this paper shows that certain corrupt elements at the helm of affair in Nigeria are motivated by personal greed and selfishness to the detriment of the ruled.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts political realism and servant-leadership theory, respectively. Political realism explains, and prescribes political relations for individuals, groups and countries. It takes as its assumption that power ought to be the primary end of political action, whether in the domestic or international arena. It posits that nations and politicians only pursue power for self-interest. This approach focuses on the fact that politicians must ensure their own survival by securing their own needs and interests before looking to the needs of others. According to Moseley; “the theory has a long history, being evident in Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War experience. It was also explained by Machiavelli in his work, *The Prince*” (1). But some of the modern advocates of this approach are Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Emeka Nwabueze uses this theory as a description of the ruling state of affair in Nigeria political system.

Servant-leadership theory was first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970s. It is a theoretical framework that advocates a leader’s primary motivation and role as service to others. It upholds the notion that, “the great leader is seen as servant first” (3). Larry Spears, Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Centre for Servant-Leadership, defines servant-leadership as,

a new kind of leadership model – a model which puts serving others as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasises increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; promoting a sense of community; and the sharing of power in decision-making” (qtd in Smith 4).

This assertion shows that motivation for leadership position must be from the desire to serve others. The servant-leadership principle is the type of leadership theory that is in juxtaposition to political realism as a theory. Its proponents advocate it for

modern democratic governance. The researcher is also aware of other leadership theories. These includes trait and transformational theories that are respectively base on personality traits and learn leadership skills. The researcher posits that for the political, socio-economic development of Nigeria society, the servant-leadership approach should be adopted.

### **Th Leadership Question in A Parliament of Vultures**

*A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze is a macrocosm of the leadership role of Nigeria's National Assembly. It portrays parliamentarians who are more engross in financial deceit and eating without regard for their primary function of law making; such as proper economic policies for any unforeseen contraction in the economy. Madam Omeaku, An uneducated food seller and wife of a retired primary school teacher turned politician is voted into power to serve the country. However, she joins others like her to display a parliament of eating, drinking and looting. Her motive for joining politics is geared towards egotism and arrogance. Although the setting for the parliamentary operation is democratic; since it provides an avenue for periodic election, the election itself is not free and fair – a situation that usher in selfish leaders. The Parliamentarians base their leadership principles which serve as core values for parliamentary business on political realism: satisfying ones need first, before others. It is in juxtaposition to servant-leadership principles which its core ethics is egalitarian belief that leaders are not better than their followers; thus, focusing on the aspiration of the masses against personal ambition. Madam Omeaku's aim of joining the parliament is not to serve, but to loot and climb the political ladder from the house of Assembly to the senate. Her ambition is echoed at the beginning of the play thus:

**Madam Omeaku:** ...imagine the likeness, A whole honourable member of the house of Assembly; A future Aspirant to the senate, et cetera... (Nwabueze 7).

Madam Omeaku is not only corrupt, but morally spoilt and has no regard for her husband who she describes as a “bushman” (9). Despite the fact that her husband uses his years of service gratuity to open a restaurant for her, Madam Omeaku engages in an immoral relationship with her colleagues in the parliament, Mr. Brown in order to further her political position in the parliament. In her word:

**Madam Omeaku:** ...To be an honourable member is not enough, what matters is the position you get in the parliament, that is, what determine your financial security... (9).

In order to attain financial security Madam Omeaku engages in financial misappropriation. This is similar to what is obtainable in Nigerian National Assembly. Lawmakers engage in corrupt practices to the detriment of the people they profess to represent. A report in the *Premium Times* of 27 November, 2013, states that:

Messrs Lawan and Emenalo, both members of the House of Representatives, face a seven-count charge of allegedly obtaining N625 million bribe from Femi Otedola, the Chairman of the then Zenon Petroleum and Gas Ltd. The two lawmakers were chairmen and vice chairmen respectively of the committee set up by the House to probe the federal government's subsidy payment for 2011. They allegedly received the money as bribe to clear Mr. Otedola's company of any wrongdoing.

The poorly educated member of the parliament, Madam Omeaku, conspires with other parliamentarians and her daughter Nkechi to remove Mr. Otobo from the position of secretary in the parliament. She (Madam Omeaku) also assumes the same position as a secretary. She builds a number of houses and set up import and export business for her husband who later supports her as a result of financial benefit from her corrupt practices. The parliament is not made up of only the corrupt and immoral Madam Omeaku, but those who find their ways into the parliament through electoral fraud. As Mr. Brown explained how he rigged election for Dr. Parkers:

**Brown:** ...He could've crashed like a pack of cards if I hadn't stepped in to rescue him (Dr. Parkers) fortunately, the returning officer was my classmate. It wasn't difficult for me to negotiate the right figures for him as I did in your own case (10).

Mr. Brown was able to commit electoral fraud because of debase electoral system in Africa, particularly Nigerian. It is in line with this notion that Mohammed-Kabir Imam explained that:

Our leaders (are) undermining the interests of the common man in a democratic setting like Nigeria. The Electoral Commission has been subsumed, the Police have been engulfed, and all the stakeholders have been engrossed in all of these, in the interest of their anointed candidates. In some cases the ballot boxes don't even suffice at all, but there is still election (528).

This is how Dr. Parkers was rigged into the parliament in order to be used by his corrupt colleagues (having stayed in USA for years) to siphon money for the Parliamentarians without his own knowledge. The parliament is also made up of other title seeking members such as Big Boy, The very Reverend, Professor, Chief, Alhaji, Sir (43). Reverend Jossy assumed "the title of Reverend during campaign to purchase some credibility from voters" (11). Mr. Brown, who described himself as a political 'juggernaut', explains to Omeaku, otherwise known as, 'Madam Hoha', how professor earned his title:

**Brown:** He was a factory worker in London ...We asked him to take that title.... In order to make our party look intellectual.... He does not have certificate... we haven't called him professor of anything... (11).

Mr. Brown who promises a life of luxury for Madam Omeaku for her support as the Chairman, the Committee for Purchase and Supply, bribe Madam Hoha with the sum of three hundred thousand naira and ensures her of:

**Brown:** Air-conditioned house, posh car, travel to different parts of the world et cetera... (12).

It is important to note that the parliament is the only arm of the government that is primarily mandated to make laws for the country. Though, it uses delegated legislature to entrust such mandate to other arms of government. But *the vultures* are more concerned about eating and drinking and cooling off. The leadership of the parliamentarians is based on greed and debauchery. As the speaker of the house, Alhaji Dr. Nathaniel Habamero notes in his house to welcome other parliamentarians:

**Habamero:** this is only to kick-start the day. We shall move from here to the Hilton, My special assistant has already made reservation for us .We shall eat and drink until we are saturated then we shall each check into a presidential suite to cool off before returning to our homes (26).

An RTC Advisory Service Ltd article on *Nigeria's Economy and Recession: Outlook for 2017* outline, among other factors, why the country experience recession. These include lack of clarity over economic policy, low sovereign saving, fiscal leakages and corruption on the part of the leaders (25-26). These are the area that leaders can control, but they are instead busy with self-gratification rather than making viable economic policies that would have prevented the country from slipping into recession. It is this leadership mishap that is geared toward accumulation of wealth on the part of the leaders that Emeka Nwabueze brings to realities and condemns.

In the same vein, Chief Aggrandi, a public office aspirant for local government election is more concerned about eating and drinking as contained in Osita Ezewannebe's *Giddy Festival*. Habamero, and the parliamentarians focus on the parliament function of "cooling off, and other selfish practices. The parliamentarians share the sum of two million naira each as inconvenience allowance" (26-27). Ini Ekott reveals that:

The Nigerian National Assembly is regarded as one of the world's most expensive when measured against the standard of living of an average Nigerian, and the government's total revenue and spending. The

assembly spends a total of N150 billion annually which is three per cent of the entire federal budget as at 2013 (*Premium Times*).

This situation has continued to militate against economic development and good standard of living for the populace. Looting of state treasury and lack of proper economic policy has made the country to slip into recession. Speaking at the public presentation of the autobiography of Justice Mustapha Akanbi, in Abuja on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2014, Nigeria's former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, lampooned the National Assembly, saying, "it is largely an assemblage of looters and thieves" (Isine, *Premium Times*). Immediately after assuming position of leadership, the 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly members upon resumption of plenary were accused of many controversies that have to do with financial gratification and demanded for outrageous "Furniture Allowance" and lived ostentatious lifestyles that were not in sync with the economic realities of the Nigerian state (Adeoye 4).

The class of Aggrandi in Osita Ezewannebe's *Giddy Festival* and *The Vultures* are the epitome of Nigerian leaders, who are interested in juicy committee membership and exotic car allowances without paying attention to taking precautionary measures for possible negative economic flows. The parliamentarians who are servant-leaders, such as Mr. Otobo explain to his colleagues Dr. Parkers what the parliamentarians are known for, thus:

**Otobo:** ...that is the trouble with you, Dr. Parker you have PhD in political science, but you forget that some of those peoples with whom you share parliament did not go to school at all, but they have PhD in political manoeuvring. And don't think they are fools. They can manipulate even the most educated one just the way they manipulate the masses (34).

Such manipulation is evident in the electoral tussle between Madam Omeaku and Barrister Umeh, whose wife is a Canadian woman. The political manipulation is popularly tagged "the politics of beater leave and Canadian Masquerade" (36).

The parliamentarian, not only use their power to manoeuvre and deceive the masses, but all the conduct of parliamentary business is full of crude method of law making processes and disorder. Nathaniel Habamero, the speaker of the house points to Dr. Parkers about difference in timing to conduct parliamentary business that does not tally with the time in a letter to the parliamentarians, he reply thus:

**Habamero:** Dr. Parkers, if we have to call everyone to order because of every little error, there would be no one left in the services of this nation, may we proceed... (45).

Disorderliness is the part of the everyday process in the parliament that is evident in the fight often championed by Madam Omeaku. In a debate in the parliament, Madam Omeaku and Dr. Parkers argue thus:

**Parkers:** Mr. Chairman I can share parliament with all kinds of individuals, but I object to receiving unnecessary insults from a buffoon (46).

**Madam:** Who do you call bo-fool? (*Rushes to Dr. Parkers and holds him by the coat. He struggles to free himself. Jossy tries to stop her from tearing the coat while Mr. Brown urges her on*) (46).

The likes of Madam Omeaku are not new in Nigerian national assembly. Chinenye Ugonna reported that, “Several members of the House of Representatives scaled the fence to gain access to the (National Assembly) complex... after they were stopped by security agents” (*Premium Times*). The parliament uses crude method in order to swear in members of the parliament. They use the symbol of the ancestors, Ogbunabani (the one that kills by midnight) not to protect the interest of the masses, but to kill anyone who report parliamentary business to the press, report fellows parliamentarian as regard to financial gratifications. As the house speaker explains, Bible is for western culture and Ogbunabani is for African culture. If democracy is from Western culture, while will the parliament not adhere to it basic principles for swearing in members? This therefore is the height of barbaric parliamentary business as oppose to western doctrine of democratic governance. The business of parliamentarians is gear towards attending parties and voting enormous amount for such celebrations. They use expensive imported dresses for members to the detriment of the economy. Regarding St. Bottles Church thanksgiving services, Habamero explains the reason why ten million naira would not be enough for the thanksgiving:

**Habamero:** The bulk of the money will be distributed through the payment of inconvenience allowances to members for attending the thanksgiving services. Extra expensive will be accrued through the making of appropriate dresses for members and hiring music group. I, therefore, approve the sum of two billion naira for this purpose. Approved?

**All:** (*Except Parkers and Otobo*) Approved! (72).

Budgeting and spending outrageous amount of money on luxuries by the political leaders is evidence in Nigeria democratic practice. That is why, despite cash crunch, Nigerian Senate illegally voted N4.7billion for exotic cars for the Senate President and the other 108 senators, an action that can only lead to economic recession (Sani Tukur, *Premium Times*).

Habamero’s criterion for selecting chairman of Board member is strictly based on those that supported the party financially during election. To him, honesty and integrity is relative for chairmanship position of the board. That is why bribery is not news in our political democratic system. Ben Ezeamalu, on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2013, reported that:



TSKJ, a consortium of four international companies (Technip; Snamprogetti; KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton; and JGC), paid the bribe to Nigerian officials over a ten-year period to secure the construction contract worth \$6 billion (N900 billion) (*Premium Times*).

Political realism in *A Parliament of Vultures* is given more elaboration and explained by the president, who is part of the collaboration for ripening the economy, he stresses:

**President:** Thank you very much.... A good leader find time to be with his subjects to discuss some very pressing issues which may sound confusing to his subjects, but which he, as the president of this great nation, has the right answers to. The president is the servant of the peoples and the peoples he rules are his master. But the master-servant relationship is more of a verbal thing than actual reality (*Laughs*) (93).

Concerning the award of contract, the president rhetorically asks:

**President:** Would you award a contract to a person that is not your friend? I ask you, would you? (*Sighs*). Next question please” (96).

These are political realities in Nigeria political system that the playwright brings to the fore for everyone to understand. According to an article by Festus Owete, published online on 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2015:

an Investigation by *Premium Times* newspaper, spanning weeks, revealed that between 2009 and 2015, the management arm of the federal legislature led by the Clerk, Salisu Maikasuwa, his predecessor, Yemi Ogunyomi, and their representatives, extensively violated the *Money Laundering Act* (2004, 2011) in banking transactions leading to the withdrawals of about N42 billions of public funds (*Premium Times*).

The constitution of every democratic nation stipulates the principles of separation of power. It also adds that the executive and the two other arms of government, the legislature, and judiciary must work together for a good democratic setting which is sine qua non to good governance. Though democracy is a working system of government; because its practices and ideological application differ from countries to countries, but democratic leadership in Nigeria is more of politically realistic types that centre on selfish interest on the side of the leaders to the detriment of the masses. The parliamentarians are supposed to be servant first; a principle advocates by servant-leadership theorists. Madam Omeaku reflected on her poor childhood background and concluded that her realistic political achievement is the aim of almost

every Africa political aspirant; except the servant-leaders. She confidently tells her colleague in the parliament:

**Madam:** I'm fine. (*Reflectively.*) When a child is bitten by a snake he fears the earthworm. I have had my own share of poverty in the past. Now that God has buttered my bread, I'll never allow myself to be poor again. Not in this world or even in the world to come I'll make enough money to last me two lifetimes (101).

The political ambition of African leaders is geared toward accumulation of wealth for even their generation unborn. Madam Omeaku further noted her other corrupt achievements.

**Madam:** I now live in my own fifty-hectare estate... set up an import and export business... purchase only three different models of Mercedes, one model of BMW, and a Lexus and sent my children to study in America (103).

Similarly, it is this kind of monetary benefit that comes with leadership position that Ola Rotimi's social satire, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* addresses. Lekoja-Brown, a retire major and landlord ventures into politics with the motives of enriching himself. These are the same vision and mission of not only Nigerian parliamentarians, but most African leader and political investors who seek public offices and returns, respectively. Plato must have seen beyond his time the negative effect and shortcomings of a democratic government. He must have considered the fact that every democratic government is a gathering of untrained, uncooked, selfish and greedy people who haphazardly gathered to eat the polity to the skin. And since no bound to riches has been fixed for man, leaders continue to accumulate wealth for themselves with its attendant negative economic implications (Habib 13). The effect of such action is what is glaring in the life of the nation that is today bedevilled with many socio-political and economic problems (Taiwo 513).

The vultures' motivation for position of power is drawn on egocentric motives to empty the national treasury for personal self. Nwabueze is not alone in the aesthetics of dethronement of self-centred leaders. Notable playwrights and critic have used their creative imaginations to address leadership problems in Africa, particularly Nigeria. Prominent playwright and poet, Wole Soyinka ridicules Kamini, whose ignorance does not allow him to learn about the negative implications of over-printing of the local currency. The resultant effect is inflation and negative economic contraction as evident in the work, *A Play of Giants*. Ola Rotimi questions the leadership integrity of a landlord, who threatens to increase his rent from twenty naira (N20.00) to thirty naira (N30.00) for his tenants as he demands for their mandate in his bid for leadership position as a senator in the eve of the general election in *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled*.

Emeka Nwabueze unfolds core leadership questions that are begging for answers in our democratic terrain which may have links to economic recession. A

critical theorist, Ameh Akoh, writing on the role of drama in the political economy of Nigeria, opines that:

...civilian administrations have had their share in the devastation of the economy of the Nigerian state...economic programmes were built on self-interest either internally or with the collaboration of foreign economic and political powers. Consequently, the masses are left to bear the brunt of such programmes (61).

This evidently shows that the issue of leadership in the country has continued to militate not only against the economic development of the country, but also prevented those that are at the helms of affairs to take preventive measures against negative economic predictions. At the end of the play, the parliamentarians are engage in approving importation licences. An action that is detrimental to an economy that is in recession, even as agitators storm the state house.

### **Conclusion**

An analysis of Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* shows that the negative economic contraction that inflicts much suffering on the people would have been prevented if the political leaders make policies that are geared towards such occurrences. But instead, they are bent on the accumulation of wealth for selfish ends. The siphoning of the treasury for personal enjoyment such as partying, would have allow enough money to be injected into the economy during recession. The play shows that the country would only experience economic growth and make policies that would reduce suffering of the masses only if the selfless leaders are in position of governance.

It is important to note that the playwright's suggestion of radical approach can also mean taking action to replace selfish leaders by servant-leaders whose motivation is to serve the people during general election. The work of a critic is to bring to peoples' understanding the creativity of dramatist(s) as applicable to the society(s) not to destabilise, to confuse, intimidate but to correct the ills in the society(s) for healthier readjustment. This is important for those that are entrusted with position of power and authority particularly and the masses in general.

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