Interrogating the Leadership Gaps and Godfatherism in the Nigerian Socioeconomic Structure: A Focus on Paul Ugbege's *Mr Chairman Sir!*

By

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Abstract

This study examines the disturbing leadership failure and unnecessary institutionalization of godfatherism in the Nigerian socioeconomic and political space with a focus on Paul Ugbede's *Mr. Chairman Sir!* as a study guide. Lack of quality leadership and its attendant godfatherism constitute barrier to the socioeconomic advancements of the Nigerian nation. The study aims to unravel the immediate and remote factors that lead to leadership failure and godfather factors in the socioeconomic structure of the Nigerian society. In order to achieve the aim and objectives of the study, the work employed Karl Marx conflict and Marxist theories. This is because conflict theory explains the tensions and struggle between bourgeois and the proletariats in the quest for equitable participation and distribution of resources. Similarly, the Marxist theory explains how the economic power is always used as weapon to control and manipulate political structure for the gains of the ruling class. The paper employed textual analysis, literary and sociology approaches as critical pivots of investigation. In the course of this study, data were sourced from published materials such as scholarly journals, textbooks and internet amongst others. It is revealed that emphasis on political patronage and greed undermines democratic accountability and thus encourages systemic socioeconomic inequality. It is the modest recommendation of this paper that leadership roles and positions should be given based on competence, proven integrity, transparency and truthfulness devoid of patronage to godfathers in society.

Keywords: Leadership, socioeconomic, godfatherism, Nigeria and drama

Introduction

It is imperative to state that effective leadership constitutes a pivotal foundation that spurs national development, socioeconomic stability, good governance and peace. To say the least, in developing nations such as those on the African continent, leadership roles are expected to enhance accountability and equitable distribution of available resources and thus enhance institutional growth. Based on the foregoing assertion, it is claimed that "the centrality of leadership to development in Africa is a major key in that leaders define the context and development pattern by policies and allocations of resources. Available information has it that "upon independence African states anticipated a better and prosperous continent." (www.eajournals.org). Buttressing the characteristics of leadership, it is opined that "Leadership is a concept which is put into operation by the individuals in their personal and professional lives. In order to implement this concept in an effective and worthwhile manner, the individuals need to acquire an understanding in terms of the meaning and significance of leadership." (www.researchgate.net). It further contends that:

> The very notion of leadership connotes the presence of a leader. As a term, a leader is one who leads, plans, organises, controls communication, delegates, and accepts responsibility.(www.ea-journals.org). The leader thus provides a leadership style and pattern for a given sphere of human endeavour, be it family, society and/or state; the presence and inevitability of leadership is real. Lynch (1997: 433) argues that leadership means the influence of a leader, the ability, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of the group's mission. (www.eajournals.org)

Put differently, it is worth mentioning that in Nigeria, for instance, the constant patterns of leadership ineffectiveness and failure have continued to reduce sustainable socioeconomic advancement, thus leading to unnecessary political instability, corrupt practices, an increase in the poverty rate and youth restiveness, amongst others. It is thus unarguable to state that these socioeconomic crises are traceable to structural weaknesses in the Nigerian polity with regard to patronage politics and godfather factors. For the purpose of clarity, it is apropos to posit that godfatherism as it is used in this paper refers to a political culture that allows

influential individuals known as godfathers to control the activities and actions of political candidates (godsons) in decision-making with the expectation of receiving economic gains and political authority and influence as loyalties. Godfatherism is put into further context as:

> The concept of godfatherism is synonymous with intermediary, mentoring, benevolence, support, and sponsoring. In a political setting, the concept is an ideology that is championed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party's ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest (Chukwuemaka, Oji, & Chukwurah, 2013). Godfathers are men who have the "power and influence to decide both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins in the election. In this sense, Godfatherism means office seekers getting connected to an individual who is believed to have the ability to deliver a desired outcome in an electoral contest. It is the tradition to look for a political father to help promote one's political aspiration. This unconstitutional influence in the choice of whom to favour has led to mediocrity, low productivity and thus weakened meritocratic leadership rights and reduced quality democratic participation. (Rasak, B., Oye, A.J., Ake, M. & Raji, A.A., p. 5, 2017)

The issue of godfatherism and the leadership question in the Nigerian nation dates back to the colonial period of indirect rule that witnessed the establishment of political power and authority on mediators. It is noted that this culture was given attention during the post-independence era, especially during the military rule. However, in contemporary Nigeria, the influence of godfathers remains a factor that controls and shapes electoral processes. Inappropriate use of power and self-aggrandizement contributed majorly to leadership gaps which are seen in administrative inefficiency, teething corruption, infrastructural decay and poor governance, amongst other inadequacies.

It is evident that literary scholars such as dramatists have used their creative talents to criticise leadership gaps and godfatherism that negate socioeconomic growth in society. It is on the above assertion that Paul Ugbede's *Mr. Chairman*

Sir! dramatises the dynamics of leadership crisis and the ubiquitous role of godfatherism in the Nigerian socio-economic structure. It is averred that "Nigerian politics is characterised by godfatherism, otherwise called 'cabalism'. "Godfathers" and "cabals" are people who dictate and control the affairs of the nation to the detriment of the masses. This is evident as he puts it, 'cabalism', a new lexicon fast succeeding 'godfatherism', the bane of our politics, be it military or civilian" (Ademiju-Bepo, 2019, p. 217). In Nigeria, the role of godfathers in the control of public functionaries and its attendant influence on governance cannot be overemphasised.

Having briefly discussed, or rather established, the background to the study, it is clear to state strongly that this study, as a matter of fact, interrogates the leadership gaps and the ideological motif of godfatherism in Nigeria as presented in Paul Ugbede's *Mr. Chairman Sir!* It is imperative to note that "the leadership gap refers to the difference between the skills…they need to be effective in their roles." (www.icam.mw). In light of the above statement, the study will systematically discuss the leadership gaps and godfatherism factors in relation to the themes and characterisation in the play with regard to justifying and creating graphic presentations of facts and situations that constitute the above-mentioned socioeconomic problem in society at large and the play in particular.

Synopsis of Paul Ugbede's *Mr. Chairman Sir!*

According to Ohia (2022, p. 65) the play is set in a market place, the story revolves around Chief Jekaje who assumes the status of a godfather and controller of the activities in the market. At this moment, the traders who are, affected by the floodwater that ravaged the market, demands for the Chairman of Ega market to address them. Consequently, the Chairman and the Representative of Unyogba Foundation promise the traders of better opportunities in the market.

In a twist, Chief Jakaje concocted a story that a Screening Officer will come from the government to screen the defaulters in the market, as those who are culpable will not benefit from the financial grants. To the surprise of the chief, the chairman took the advantage and perfected the intended fake idea of the chief and consequently favoured the traders; just as he flashes back an encounter he had with an Oldman who promises him a good fortune should he carry his luggage.

However, the refusal of Chairman to do the bidings of chief Jakaje becomes a threat to his life. Under the Ugba tree, Chairman promises the Oldman a juicy position in return of his favour done him but the OldMan refuses, saying that he is a lazy man who depends on the sacrifices people brought under the Uba tree.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict and Marxist Theories

Theory(s) are critical ingredients needed for examination of concepts, ideas and situations. It is on the above statement that this work employs relevant theories such as Karl Marx conflict and Marxist theories in the examination and critical analysis of the above choice topic – leadership gaps and godfatherism in Paul Ugbede's *Mr. Chairman Sir!*

It is fundamental to state that conflict theory was developed by scholars such as Karl Marx and later advanced by Max Weber and Lewis Coser. The thematic thrust of conflict theory states that society is characterized by constant disagreements (conflicts) that arise from unequal access to wealth, power, opportunities and resources. The theory also puts emphasis on domination and competition amongst other social groups. It is claimed that:

> All societies and social groups experience various levels of conflict. Conflict can occur between individuals, between social groups, and/or within social groups. Conflict Theory is one useful perspective for understanding how and why these disagreements occur… Conflict theory focuses on differences in power between individuals or social groups. This theory emerges from philosophical perspectives developed by Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, and Marx, and emphasizes the idea that people are inherently contentious when competing for resources and power. This theory gained popularity during the Civil Rights Movement as people challenged the traditionally greater power of Whites and men in society. (www.researchgate.net).

The influence and need for conflict theory demonstrate the disagreement between the traders and the leadership in the Ega market, the dominate scene of action in

the play – *Mr. Chairman Sir!* For the Marxist theory, it is a necessary ideology in analyzing the relationships between economic power and social control. According to the thematic concern of Marxist theory, the ruling class uses its economic influence to control the outcomes of political and social position. As presented in the play, Chief Jakaje maintains the role of a godfather thereby wielding socio-economic power to manipulate leadership structure and thus suppress opposition for personal gain.

Leadership and Godfatherism: The Thematic Implications in the Play:

Bad Leadership/Godfatherism

Leadership crisis has been a disturbing factor that deters national development in any nation. The quality of development in the society is, no doubt ascribed to the quality of leaders. This implies that good leaders will always make good nation and vice versa. It is on this premise that the playwright questions the leadership styles of those at the helm of affairs in the society. The dramatic action in *Mr. Chairman Sir!* exposes the highhandedness of select few ('cabals') who control the majority populace. There is no gainsaying the fact that leadership implies service delivery to the people. To this end, provision of welfare and standard living condition of the people are duties of those in power. Ironically, the leaders seek for self-aggrandizement and permanent control of their investments. This scenario is showcase in the dramatic action in the play. Chief Jekaje and his Excos have no good leadership qualities; thus, their interests are to exploit the poor traders in the market. Even when they promise to cater for the well-being of the traders, they do not fulfill their promises. Hear this:

> AKILAKIADI: …All our lives for this market, we don dey wait. Una talk say, una go give us light. We dey wait. Una talk say water go dey flow for this market. We dey wait. Una talk say, una go build new stores so that people no go dey sell for main road. We dey wait. Una talk say una go do gutter we go de commot dotty water from market enter River Niger. We wait sotey, water carry our property (Ugbede, 2014, p. 66).

The play interrogates the insincerity on the part of public office holders. It is on this note that the playwright uses the instrument of ridicule to criticise the bad leadership style of some persons who do not render quality leadership services to the people. This constitutes the socio-political realities that do not only impinge on moral questions but are inimical to the socio-economic growth of the society.

Theme of Corruption:

Corrupt practice is a cancerous phenomenon that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society; especially in Nigeria. This sense of illegality and moral ineptitude constitute a disturbing factor that negates the socio-political advancement in Nigeria. When action is, taken unduly to advance one's position or interest against the acceptable constitutional and moral principles governing human conduct; such action or behaviour is, regarded as corruption. The above statement is dramatised in the play – *Mr. Chairman Sir!* These moral question and unethical conduct constitute the satirical investigation in the play. The play therefore ridicules the corrupt nature of Chief Jekaje and his executive members whose interests are to continually oppress and intimidate the poor traders in the Ega Market. The play reveals that Chief Jekaje and his cohorts have been exploiting and embezzling the funds generated from the market at the detriment of the poor masses. The corrupt practices in the play are, further highlighted when the market Executives refused the traders to benefit from the relief funds donated to them by the Unyogba Foundation and the state government to alleviate their suffering. Instead, they scheme on how to share the funds amongst themselves. Their plan to share the funds is, illustrated in the dialogue of the Secretary thus:

> House of Assembly member, one hundred, fourteen councilors, one hundred each… NULGE Chairman, one hundred, Commissioner for Commerce, one hundred, Commissioner for Local Government, one hundred, Revenue Officer, fifty thousand… (Ugbede, 2014, p. 10).

Even the Revenue Officer who represents the interest of the Local Government Council in the market is involved in the executive corruption that characterized the administration of the Market Union. He is busy assisting the Chief in inflating tax rate and issuing fake receipts to unsuspecting victims in the market. When he

feels that he is not adequately, compensated with the available relief funds, he tells Chief Jekaje that:

> But I'm the one doing the work! I'm the one walking the market, making sure there is order, turning a blind eye even when you inflate tax! If your Screening Officer was truly going to come, I would have been the one to be implicated for forgery of receipt and other documents! (Ugbede, 2014, p. 11)

The theme of corruption is visible in the character of Chief Jekaje who tells lies to placate the quest of the poor traders. In order to deny the traders of the relief funds donated to the flood victims, Chief Jekaje tells them that a Screening Officer will come to screen them and anybody founds wanting will not benefit from the exercise. He says "Ehm… Screening Officer… he is the eye of the President himself! He is going around the country screening defaulters commot! He will be here soon! (p. 5). However, the above information given to the traders by Chief Jekaje is false and fictitious. It is a cover up and concocted imaginary idea of Chief Jekaje to divert the attention of the traders from the relief funds. This is made manifest when his daughter, Madam the Madam tells him to ask her husband, the Chairman of Ega market to release the money for her foundation laying ceremony (pet project). Hear this:

> MADAM: (*Smiling*) I need to have it before the Screening Officer comes?
> CHIEF JEKAJE: (*laughs*) Oh, the Screening officer! (*laughs again*) Don't worry the Screening Officer is not coming now!
> MADAM: Not today!
> REVENUE OFFICER: Not tomorrow!
> ALL: (except Chairman) Not forever! (Ugbede, 2014, *p.* 62)

Even though, the Chairman impersonated the character of the imaginary Screening Officer to actuality, the intention of Chief Jekaje is to, perpetually place a lie scheme in the minds of the protesting traders. The unhealthy attitude and

blatant lies of those in power are, satirically exposed in the play. From the contents of the play, it is obvious that most leaders in the society are not truthful to their followers. To this end, they device means and other questionable control mechanisms to, perpetually control the obedience of their loyalists. Corrupt practices as it is evident in the play constitute the socio-political realities that hinder the rapid socio-economic, religio-cultural and political advancements of human society.

Oppression:

The play is characterised by oppression, suppression, and outright intimidation. This is, shown in the class division between the Ega Market Union Executives and the other traders. Judging by the events in the play, the market Excos are the privileged class while the rest of the traders are the less privileged class who are intimidated and oppressed. The Chief Jekaje led Executives of Ega Market Union constitute the 'cabal' that control the activities in the market. This group of people determines who occupies any position in the market. At will, they also remove those who are not loyal to them. It is in the quest to control the human and financial activities in the market that they refuse the traders to have access to the relief funds donated to the flood victims. Reacting to, the oppressive tendencies of Chief Jekaje and his cohorts, the Chairman questions his attitude thus "Chief…How long can people keep silent over injustice? Not for long…one day, they shall shake themselves off their slumber and realize that they have been bound by a powerless minority" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 8). The level of oppression and intimidation against the poor traders have devastating consequences on them, thus MAN 3 reveals that "for the whole market for this country, na we dey pay tax pass. But nothing wey una do for us! The small one wey come wey we go use better our life, una no wan give us!" (p. 66). On her part, WOMAN 3 laments "I no sleep O! Hunger no let me sleep! (p. 67). All these lamentations by the poor traders of Ega market are dire consequences of the oppressive nature of Chief Jekaje and his Excos.

The play ridicules the socio-political problems in the society as it is dramatically, demonstrated in the play. It is obvious to state that the gulf between the privileged class and the less privileged is enormous. It is in the interest of the privileged class to, constantly remaining in power; thus oppresses the disadvantaged class. However, the poor masses strive to survive by protesting the constant

intimidation, harassment and oppression of those in power. The result of this contradiction leads to class struggle. Class struggle in this context is the conflict or disagreement between the 'Haves' and 'Have-nots'. In the play, Chief Jekaje and his Executives belong to the 'Haves' (privileged class) while the rest of the traders fall under the category of 'Have-nots' (less privileged class).

Theme of Change:

Change is a necessary tunic that most occur in the society. Man and his activities are not static; thus the call for change from retrogressive action and ill-fashioned attitude to the ethical standard in the society. The play is a wakeup call for dismounting of obnoxious traditions, habits, and practices that hinder the progress of the poor masses. To be specific, lies, intimidation, oppression and victimization amongst others have been the instrument used by some leaders to control and have advantages over their subjects. This unhealthy attitude is, shown in the character of Chief Jekaje who in the quest to deny the traders of Ega market their right to benefit from the relief funds uses intimidation and harassment techniques to have his way. In this circumstance, he lies to the traders that a Screening Officer will come to screen them before they will benefit from the money. This concocted lies, according to him is a 'joke' just to keep them off from the money. Ironically, however, the Chairman of the market impersonated and acted the "fictitious screening officer" to the admiration and conviction of everybody including Chief Jekaje. When eventually, it was, revealed that the Chairman, outsmarted them and revealed his identity, he tells Chief thus "I couldn't bear to see you plunge the people further into poverty? I wanted a change! But I could not face you. I had to use your joke against you and it worked" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 108)

In the end, the traders through the influence of the Chairman of Ega market got freedom and liberated from oppressive mechanisms of Chief Jekaje and his cohorts. The change mantra manifests in the dialogue of Chairman thus "I see the light! It is coming up from the valley, rising into our horizon... A light that frees our spirit from self-shackle to self-awareness! An awareness of who we really are! That we have the power! (p. 113).

Character Delineation in the Play: An Analysis

Chief Jekaje: He is the founding member and the Godfather of Ega market politics. He is the father in-law to Chairman. Chief Jekaje controls reasonable size of investments in the Ega market and he is determined to hold on to power to protect his integrity and investments. When the former Chairman of Ega market became untrusted, it was Chief Jekaje that brought the idea of replacing him with another Chairman that will be loyal to them. Judging from his utterances in the play, Chief Jekaje is rude and silly in his words. He tells MAN 2 that "It is your father nobody wan hear his own! You hear! Your father that cannot fit bury his father properly, he is the one nobody wan hear!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 1). Also, Chief Jekaje is a cunny and deceitful man. To ensure that the traders do not benefit from the money given to them, he concocted the idea that a Screening Officer will come to screen the people and those found wanting would not benefit from the relief funds. He says "before we give money, Screening Officer will come from federal capital to screen you!... Screening Officer… he is the eye of the President himself! He is going around the country screening defaulters commot! He will be here soon!" (p. 5). Chief Jekaje is a corrupt leader whose stock-in-trade is to emblezzle public funds. It is on this note that he ensures that the relief funds are, shared amongst him and his executives. Again, when his daughter, Madam the Madam, Chairman's wife spurs him to make her husband release money for her foundation laying ceremony (pet project), Chief Jekaje says to her "good! good! One million for my daughter then! And I go remove my percentage immediately!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 61). The dramatic action reveals that Chief Jekaje is man of strong will. This is evident when the Screening Officer attempts to reject the bribe offer given to him by Chief Jekaje. He replies him thus, "you think I will shake *gri gri gri* like others! Look my eyes O! Are they red? Chief Jekaje cannot fit fear!" (p. 89).

Chairman: He is the Chairman and the leader of Ega market Union who believes in the struggle of the traders. He ensures that the flood funds are not, embezzled by Chief Jekaje and his executives despite the pressure mounted on him to make the money available to them. Chairman is the authorial voice who stands against injustice, intimidation and oppression of the poor masses. He tells the traders "we shall do everything within our power to alleviate your pain" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 3). The play reveals that Chairman had an encounter with an Oldman who directs him to his fortune. The Oldman informs him thus:

> Today, fate shall smile on you and whatever you do with it shall give you a future or close its door loudly at your face …Young man, in the next few minutes, your destiny will pounce on you… This is not for free! When you place your feet in gold, you must come back and pay me! (Ugbede, 2014 pp. 19-21).

Having known that the idea of Screening Officer is a lie and a desperate ploy by Chief Jekaje to deceive the people, the Chairman decides to impersonate the Screening Officer to ensure that Chief Jekaje and his Excos do not embezzle the public funds. Having played the role of Screening Officer so well that almost everybody thinks he is the much expected Screening Officer, the Chairman removes his mask to identify his real identity. Read this:

> CHIEF JEKAJE: So it is you! You are the one!
> CHAIRMAN: I couldn't bear to see you plunge the people further into poverty. I mean, have we not done enough? I wanted a change! But I could not face you. I had to use your joke against you and it worked… nearly (Ugbede, 2014, p. 108).

The Chairman is known for accepting responsibility of his action. Even when the Oldman tells him to pay him for the information he gave to him, Chairman obliged by paying his 'tithes and offering' under the Ugba tree. Secondly, he accepts to take responsibility of Titi's pregnancy. However, Titi denies that he is not responsible for her pregnancy; saying that Chief Jekaje planted her in his house to monitor him and the activities in the market.

Secretary: The play reveals that he is a 45-year Oldman who takes care of Ega Market Union Secretariat. He is one of the Excos who wants the relief funds to be, shared amongst them. He is a foil or auxiliary character who assisted Chief Jekaje to manage and control the socio-economic activities in the market.

Revenue Officer: He is one of the characters that advanced the dramatic action of the play. He represents the Local Government Council in the market. His duty is

to collect revenues generated from the Ega market. However, he works in collaboration with Chief Jekaje to embezzle money generated from the market. To further reassures Chief Jekaje of his importance in the market, the Revenue Officer says, "I am the one walking the market, making sure there is order, turning a blind eye even when you inflate tax!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 11).

Iyeaja: She is a member of the Ega market Excos. She is a corrupt woman who encouraged Chief Jekaje to share the money meant for the flood victims in the market. She helps in embezzling the money generated from the market as she collects loan money without paying back. She reviews that "I collect Chief… and I give you your forty percent…" (p. 78).

Madam the Madam: She is 48 years old and the Chairman's wife. She is a woman of easy virtue who marries various husbands and dumps them at will. Before she comes to marry Chairman, she had already married her fourth husband. The story reveals that Chief Jekaje forced the Chairman to re-marry to her to enable him gain access to power and financial control of the market. Madam the Madam does not have respect for her husband, Chairman. She says to her husband thus "I want you to do what men do, take care of those you're responsible for? That's what real men do? My first husband? He takes care of me!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 49).

Timo: He is Madam the Madam's son who was involved in criminal activities in the past. He is the foster son to Chairman, his mother's husband. Timo is not prudent at spending money. This is because he had lavished the money his foster father, the Chairman gave to him to start trade. As Chairman refuses to give him more money, Timo threatens to kill him. He tells his mother thus "as long as people like your husband keep eating and denying us our share, we'll hold our guns close! I will come back… There's going to be war! (Ugbede, 2014, p. 56).

Titi: She is Chairman's girlfriend and Madam the Madam's house cleaner. She plans to elope with Chairman in a bid to cart away the money donated to the flood victims. Titi is, planted in Chairman's house by Chief Jekaje as bait to attract his interest. She tells Chairman "Chief came up with the whole idea… He planted me in your house as a distraction so he can have a hold on you…" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 114).

Representative: The Representative of Unyogba foundation represents the interest and goodwill of Unyogba foundation and the state government in the affairs of the Ega market. He presents the cheque donations of the above named institutions to the flood victims to alleviate their suffering. Representative tell the traders that "Unyogba foundation will like to make a donation of 1.5 million!... His Excellency has equally asked me to donate another 2.5 million on behalf of the state!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 4)

Screening Officer: The Chairman used a mask to impersonate the character of a Screening Officer. In real terms, the Screening Officer never existed, hence, it is a ploy used by Chief Jekaje to deceive the people. However, Chairman capitalized on that 'joke' to act the character of Screening Officer to the admiration of the unsuspecting victims. The sole intention is to use the instrument of the Screening Officer to prevent Chief Jekaje and his cohorts from embezzling the public funds.

Akilakiadi: She is a woman leader and activist who led the protest against Chief Jekaje and his Excos. She requests that the Executives should release the relief funds to the traders. She is a vibrant youth leader who champions the call for liberation of poor traders in the market. Akilakiadi is a fearless leader who resists the attempt by Chief Jekaje's thugs to kill them. In solidarity, she tells her fellow traders thus "make una hold your hands! Even if them dem dey shoot us, hold your hands! Even when dem dey burn us with fire, hold your hands! No fight back O!" (Ugbede, 2014, p. 111).

Social Criticism in the Play:

The play criticises the biting influence of 'godfatherism' in the society. In Nigeria, selection or election of people into public offices is mainly characterised by the influence of godfathers. This is because the kingmakers (godfathers) would want to protect their investments and their past involvement in government. This scenario has contributed to low level of performance and outright mediocrity because of the imposition of unmerited candidates into exotic public offices. Most times, these selected (imposed) candidates remain docile as they act on the orders of their godfathers. The foregoing explanation constitutes the nucleus of satire in the play –*Mr.Chairman Sir!* The play ridicules the cancerous and unethical issues that bother on the choice and imposition of candidates on the masses by power

brokers in the society. The play further reveals that Chief Jekaje led executives in Ega market choose to replace the former stubborn Union Chairman of the market with the 'new Chairman' that will be totally loyal to them. It is on this note that they brought the Chairman that will protect their investments and actions. In reaction to the way and manner in which Chief Jekaje controls the Chairman for his advantage, the Chairman laments:

> They laugh at me because everyone knows Inyomalebo is not 'Mr. Chairman'. No… I am not.
> I am just a conduit pipe
> A stooge
> A passage way
> A meal ticket
> A puppet
> A yes man
> The real Chairman? Chief Jekaje. Chief Jekaje is the man who planted me here… (Ugbede, 2014, p. 18)

Despite the fact that the Chairman is, imposed on the people by Chief Jekaje, his interest is to alleviate the suffering of the poor masses (traders). Before he became the Chairman of Ega market Union, he was part of the struggling load carriers in the market who eked a living by carrying "bales of clothes for the very rich clothe sellers…" (p. 18). To hold on to his promises, he refuses to share the relief funds given to the traders as against the order to share the money by Chief Jekaje and his executives; rather he resorts in using the money to take care of the welfare of the traders including building new stalls amongst others.

Satire in this play is a deliberate caricature on the moral ineptitude of Chief Jekaje and his executive members. Their moral gaps become worrisome to the extent that they do not care for the welfare of the traders who lost their fortune to the flood. Instead, they crave for embezzling the funds donated to the flood victims. Recounting the unfulfilled promises the Chief and his executives made to the traders, Akilakiadi, the leader of Ega market traders laments:

> Una talk say, una go give us light. We dey wait. Una talk say water go de flow for this market. We dey wait. Una talk say, una go build new stores so that

> people no go dey sell for main road. We dey wait… We wait sotey, water carry our property (Ugbede, 2014, p. 18).

The play ridicules the attitude of some leaders who do not keep to their promises. This attests to the attitudes of some typical Nigerian politicians who do not fulfill their promises to the electorates. Therefore, it is the focus of the play to prick on the conscience of the leaders to live up to their responsibilities. Emphasizing on the thematic implication of the play, the Playwright writes in the preface thus "*Mr. Chairman Sir!* calls on African leaders to rise above blame games and take full responsibility for their actions and inactions…" (p. iv)

The satirical bent in the play attacks the self-centredness of 'cabals' whose interest is to amass wealth for themselves at the detriment of the poor masses. This unhealthy behaviour is a factor that hinders the socio-economic advancement in the society. Chief Jekaje and his cohorts are the arrowheads of corruption in the play. In fact, to ensure that the traders do not get fair share of the money donated to the flood victims, they concocted the idea that a Screening Officer will come to screen the traders and thus the defaulters will not benefit from the funds. In fact, Chief Jekaje tells IYEAJA that there is nothing like the Screening Officer; while assuring that the concept of Screening Officer is the figment of his imagination. He says "Maradona! Call me Maradona! There is no Screening Officer! You think is coconut that is inside this head? (p. 8). The play satirises the questionable attitude of some leaders who deceive their unsuspecting followers in order to enrich themselves. This however hinges on moral question that deters socio-economic growth in the society. In this connection, it is the intention of the play to reveal the pretentious and infallible nature of man. This statement re-visits the biblical injunction that says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This biblical allusion is, explained in the character of Chairman who maintains the position of moral man and freedom fighter, yet he is not very free from moral ineptitude. It is evident in the play that the Chairman is sexually lost for Titi, his girlfriend; who he plans to elope with and runs away with the relief funds. Hear this:

> CHAIRMAN: I can't resist you Titi.

(*panting*) Let's go to the table… please the table…
TITI: You'll take the money?
CHAIRMAN: Please…
TITI: Then I'm not going…
CHAIRMAN: I'll take the money! All of it and tomorrow night, we'll be out of here!

When the Chairman realizes that he has moral questions to answer, he made bold to say that he is not a good man. He further tells the protesting traders to sort for a good man amongst them to become their leader. He says "I am truly not a good man and incapable of leading you. I step down from my office as Chairman and hopes a good man or woman comes along to lead you" (p. 109). It is on the confession of the Chairman that it becomes explicit to reveal that, "Africans not looking for a good man, no. Africa is looking for someone with a will, a will to be responsible to the people; a will to turn the wheel of change no matter who it hurts…" (p. iv). What therefore constitutes satire in the character of Chairman is the pretentious nature of man. No man therefore is perfect, no matter his or her contributions to better the society. The dramatic flaw in the character of Chairman is the sexual quest for Titi's love, which made him to sign a document to elope and run away with the relief funds with her.

The issues of bad governance and poor leadership have contributed to huge corruption and low level of development in Nigeria. This has resulted to situations where few persons (cabals) control the available socio-economic resources at the detriment of the masses. This reckless abandonment of the poor masses has resulted to restiveness and outright loss of lives and property in the society. This situation is, demonstrated in the dramatic action in the play – *Mr. Chairman Sir!* It is in reaction to the unwholesome and unethical practices of the leaders (those in positions of authority) that the play ridicules their excesses. The intention of the playwright is to interrogate human and social follies that negate the growth of the society. To say the least; issues connected to leadership question, corrupt practices, low level of socio-economic advancement of the people are the socio-political realities that bedevil the human society in which the play satirises.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this work has critically interrogated the leadership gaps and godfatherism in the Nigerian socioeconomic structure with particular attention to analyzing Paul Ugefde's *Mr. Chairman Sir!* The work established the background that motivated the study. It is noted that in most market places in Nigeria and its environs, leadership failure remains a disturbing factor to the smooth administration of the day-to-day activities in such a place. More so, the influence of godfathers in society as dramatized in the play is disturbing as it negates the moral and ethical principles governing human conducts. As exemplified in the play Chief Jekaje and his cohorts represent a leadership culture rooted in corruption, exploitation, and systems oppression. Basically, the play serves as a sociopolitical commentary and a call to moral reawaking. It therefore strongly reinforces the need to interrogate leadership quality and accountability in society. No doubt, it is deduced that, the playwrights social and artistic vision is to dislodge the godfatherism factor in the socioeconomic structure of man and thus encourage effective and efficient leadership that will enhance harmony and cordial relationships in society.

Recommendations

Having extensively analysed and discussed the leadership gaps and godfatherism in Paul Ugede's *Mr. Chairman Sir!* the reseacher puts forward the following recommendations thus;

- It is the kind recommendation of this study that attention should be paid in recruiting or selecting or electing leaders in society. To this end, credible individuals of integrity should be allowed to man positions of authority in order to provide quality and efficient leadership to the people.
- To work advocates for continuous civic education that is geared towards enlightening the citizens about their constitutional rights, responsibilities and accountability in leadership. This is because, when the masses are adequately informed they can confront bad leaders and seek for accountability and justice.
- It is the modest recommendation of the paper that the fight against corruption must as a matter of fact be strengthened through legal reform. This will help to enforce the existing laws. The paper advocates that the

culture of impunity that allows leaders to act without consequences must be abolished as a matter of fact.

- ❖ The paper is of the opinion that leaders must be reminded that leadership is a form of entrusted stewardship rather than an avenue for personal gain and authoritarian control.
- ❖ It is recommended that dramatists should be encouraged to use their creative works to examine social problems such as leadership gaps (failure) and godfatherism that characterized the Nigerian nation nowadays. This singular attitude will go a long way in checkmating the anomalies and thus institutionalise social order in society

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