

**LEADERSHIP VALUES AND YOUTH CRISES IN NIGERIA:  
A STUDY OF EMEKA NWABUEZE'S ECHOES OF  
MADNESS AND A PARLIAMENT OF VULTURES**

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**Abstract**

The popular statement that youths are the power house of every nation is becoming delusional in the present day Nigeria; not with the recent inconsistencies in behavioural displays being recorded among the youths. Indeed, there is a close link between the values a society is known for and the values manifested by its leaders. Public perception of government in Nigeria is that of a nation that has been grossly affected by bribery, corruption, scandals, and wrong impression for wealth acquisition. In a situation like this, cynicism and wariness tend to replace confidence and trust. Everyone is affected by this trend especially the youths who usually learn by observation. As such, they are left with little or no option than to follow the footsteps of their leaders. The current relegation of governance to private business by some Nigerian leaders precipitates the need for this study. The paper is anchored on the social learning theory of Albert Bandura which suggests that behaviour is influenced by observations of models within the environment. The study, which is qualitative in nature, explores the effects of leadership values on the behavioural crisis of Nigerian youths as portrayed in Emeka Nwabueze's *Echoes of Madness and A Parliament of Vultures*. The paper observes that activities of the ruling class are not impacting positively on Nigerian youths and recommends that cubing the youth crisis in Nigerian will yield better fruits when leaders and those in authority model positive values in their day to day activities.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Youth crisis, Values, Observation, modelling.

**Introduction**

As a unique genre of literature, drama is always a handy tool for confronting social ills and upholding social values. In the process of performing these social functions, its entertainment property is never undermined. Tekena Mark observed that "plays reflect the taste, attitudes, lives, anomalies, needs and

aspirations of the society, and are written with the aim of informing, entertaining and educating the masses (19).

Drama remains a veritable medium employed by artists to voice their ideologies on contemporary issues in the society with the aim of raising awareness for tackling the issues. Thus Emman Dandaura states that "his artistic sensibilities are shaped and sharpened by the socio-economic contradictions and political happenings of his time" (179). The contemporary Nigerian dramatist therefore has it as an obligation to include topical issues in his play themes to reflect the socio-political situations in the society.

Nigeria, in recent times is witnessing various manifestations of youth crises. This menace has resulted to the loss of vibrant and lucrative youths to the cold hands of untimely death, drug abuse/addiction, ritualism, banditry and other social vices. Observations show that there is a close link between the values a society is known for and the values manifested by its ruling class. When the values of the leaders work towards the promotion and protection of morals, and ethics, the citizens are more inclined to respect and trust its powers and authority. The type of values modelled by the leaders of any organized society therefore determines the behaviour of its citizens. This is mostly manifested in the lives of youths who usually learn by observation.

Values, according to Andrew Obiajulu is a reflection of "people's idea of what is right, desirable and worth striving for" (120). Culturally, Lawrence Emeka sees values as "criteria that give meaning and significance to the total culture and society" (16).

On the other hand, D. Falade and Falade M. Perceive values as the; standard or principles by which human beings are influenced in their choice among alternative course of action ...they determine where people put most of their energies, what they work for and the way the go about what they do (58).

Tafiya, Namdal and Umami support this by saying that "values are deep seated beliefs that influence people's actions, and rules by which they make decisions within the society" (122). Leadership values therefore are those principles that guide the placement of priority on societal needs.

Youths definition varies from culture to culture. The United Nations General Assembly places the youth age between the ages of 15-24 years. However, age definition of youth varies according to country. In Nigeria according to the National Youth Policy Document, 2019, the age range of youths in Nigeria is between 15-29. Ego Uzoezie defines youth as "one who has

not gained a reasonable measure of independence both from himself and from the society at large" (47). The National Youth Policy Document defines youth as "a period of change from the reliance of childhood to adulthood's freedom and being aware of the need to work with other members of the society to help and achieve the aims and objectives of the society (FGN 1). This age is the age of character building and mental maturation. It is a period in life "when choices that will eventually affect the future are made by young adults" (Aghamelu,7). The National Youth Policy Document presents the youth as one of the greatest assets any nation can have. The importance of youth to the development of a country is stressed by Joseph Adeniyee who points out that, "the youth in the society are the engines of growth and development, and also the crucial masses of the people whose actions and inactions can develop or destroy the hegemonies" (np). The National Youth Policy document collaborates this by stating thus;

Youths are the foundation of the society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development in and security of a nation. Through their creative talent and power, a nation makes giant stride in economic development and socio political attainment. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation. In their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose...and because of their dreams and aspiration, the future of a nation is assured (FGN. 1).

Idike Adline and Eme Okechukwu affirm that;

Youths are the greatest asset that a nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. They serve as good measures of the extent a country can produce as well as sustain itself. (57).

It is therefore pathetic to observe that this important group of people are the most exploited group in the country. They are usually used as political thugs by the politicians to achieve their selfish aim of leadership and in the end are abandoned to their fate. Virtually every community in Nigeria is battling with one form of youth crises or the other. From North to South, East to West, stories abound of variety of youth crises ranging from unemployment, underemployment, kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, drug/substance abuse, ritual killing, banditry, insurgency, school dropout, among others. The reason is

not farfetched. Chinua Achebe once observed that the problem with Nigeria is simply a failure of leadership, emphasising that "the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership (1). In a country where values and integrity are wrongly placed by leaders, youths tend to tilt towards impunity.

As earlier, stated, values determine the direction people channel their energy, what they work for and the way they go about what they do. The public perception of Nigerian leaders has shrouded with bribery, and corruption, which encourage scandalous display of ill acquired wealth, sycophancy, and selfishness. This trend which is becoming the order of the day is having serious negative effect on the behavioural display of Nigerian youth. Leadership values in Nigeria work against the moral goals of the youth, there by contributing to the many crises faced by the young population. It constrains the youth to a negative understanding of self, leading to crises as is being witnessed in the country. John Odey is of the opinion that "the wages of corruption is what our spoilt youths are currently giving to us in this country (49). In addition to this, Adeninye avers that, Individuals are celebrated based on their smartness to divert public fund to private accounts... Those who are supposed to behind bars are bestowed with chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees (np).

This moral pervasiveness entails grave consequences for the youth whom we know, learn mostly by observation and modelling. They are left with no option than to believe that wealth acquisition is the sole objective of leadership. Where they don't have access to national treasury, any other available means is exploited to meet up with this modelled life style. Hence kidnapping, drug pedalling and trafficking, banditry, internet fraud, ritualism and other vices being practiced among youths today. This paper argues that the current youth crises in Nigeria is an aftermath of the values being promoted by the ruling class as is observed in the plays understudy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is framed theoretically by the social learning theory of Albert Bandura. The theory maintains that behaviour is learned and exposure of the individual to conditions or behavioural displays has great influence on his or behavioural outcome. This theory is relevant to thus study because it supports the assumption that one can develop positive personality if exposed to positive models while the exposure to negative models results to negative personality. The theory goes on to state that an observed behaviour is likely to be imitated

when it is accompanied with reward. However, when such behaviour is punished, the tendency to imitate it reduces.

### **Synopsis of *A Parliament of Vultures***

The play is an artistic reconstruction of Nigerian Parliamentarians in their culture of misplaced values that give rise to selfishness, materialism, illegal wealth acquisition, excessive spending among others. Election has just been concluded into the Nigerian parliament. In their desperation to fulfil their selfish ambition for their new office, the parliamentarians employed various tactics to loot the national treasury... important issues are trampled upon while trivial matters that benefit them financially are seriously attended to. Everything that militates against their objective has to be eliminated. Hence the minority leader, who happens to be the Secretary of the house, is impeached, black mailed and arrested for standing on the side of truth, equity, justice and integrity. It is the arrest and subsequent detention of this minority opposition leader that triggers off the revolutionary demonstration carried out by students which eventually ousted the fleeing leaders.

### **Leadership Values and Youth Crises in *A Parliament of Vultures***

The play in a sub-theme provides a satiric presentation of leadership values and its contribution to the current youth crises in the country. The playwright creates a situation that proves the assertion that youths believe that associating with the political class is a sure route to accessing the national cake irrespective of one's academic background. Madam confirms;

**Madam:** ...what matters now is not what you know but whom you know. That's the first lesson of life. And I insist on my daughter learning that first lesson (19).

Madam, a member of parliament insists that education is not needed for her daughter to succeed in life. For all she needed is to mingle with the right people and her future is secured.

**Madam:** (Laughs) University! What does she need a university education for?... What's the purpose of university degree without a future? Going to the university is like one mortgaging her future... (18)

The effect of the values placed on wealth and materialism by the leaders is adequately highlighted by the playwright in the character of Nkechi, who happens to be the only visible youth character in the play, at the earlier part of

the play is seen as shy nineteen year old girl. She has to abandon her education in order to make a career with the political class with the support of her mother. Nkechi is frequently used by the leaders to achieve their selfish aim. This qualifies her to identify with the leaders, attend their meetings and even contribute in their deliberations. Habamero explains;

**Habamero:** That's all right, Madam. Perhaps the Very Reverend Jossy does not understand the role of Miss Omeaku in the House. Perhaps he does not understand that Madam used her pretty daughter to bring down the former speaker of this House. And Madam has more jobs for her (28).

This offers her the opportunity to observe these leaders and in the process perfects in their mannerisms. She is handsomely rewarded by the leaders for her escapades with their opponents which leads to the impeachment of the former speaker and the removal of the parliamentary Secretary.

**Habamero:** Take these papers. Give it to the establishment whose name is on it. He will give you a brand new Honda Accord for your use. Approved?

**All:** Approved! (31).

Nkechi is also given the post of Press Secretary to the President despite her limited educational background. She is able to carry out all the assignments given to her because her understanding of the ruling class is that connection supersedes qualification as is modelled by people around her. This type of pervasive value is not favourable for youth development since it relegates hard work and morality to the background.

The insensitivity of the leaders to societal problems is further highlighted with the Presidential Press Conference organised by the Parliamentarians for the pressmen and the populace. Nwabueze uses this conference to fully highlight the direction of the leadership values in the country. Domestic issues are presented to the president to clarify and he ends up exposing his incompetency and misplaced values;

**President:** ...The president is the servant of the people and the people he rules as his masters. But the Master-Servant relationship is more of verbal thing than actual reality. (laughs) (93).

On the need to find out the reason behind the many agitations being witnessed in the country, the President replies;

**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... (94-95).

All the issues raised at conference are conveniently trivialised by the President, with Nkechi present as the Chief press Secretary. The effect of this on the young woman is negative understanding of leadership and its intricacies. The play aptly demonstrates that youths tend to observe the activities of their leaders whether positive or negative and subsequently perfect them.

### ***Synopsis of Echoes of Madness***

The play is powerful representation of the crazy desperation for political leadership positions without the interest of the citizens. The plot revolves around Obiora and his uncle Akamonye, in a clan saddled with the replacement of a dead Chief Priest. Akamonye in his desperation for leadership, bribes the village diviner for him to pronounce him as the replacement for the chief priest of Avujah. However, in a dramatic twist of event, the diviner mistakenly, names Obiora, Akamonye's nephew in place of him. Akamonye hopes that Obiora, being a resident of the United States of America, will not be able to come home for such responsibility. However, Obiora, returns unexpectedly as the ritual for his return is being performed at the shrine of Avujah. With this twist of event, Akamonye hopes that Obiora would accept the offer and allow him to deputise for him but Obiora out-rightly rejects the offer to Akamonye's disappointment. Akamonye did all within his power to frustrate Obiora into submission but did not succeed. Another divination is genuinely carried out and a true replacement for the late chief priest is made. Peace later returned to the community but Obiora, desperate to avenge the death of his wife, Brenda, kills Akamonye.

### ***Leadership values and Youth Crises in Echoes of Madness***

The national youth Policy Document clearly states the government plan for youth regarding employment and youth productivity. The problem however is their implementation by those in authority. This is seen in the play understudy. Nwabueze, in the play, makes it clear that when youths are not gainfully employed, they tend to tilt towards negativity in their behaviour. Obiora has to leave the comfort of his life in the United States of America to honour a job

offer in one of the newly created Ministries in his country only to be told that the offer has been suspended. He explains;

**Obiora:** And when I ask them when I expect to hear from them, they replied that they didn't know. One man simply told me to forget the job for the moment (36).

Ifeanyi sums it up thus;

**Ifeanyi:** (nods his head) Tribalism, they are reserving the position for someone else. (36)

This is possible because leaders of the country don't demonstrate the values of productivity and creativity in their employment policies. This reduces the productive and creative potentials of youths leading to frustration and disillusionment which in the long run breeds crises. As if losing the job offer is not enough, Obiora's experience at the wharf further illustrates the predicament of the younger generation in the hands of the leaders. Obiora's legitimate plan to establish himself and contribute his quota to development of the country is frustrated by bureaucracy. He explains thus;

**Ifeanyi:** what happened at the wharf?

**Obiora:** we couldn't find our container. We were told they were cleared by our agents. Unbelievable.

**Ifeanyi:** I see. And have you contacted your agent?

**Obiora:** we have no agent...it seemed the containers have disappeared ...That would be terrible. All our household good, documents, papers and the things we would use to set up our business. Boy, that container has the things with which we would live... We feel like people marooned in an unearthly island. (37).

Obiora thinks that he could fight this bureaucracy but Ifeanyi is of a different opinion;

**Ifeanyi:** Do you believe her? Do you really have confidence that the containers will be found? You've really been away too long, Obiora. You need more orientation to understand the nature of our society (37).

These frustrations and disappointments witnessed by Obiora in the hands of those in authority did not go well in his psyche. He becomes highly depressed.



This depression later contributes to the emotional crises that eventually leads to his destruction.

The effect of unemployment on youths is also seen in the life of Dimgba, the village youth leader, in the play. Despite his masculine strength and verbosity, Dimgba still allows himself to be used as agent of intimidation, blackmail and other social vices. This is because he is not gainfully employed there by making him vulnerable for people like Akamonye, in the play, to use them to achieve their selfish goals. Thus Dimgba is always at the beck and call of Akamonye, having no decision of his own in the unfolding events in the community. Akamonye is a retired civil servant and one-time influential politician thus Dimgba sees him as the only ladder he needs to climb to the top as he promised him with the others;

**Akamonye:** You will be my assistant. Dimgba will be the acolyte, while... (26).

Akamonye abuses this trust and uses Dimgba as the agent for all his nefarious activities in the play. Many youths allow themselves to be used by criminal minded leaders because they have no other means of lively hood. Ifeanyi explains how he allowed himself to be used as a 'front' by his uncle after his frustrated attempts to attain financial independence. He explains;

**Ifeanyi:** ...my maternal uncle saw my predicament and advised me to open up a business in my name, and he diverts his contracts to that business (35).

The playwright is able to establish in the play that people in leadership positions tend to frustrate youths genuine efforts through their attitudes and values. Obiora, the resourceful vibrant young man is frustrated into a violent and psychologically imbalanced youth while Dimgba, the strong and energetic youth leader is transformed into an assassin. This frustration leaves negative effect on the psyche of the youths, which in the long run culminates to the many youth crises being witnessed in the country.

### **Conclusion**

The playwright is many a times referred to as the societal watchdog, thus they are motivated by societal issues and work towards rectifying them through their plays. It is in light of this that we have examined these two plays of Emeka Nwabueze to see their prescriptions for the current youth crises in Nigerian. Having considered the textual analysis of the plays understudy, it is observed that leaders in the plays model negative values for the youth resulting in their

crises. Nwabueze demonstrates in the plays that leadership values exemplified in the plays have adverse effect on the behaviour of youths, and have the potential of triggering off youth crises as is being witnessed in the country recently. Nigerian leaders, by all standards have demonstrated their interest more on personal affluence to the detriment of the younger generation in particular and the masses in general. Nigeria needs leaders with vision and integrity that are capable of harnessing the innate potentials of the young population for effective development. The aspiration of young Nigerians is that competent positive value driven leaders should take over the mantle of leadership in the country at all levels for inclusive development. The plays aim at raising the consciousness of leaders at all levels to realise that their leadership values have serious effect on the psyche of the youths and affects their behavioural display. Those in leadership positions therefore should see themselves as role- models and as such should uphold positive leadership values bearing in mind that they are models to the younger generation who are believed to learn through observation and modelling. In as much as the author is not in support of the ugly behaviours of the young ones in the society, neither does she subscribe to their being blamed for all the societal ills, because as the social learning theory suggests, their behaviour is a true reflection of their models at any given time.

The playwright implies in the two plays that to reverse the current trend of youth crises in Nigeria, the leaders should develop more positive leadership values different from what we are currently witnessing. Their current devotion to wealth acquisition should be replaced with economic security for all and sundry. When leadership values include putting in place enabling environment that can positively engage the teeming young population in the country, the issue of substance abuse, kidnapping, ritual killings, internet fraud, drug and human trafficking etc. will be nipped in the bud.

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