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Crisis of Governance in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*

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Abstract
This researcher examines the social realities of the crisis of governance depicted in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, a powerful critique of Nigeria's political landscape. The researcher explores how the author illustrates systemic corruption, political manipulation and moral decay that characterize the nation's leadership. The study argues that *A Parliament of Vultures* not only reflects the socio-political struggles of contemporary Nigeria but also exposes the bleak consequences of unproductive governance using allegory and symbolism to highlight the detach between rulers and the ruled. This research delves into the roles of literature in confronting maladministration and advocates for possible resistance and revolt as seen in the tackling of Nigeria's governance crisis. By scrutinizing the play's account of political vultures and their impact on social and economic structures, the paper proposes critical perceptiveness into the wider implications of governance and overriding need for entire systematic reform in Nigeria. This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, while Sociological Theory serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing the literary text.
Keywords: Crisis, governance, resistance, *A Parliament of Vultures*, Sociological theory.

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Introduction

The crisis of governance in post-colonial Nigeria has been a subject of intense debate as the country grapples with fundamental corruption, political instability and leadership disaster. In *A Parliament of Vultures* Emeka Nwabueze articulates a trenchant critique of these challenges through vivid allegorical and symbolic devices, highlighting the moral and political decay afflicting the nation's leadership. The creative legacy of post-colonial African literature is manifest in contemporary African works, with writers responding to key social developments. These circumstances impact themes of literature that is why literature captures human experiences. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1972: xv) affirms:

> Literature does not develop in a vacuum. It is given impetus, shape and direction and even area of concern by the social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and other forces cannot be ignored especially in Africa where modern literature has grown out of the gory background of European imperialism.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's proclamation is hinged on the understanding that there is a nexus between literature and societal factors. Literature cannot exist apart from society. David Ker (2003:1) states, "African writers bore resemblance 'to the horror', the nightmare of history that modernist writers in Europe and America were writing about. Modernism provided the African novelist with an art that could adequately express his view of history". *A Parliament of Vultures* is set against the backdrop of a fictional yet highly recognizable political system; the play represents ruling elite that function with little or no regard for the welfare of the people. Through the metaphor of "vultures", the playwright illuminates the blood sucking relationship between the political class and the masses, highlighting how the greed and self-interest of those in political positions magnify the nation's multiple problems.

This paper seeks to explore the social realities in *A Parliament of Vultures*, examining how the play reflects the governance crisis in Nigeria. By highlighting the play's depiction of political power, corruption and resistance, this researcher will offer deeper profound insight of functions of literature in appraising incompetent governance and advocating for societal transformation in the framework of post-independence Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is sociological theory. Sociological theory was introduced by Kenneth Burke in his literary work titled *Literature as Equipment for Living: Critical Theory Since Plato*. Kenneth Burke says that literature is a, "Strategic naming of a situation which singles out a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure" (596). The result of this line of thought is that literature cannot exist without the society. The society is the substance used in creating literature. For Kenneth Burke, literature is a 'sociological object that operates sociological roles in the society. This is because besides gratifying readers and audiences, literature should also serve as a leeway for effecting changes in the society. This validates Anthony Trollope's assertion as quoted by Francis Nwaga (1985:18), "the writer of stories must please, or he will be nothing. And he must teach, whether he wishes to teach or not". This conclusion notably considers literature as a representation of the society.

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Social Reality and the Crisis of Governance in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*

A Parliament of Vultures employs sarcasm and allegory to critique the inefficiency and corruption characterizing Nigerian leadership, reflecting broader African political realities. The social reality of post-independence Nigeria encompasses prevailing social, economic, political, and religious conditions. Emeka Nwabueze foregrounds subjugation of the populace, drawing attention to political corruption of the ruling elite against ordinary citizens. The masses are subjected not only to the consequences of irresponsible governance but are also treated as marginalized and expendable members of society. The downtrodden population exists in a state of systemic neglect, while political leaders engage in the looting and misappropriation of public resources, undermining the collective welfare of the people.

Decades after independence from colonial powers, African literature continues to engage with themes of anger, disillusionment, environmental concerns, and exploitation. Post-independence African literary works largely constitute traumatic narratives reflecting the experiences of the populace. These texts frequently document the betrayal of citizens of post-colonial leaders. Literature emerging from post-independence Africa illuminates critical questions regarding citizens' perceptions of African governance and underscores the imperative of confronting and dismantling the oppressive structures characteristic of neocolonial contexts. Emeka Nwabueze's depiction of characters mirrors the realities of contemporary African society, with oppression in the play functioning as a critique of the systematic trauma inflicted upon the populace by ruling elites.

Emeka Nwabueze compares and complicates the psychological implications of bad governance on the people. His play argues that Africa continent history of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism informs post-independence contemporary discourse on disillusionment, sorrow, anger, degradation as well as the ways in which leadership positions of the continent is constructed. People who are bereft of ideas are forced on the people as leaders; this is the tragedy of the African society:

> OMEAKU: I was a fool to let you run for elective office. I thought you could have lost your deposit, all your crooked relationship notwithstanding. Who could have believed that a roadside food seller would become one of the lawmakers of our country? Your success in the polls is the final undertaker that will bury this nation (11)

Postcolonial African texts confront leaders with the enduring legacies of oppression nand collective trauma, provoking critical reflection and emotional engagement. Infact, Odinaka Ifemeh (2019: 37) argues that little progress has been made since the departure of colonial powers apart from, "the act of reading post-colonial literature pushes the reader into crisis, breaking down accepted representational structures and frames of reference for both the people and the continent". The disruption of the reader's interpretive framework constitutes a traumatic crisis, as noted by Ikenna Obi (2010:18), "reading this literature traumatizes the readers and thus shatters the concept of governance".

In post-independence African literature, when the populace seeks justice, the texts construct novel representation of resistance through the strategic use of characterization. Emeka

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Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* depicts the degradation of the masses which attest to the oppressive acts of the rulers against the people:

> PRESIDENT: The president is a very busy man. He has no time to listen to disgruntled elements who complain about everything whether good or bad. They're merely men and women who are jealous of those whose bread God has buttered by placing them in positions of power and authority, and of course, the good things that go with them. (Raises his voice) And I'm making it clear to every member of this nation that I'll deal very ruthlessly with anybody accused of such offence (63).

Wale Oguntimi (2004:15) depicts the exploitation of the populace, a recurring theme in post-colonial African literature, "discussing post-colonial African literature representation of repression, social injustice, loss, anger, bitterness, war and death".

Contemporary African literature has shifted its focus from colonial rule and its enduring legacies to other manifestations of neocolonialism. Postcolonial literary texts invite critical examination of how oppressors and their collaborators perpetuate the subjugation of the populace. Simultaneously, this body of literature raises awareness of systemic oppression, enabling readers to recognize and resist forms of socio-political domination. As Dele Maxwell Ugwuanyi (2022:11) observes:

> The colonial experience of most African countries has refused to go after many decades since the colonial masters left. This is as a result of the myriad of social, political and economic problems still facing the continent. Independence promise a lot of good things for the masses and this brought about their active participation in the struggle for independence …. Literature in Africa, which has been described as functional and committed, has been used by various writers to reflect this ugly situation which most African countries have found themselves.

Many scholars examining postcolonial literature argue that writers position their artistic and social engagement to reveal the oppression of the ruling elite against the populace. Consequently, characters in these works frequently engage in conflicts with rulers and their collaborators:

> PARKERS: (shrugs his shoulders) Shameful! This is a generation of vultures! The way things are going, a full-scale revolution may be the only answer.

For some writers, literary production serves to align with the populace, as they are predominantly victims of socio-political oppression. The writer therefore helps the people regain their humanity by revolting against their brutality. Such brutalities are intricately intertwined to bad governance. The writer must identify with the populace in the battle against dictatorship as stated by Chijoke Uwasomba (2006:98):

> In class societies like Africa, culture, art and literature take on class character where literature is fully implicated as evince of a consciousness that seems to conserve society on behalf of privileged interests or in contrast, exude a revolutionary consciousness congruent with the objective interest of the oppressed class engaged in class struggle to change the status quo.

Accordingly, there is commitment on the part of some African writers who craft literature that show resistance and revolt of the people. These writers also make resistance ideology their main source of inspiration.

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For Emeka Nwabueze, his ideology is to stimulate the mindset of the people and inculcate in them the need to seek for freedom from tyranny. Inspired by writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the author denounced such violation. Today, however, with African experiencing maladministration of rulers, it is therefore necessary to collaborate with the people to form alliance against the oppressors. Wole Soyinka (2005:60) opines:

> It is lack of such major challenges that has contributed to our flabby moral muscles, to our habit of succumbing to the line of least resistance when faced with decisions that require the exertion of a moral will, the tendency to insist on a discount where a moral price must be paid, even where that price is no more than a temporary inconvenience.

Nwabueze demonstrates a steadfast commitment to employing language skillfully to convey the experiences of the populace, the writer reveals the harsh, demeaning, and disheartening conditions under which Nigerians and other Africans presently live:

> CHIEF OF PROTOCOL: I have important information for members of this parliament. My cousin, who is a student activist, has revealed to me that the arrest and detention of Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo is causing a big crisis in the university. The students are spoiling for action with the government. They accuse the government of repression (71)

Nwabueze wrote protest literature against incompetent leadership prevalent among Nigerian government. He uses his play, *A Parliament of Vultures* as a potent weapon against corruption of the rulers. The playwright shows his contempt and disdain for corruption by exposing it fearlessly and frankly as it is, particularly in Nigeria at the time he wrote his play. The campaign of Emeka Nwabueze against graft is seen in the image pattern of the play. The play appeals against looting and plundering of the commonwealth.

Nwabueze paints a society where morality is distorted:

> PARKERS: Yes. There's an important business which ought to be the concern of all of us. A gentleman came here complaining of what he described as the amorous relationship between his wife and a member of this parliament. Members of this parliament have to radiate respect and honour. We should not be seen as corrupt and lecherous. Mr Brown should explain the relationship between him and Madam Omeaku (38).

The interaction between Brown and Madam illustrates a pattern of risky sexual behavior:

> BROWN: Madam ho-haa!
> MADAM: I'm fine!
> BROWN: *Holding her hands*There are a lot of material things you can get. Air-conditioned house, posh cars travel to different parts of the world, et cetera. *Looks at the television set.* This is archaic. You need a computerized set ….
> MADAM: *Elated* Mr. Brown! Mr Brown!
> BROWN: Politics is no child's play.
> You'll even do your shopping in London or New York, or even Rome.
> MADAM: Mr. Brown! Mr. Brown!
> BROWN: So you would not need half a million at the moment. This is only the beginning. I'll give you three hundred thousand for a start. (*Opens his brief-case)*

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> and brings out a wad of notes, and gives it to her. She removes the top of her wrapper and wraps the money, then embraces him, smiling.
> MR. BROWN caresses her hair) (5)

The portrayal of BROWN and MADAM reflects patterns of sexual indiscretion comparable to those found in real –life contexts. Their roles as members of Parliament emphasize the tension between private behavior and the moral responsibilities associated with political leadership. The society is infested with poverty and infrastructural decay. The horrible image of poverty where the citizens live typifies their level of destitution. The same indigence trails Omeaku like a shadow. Unlike politically exposed persons who amass ill-gotten wealth through their involvement in politics and governance, Omeaku is a pauper despite giving his thirty-five years to his country of birth:

> OMEKAU: It was the result of my thirty five years in the service of my nation. The nation that give me birth.
> MADAM: (*mimics him):* "Thirty-five years in the service of my nation". What was such a service worth, Mr Omeaku? Thirty-five years as a teacher in a Primary School. What is such service worth in the present age? If I hadn't brought you out of the village, you couldn't have smelt township life all the days of your life. Ye-ye man (6).

Omeaku represents the class of people who do not live, they merely exist. They suffer misrule of the rulers. Besides, Omeaku is bereft of prosperity notwithstanding his thirty-five years of service to the country; he is extremely poor and depressed. Emeka Nwabueze mirrors the situation in the society where the political system perpetuates injustice against the people, this further dehumanizes them, they continue to wallow in poverty:

> MADAM: Who do you think you are talking to? Eh? Invoke the powers of what? Do you call yourself a husband? Husband for mouth! Do you know the duties of a husband? Do you think you can fight me? All I need to do is to make a few connections here and there and you are finished. And let me tell you, it takes more than a heavy wind to uproot an iroko (6).

Omeaku's inability to live decent life ensures that he does not rise above poverty, his wife do not respect him anymore. He cannot support his family with his pension stipend. The social inequality between the rulers and the ruled is another image highlighted in the play. The rulers represented by members of the parliament live in absolute luxury while the citizens live in abject poverty.

However, Nwabueze looks at the post-independence dilemma of the citizens. The playwright believes that the exploitation of the masses by the political elite is his primary target of criticism. Emeka Aniago, Nobert Oyibo Eze, Stella Okoye-Ugwu and Divine Sherriff Joe (2021:55) states:

> Poor leadership has unarguably been recognized as a major national question around which many socioeconomic and political problems revolve in Nigeria. It has led to decadence and a squander mania mentality which breeds all sorts of vices, mass poverty, absent and decaying infrastructure, kidnapping, agitations, banditry and all kinds of insurgency. Playwrights like other social scientists, have continued to interrogate this ugly phenomenon, which make socioeconomic and political development a will-o-the wisp in the country.

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A Parliament of Vultures presents a strong, criticism of the misrule assoiciated with post-independence political leadership. In this play, Emeka Nwabueze sympathizes with the underprivileged, suffering people in Nigeria. Colonialism to independence has not added any benefit to the people. Rather, independence has open up oppressive conditions of the African run country. EmekaNwabueze through his play indicates that poor leadership of Nigeria is result of electingincompetent people into leadership positions:

> HABAMERO: Let there be no further argument on the matter. I'll be there to help her in case she encounters difficult words. Besides, I can go through the minutes with her before parliament convenes. You know there are not more than ten effective members in the crowd called parliament. The others are noisemakers who shout for attention. Give them some recognition in committees and they shut their mouths like a corpse. Approved? (17).

This shows the type of leadership in Nigeria and others African countries after independence from colonial imperialists. The money meant for the people is looted by the rulers while the people wallow in penury:

> HABAMERO: You have seen, Honourable Otobo, that ten million naira will not be adequate to take care of this business. The bulk of the money will be disbursed through the payment of inconvenience allowances to members for attending the thanksgiving service. Extra expenses will be accrued through the making of appropriate dresses for members, and hiring the music group. I, therefore, approve the sum of two billion naira for this purpose, approved? (47).

Members of Parliament in *A Parliament Of Vultures* are model of office holders in contemporary Nigeria whose idea of leadership is their own personal interest, looting money meant for the people. These dispositions of politically exposed persons spur post-colonial writers to lampoon the corruption manifesting in governance. The political rulers' are insensitive to the plight of the masses.

> HABAMERO: May I cut you short, honourable member. Honesty and integrity are relative. However, we shall adhere to the tradition of our predecessors. Board membership should be reserved for people who helped the party during the elections. This should be supplemented by the addition of other people who can prove their cooperation to the members of parliament, our people say that it is the firewood gathered during the dry season that we utilize during the rainy season. I'm sure the honourable members understand my meaning (48).

Nwabueze's*A Parliament of Vultures* is a deeply political play which buttress nefarious nature of political rulers as seen in the characters of Members of Parliament, their extravagant lifestyle amidst poverty stricken masses underpin the devilish characteristics of post-independence rulers in Nigeria. UcheNnyagu, OnyeachulamSylvanus and Frank IkemefunaIkeji (2023:30) assert:

> Nwabueze uses Mr Omeaku to give a true picture of what our parliamentarians do in the parliament as Mr Omeaku, as a drunk, staggers all through as he lashes them thus, "So this is what you people are doing?" He calls the ignominious parliamentarians vultures and the parliament, he calls a parliament of vultures for eating the nation to death, leaving nothing for the masses to quench their thirst".

A Parliament of Vultures portrays distorted perceptions of the people about politics and politicians. From the actions and inactions of the characters, it is obvious, the poor leadership of

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Nigeria and other African countries will continues until the people resist and revolt against their oppressors.

> CHIEF OF PROTOCOL: Because they have a different brand of leaders. Revolutionary young men thirsting for blood. You don't seem to understand the magnitude of this problem. I was informed that these activists have been watching the activities of government very carefully. The arrest and detention of Dr. Parkers and Mr. Otobo was the immediate evidence needed to spark off the crisis. If care's not taken, there could be a revolution (72).
>
> CHIEF OF PROTOCOL: The Student Union is in league with a group of individuals called the Men of Destiny. This is a group of young men and women who claim that they want to control their own destiny, and save the country from imminent collapse. Some of them are unemployed graduates who feel that the government oppresses them (72 – 73).

Conclusion

Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament Of Vultures* is a bitter criticism of Nigeria's governance crisis, effectively exposing the widespread issues of leadership deficiencies. Through imageries, the play not only reflect Nigeria's endemic social realities but also galvanize critical thinking among the citizens. By highlighting the detrimental impact of egocentric political privileged class on the country's national development, Emeka Nwabueze canvass for the people active engagement in political activities of Nigeria and seeking for transparent and accountable government. *A Parliament Of Vultures* validates the necessity for collaborative action to address crisis of governance and promote lasting development in the society.

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