

## The Moral Burden of the Artist and Oracle of Wisdom in Nigeria's Democracy

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### ABSTRACT

*There is an aesthetical and intuitive plank or link between morality and governance. Also there is a phenomenological bridge among existential questions and semiotics of immorality, bad governance, lawlessness, food insecurity, unaccountability, lack of transparency, religious extremism, insurgency, inflation, corruption, mismanagement, domestic violence, misogyny, gender problems and political instability. Most of our Nigerian writers and dramatists have no virtue and the knowledge. They wear ethnic cocoon or biases that could not allow them to discern the truth, say it and ready to die for it as Socrates did? One is either an Oracle of wisdom or the oracle of truth like Socrates or not; there is no halfway to it, it is an absolute confession otherwise it is not oracular.*

### INTRODUCTION

Philosophy, Morality and Democratic governance in Nigeria is one of the most charitable, substantial, iconic and epic questions of today. This is because a quantum of concerns has been raised over the phenomenal and exponential exacerbation of unethical build up against Democracy, spiking of the stakes with unethical democratic practices and the corresponding economic, political and cultural despair, anguish, conundrum and problematic.

We are short of saying therefore just as there is an aesthetical and intuitive plank or link between morality and governance there is nonetheless a phenomenological bridge among existential questions and semiotics of immorality, bad governance, lawlessness, food insecurity, unaccountability, lack of transparency, religious extremism, insurgency, inflation, corruption, mismanagement, domestic violence, misogyny, gender problems and political instability.

### THE ORACLE OF WISDOM

The Oracle of Wisdom are the sagacious intellectual class, the literati, the voices of reason, the philosophers-king and the creative writers, poets visual and audio artists interfacing with the orgies and contradictions of life. J.B Akam would describe human condition of persistent struggle out of which unhappiness predominates (Okafor, 2017:1) as an essential

philosophic equipoise in his revered work titled, "The Oracle of Wisdom towards philosophic Equipoise" (Akam 2017). This is a truism even as he referentially acknowledged the unhappy Duke in Shakespeare saying to his unhappy companion, Jagues.

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy;  
This wide and universal theater  
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
Where we play in. (Shakespeare, 1996:622.)

Although human highest good is happiness to majority of the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary thinkers, it is nonetheless pontificated as a predicament by a class of modern philosophers called the Existentialists who see the highest good as freedom, authenticity and responsibility as against despair, anguish and turmoil.

This concern of thinkers, poets, folklorists, sages and writers over the ages underlines the occupation and preoccupation of voices of reason or wisdom coming from the select few who have the special gift. They are the oracles of wisdom, the sagely characters usually on high moral ground and with unconvoluted imagination, intuition, critical understanding and magisterial candor, who are the philosophers, theologians, poets, painters, creative writers and critics of yesterday and today otherwise called the artists. The African counterpart of literary, oracular and sagely

activities are culturally vented through the windows of the arts of Folktales, Tables, Riddles, Epigrams, Myths, Poetics and Legends. Indeed in African philosophy wisdom, intuition and comprehension of truth are ontologically emotive and artistic. That is why the oracle of wisdom is an avan-guard moral high ground in the society.

In African (Igbo) Philosophy the Oracle of Wisdom is symbolized with a staff, an object, a physical and creative instrument called "Ofor". It is a traditional staff for affirming or stamping the truth. It is a symbol of holiness and spirit of ancestors, and its relation to God is truth (Dukor, 2010; 159). As part of African philosophy an ordained Oracle of Wisdom would chant a canticle holding the staff of Ofor in the poetry I call the Muse of Truth Oracle (For Gbusaizu Dukor 1830 - 1958) thus:

### The Muse of Truth Oracle

*Oracle,*

*He is who carry,  
The weight of old age,  
The expectation of grey hair,  
And the duty of wisdom.*

*There is power in the truth,  
The power of the oracle is the truth,  
The oracle in him is the truth.  
Hence his power is the truth.*

*The 'geist', the spirit which he is,  
Has the power of the spoken word,  
The animistic version of transcendental reality,  
The divine spark and utterance of totality.  
The truth of the spoken word,  
Is the light and sound of God,  
By which all things come to pass.*

*The oracle,  
Raises the symbol of truth - ofo  
Authority,  
And the sun rises,  
When it returns on the floor,  
The sun sets.  
When the spoken words are uttered,  
The planetary movement completes a cycle,  
Neither the symbol nor the word,  
Vibrates without the enemies,  
Heel on move.*

*Alas! He carry the symbol of truth,  
And wisdom.  
The symbol of truth,*

*Is in his hand and in his mouth,  
He is an enigma,  
His shield and buckler is the truth,  
The amour and weapon against enemies.*

*When the truth oracle pauses,  
Truth is uttered.  
When the oracle muses,  
Everything comes to pass:  
Prophecy, curse and blessing take wings,  
Life is animated into objects,  
Madmen regain sanity and  
Trees and rivers chant canticles;  
Think not that truth is not God.*

*Think not that the truth oracle is god,  
But a historical person, a centurion,  
An African philosopher and poet,  
The poetry of the oracle is in his mouth and  
hand,  
Truth is his poetry, word and life,  
Think not that his truth is not oracle of God.*

*Beware,  
-The truth oracle is not God,  
He is servant of God,  
The chief priest of God,  
The quintessence of loyal priesthood.*

*He is a servant of God,  
A prodigy, long legs, long footed,  
Long hands, tall fingers and nails and runaway  
mouth,  
Handsome,  
Abnormal features and physique?  
Like Socrates!  
And the gift of the muse like  
Homer and Sophocle?  
(Dukor, 2010; 131).*

### THE ARTIST AND THE ORACLE OF WISDOM

Human predicaments generally, whether despair, anguish, economic and political instability or social anomies are the consequences of lack oracles of wisdom in particular space and time. The voices of poets, writers, cultural and literary critics in general stand for oracles of wisdom and for good and order in the society. The oracle of wisdom therefore "offers sagely and philosophical advice for personal problems, dilemmas and national disasters" (Shawn Olson, 2005). An oracle is a god or representative of God whose wisdom is unquestionable and appropriated or available for solving human multifarious problems.

The human agents of these oracles are men and women with poetic and philosophic imagination who are cast in the mould of Socratic philosophers-king, leading the society with reason to the ultimate virtue and good of mankind. As philosophers, poets or wise men they are a group of contemporary African Philosophers called the "Sage philosophers" or those gifted with philosophic sagacity whose intent and purpose in chanting canticle, poetic verses, dialogic, drama and fictional or historical narratives is to deliver societies from moral conundrums. Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and others tried to philosophically achieve this mission of avid literally, poetic and imaginative analysis of colonial and post-colonial African Nigerian societies in the cast or mould of oracles of wisdom.

In Nigerian literary genre there is yet a consensus on the historical affirmation of literature generally as the handle for tweeting knowledge, the truth severally and collectively as enunciated by Achebe and Osofisan respectively; "a literature gives us a second handle on reality; it enables us to encounter in the safe manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psych in real life; and at the same time provides through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats which they are found within problematic and incoherence selves or in the world around us" (Anyokwu, 2017).

Osofisan on the other hand would argue that "literature mirrors reality but not disinterestedly. Its ultimate surreptitious goal is in fact to turn it into a telling code for yet-unseen times of the future. By forewarning of the dangers ahead, it can help to pre-empt them, the writer himself must be gifted with and demonstrate, a vision of uncommon profundity and unwavering resilience (Anyokwu, 2017).

Oracles of wisdom are therefore literary and poetic men and women with strong, furnished imagination would decipher the path ways out of which their societies can be liberated from the moral, social and political shackles inhibiting progress. As it were they are not in caves and would work through artistic expressions to liberate others from the caves. The foregoing elucidation and analysis of "Oracle of Wisdom" is a hermeneutic prelude to a rigorous engagement with Morality and Democracy qua morality and democracy in

Nigeria. The question is; is Nigeria blessed with voice or voices of the oracle? There is no doubt that there have been oracles of wisdom and their voices in the search for peace, stability and progress of the Nigerian nation state since its creation as an amalgamated nationalities in 1914 and its subsequent freedom from colonial rule in 1960.

These abound in the literary tapestry in forms of narratives, poetries, folk-tales, scriptures, visual arts, dramas movies, theatres and works of arts. In the same vein, the philosopher-artist-poet-imaginative engagement of the ills of the traditional and modern Nigerian society are the natural and anthropological extension of the knowledge work of the ethno universal enterprise cum precipitated reason of philosophers – king and academics.

There is no doubt or skepticism about the callings of the philosopher artists and the philosophers – king or academics and even their collaborations in critical engagement of post-colonial Nigerian state, because while the former is the product and gadfly of his space and time, society and culture the later as the philosopher king is the excavator or purveyor of truth in its cultural sublimity.

In the critical and or conceptual engagement of the society as it were, both the philosopher-artist or critic and philosopher king or academic are knowledge or wisdom workers for the preservation and innovation of human values and society.

The oracle of wisdom is a philosopher, an artist and scientist. They are the gadfly of the society in every society. They are the products of their society and time; take for instance, Socrates of Athens who postulated knowledge as virtue. He was the oracle of wisdom of the Ancient Greek time at the period of immense speculations and diversity of learning when the enormous threat to Greece by the Vast Persian Empire had subsided.

The knowledge work of his time was to unveil what constitute the fundamental stuff of the earthly substance. For him what constitute knowledge in this direction is virtue i.e. virtue is knowledge as "no one does wrong voluntarily". (Warner; 1988:55) This knowledge is the truth or the good. This moral philosopher and oracle of wisdom of all times before Jesus Christ so galvanized the society in theory and practice that he became a great threat to the Athenian political leaders and hence was executed. He

was quoted to have said “give me philosophy (truth) or death”, and he eventually died for the truth.

### **SOCRATES, ARCHETYPE OF ORACLE OF WISDOM AND THE ARTIST**

Socrates was a man who from the primordial and extant Greek literature, could be described as a man of destiny who was on oracle of wisdom assignment. He has continued to earn the admiration of critical thinkers, poets, creative writers and literally giants from Aristophanes (in his clouds) to Erasmus, and had paradoxically incurred the hatred of Nietzsche, albeit in the same literary tradition of the oracle of Wisdom. At about the age of forty, the Greek Delphic Oracle in answer to the question of who was the wisest man alive from a folk affirmed that no one was wiser than Socrates. As this episodic historical revelation was at the instance of Socrates he not only cognized it but also had the passion for it as his divine mission and mandate.

We can, therefore, trace the origin of the concept of “Oracle of Wisdom” to the Delphic Oracle (God) whose portrait is Socrates, the wisest man in his time, and all other wise men in history who are the purveyors and custodians of knowledge, literary vision and normative values that sustain and consolidate the societies; a moral burden in the sense in which today's writers, philosophers, poets and sculpturists try to redirect the societies from the brink of existential catastrophe. More burdensome is the way the ancients Greeks conceived all vocations and disciplines from astronomy, medicine, mathematics, science to logic as arts, and Socrates in truth and spirit was all of this as Oracle of Wisdom.

The allegory of the cave called the myth of the cave, analogy of the cave or the metaphor of the cave would illustrate clearly this artistic and philosophic conception of the Oracle of Wisdom as presented by Plato as form of dialogue between Plato's brothers Glaucon with Socrates as the principal speaker. It shows that the world we see is only a reflection of the forms the world represents and only understanding the forms can lead to true knowledge and then to wisdom. The metaphor of the cave is an imagery of a cave in which prisoners are kept. Since children, they are all chained so that their legs and necks are immobile and forced to look only at a wall in front of them. Behind the prisoners is a fire and between the fire and the prisoner is a raised walkway on which people (puppeteers)

can walk carrying objects, human and animal figures. The prisoners could only see these flickering images on the wall in front of them since they could not move their heads, and so, naturally enough, they presumed the images to be real rather than just shadowy representation of what is actually real. Socrates twist in this plot is when the prisoner got released to turn and look at the fire, he notices that the images weren't real items on the walkway. If the prisoner is taken from the cave and brought into the open the disorientation would be much more severe as the light of the sun would be much more brilliant than the fire, where the prisoner would be able to see beyond shadows to the knowledge and reality (forms) of the world to the consternation of his former position and his colleagues in the cave. (Plato, BKS VII & VIII)

Socrates through his disciple, Plato had configured the allegory of the cave to demonstrate that true knowledge is inmate in man although he could be in a cave by circumstances of orientation, discipline, education and socialization, and unless he or she is freed from the cave and shackles he or she cannot see the light of the sun nor observe cognitively the forms of things or realities. Socrates and Plato were masters in poetic metaphorical and creative plots and narratives for the purpose of highlighting the truths for good economic, social and philosophical life and ultimately for the moral society and good governance. Truth is the social engine of a good society and the instrument of liberation from the clutches of ignorance and economic and political backwards.

Oracle of wisdom is, therefore, the Oracle of truth and wherein situated the corridor of a moral society where poets, creative writers, movies actors in Nollywood or Hollywood novelists, dramatist and philosophers are the scavengers and interlocutors of truths that underlie every moral democratic flux. However the best representative or ideal Oracle of Wisdom is Socrates, the Oracle of truth and morality as well as the wisest man in Athens of his time. Literary and philosophically he educated and admonished the Athenians to eschew immorality, greed, profligacy and falsehood and live a good life governed by the truth. In the Greek “Agora” or village square or market place he thought every gathering on good life and truth. His artistic and literally vocation was dialogues, dramas and poetries as means of teaching and propagating truth and justice in the society. He disciple Plato furthered his ideas on dramatic and poetic teachings on

justice and political economy in the *Republic*. A non compromiser of truth and morality, when the Athenian nobles and leaders became outraged with his teachings and wanted to execute him, Socrates refused a leeway of escape from Athens because, for him it is either philosophy (truth) or death because a man who lived and grew in a society must be subject to its laws. The noose of the Athenian law was enacted to have its way and Socrates was executed in 399BC. He died under the moral burden of the oracle of wisdom in the ancient Athenian Democracy.

### THE QUESTION OF MORALITY IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

The allegory of the cave offers us an apt illustration of the ontology of truth which cannot be appropriated by those in the cave but which is accessible to someone who is unshackled, outside the cave and under the direct influence of the sunlight. For Plato, there is a latent truth or knowledge in man but which is inhibited by ignorance and J.J. Rousseau would argue "man is born free but he is everywhere in chains". The personae of Oracle of wisdom is not in chains, he is out of the cave and that is why he is under the moral burden to literally ex-ray the society and show the path to correctness, liberation and emancipation.

In African traditional societies and among ancient African Oracles of wisdom, wisdom was exhibited and truth comprehended through poetries, myths and fables because of their religious and metaphysical bents and not so often through prose and drama because of their circular and non-transcendental nature and motif. Unlike the scientific observatory paradigm the cultural paradigm of the traditional African tapestry is that truth is girded and gauged out of religious and metaphysical poetry and sensation. This cannot be absolutely denied by science without some element of truth.

There are Oracles of wisdom in Nigeria by virtue of their literary and poetic or philosophical sagacity. Therefore, writers, poets and creative artists are under the moral burden to speak truth to governance and society and unless and if and only if they have the knowledge of the truth they cannot be the Messiahs or Oracles of wisdom to save Nigerian from the conditions of failed state, hyper inflation, employment, kidnapping, Niger Delta insurgency, communal clashes, farmers and herdsmen umbrioglo, BokoHaram insurgency, Corruption, unaccountability, depletion of

foreign reserve, fall in the value of naira, ethnic politics and religious bigotry.

To eradicate these malignant social anemias from the polity is the moral burden of men and women of wisdom who ought to ex-ray and cognize society's problems with the objective of finding solutions to them and charting the path to emancipation and progress.

In the pre-colonial societies and histories of societies there were therefore, thinkers sages, writers, poets, folklorist, scrupturnists and leaders who stood gazing the star and sun on behalf of the members of the society. Socrates would describe them as the guardians who have the knowledge to see beyond the physical to the intelligible truth upon which an ideal governable society is predicated. To cognize and speak to truth is therefore the moral burden of the artist the philosopher, the scientist and the leaders in a democratic society.

Our present leaders are lacking in the knowledge of the truth that will put the society on the path of sustainable economic and political stability. The echoes of writers, creative artists, poets and philosophers are however not absolute voices of reason. Writers in Nigeria for instance, are more often motivated by ethnic justifications and their epistemology of social and political issues sometimes are from ethnic lens than from universal truths.

That is why while there are activists and writers, only few are genuine men and women of wisdom or representative of the Oracle of wisdom. Lacking in truth and wisdom and ability to cognize beyond the cave to see the sun is the moral and epistemological burden which limits leadership and the artistry in putting the society on the path of sustainable democracy, wherein the moral volatility is exacerbated by the ills of corruption, ethnicity, religious bigotry and crass-maternalism.

At certain closets, space and time the poetic, creative or artistic canvas of Nigerian literary scenario are only episodes of ethnic and religious undulations in consonance with already existing challenges and political divides without connectivity or appropriation to the summit of reason, the epitome and canvas of the Oracle of wisdom represented very well by Socrates.

The question of morality in Nigeria's Democracy is therefore, a societal problem in a moral society inhabited by moral agents and

unless these agents conform with the dictates of reasons excavated and enumerated by the touch bearers who are men and women of reason, who are out of the cave, who are the guardians and who are Oracles or representatives of the Oracles of reason or wisdom the society, the Nigerian nation state would remain morally upside down and the resulting catharsis or anomie would continue to subsist as the moral burden of the leaders, poets, creative writers and philosophers.

Plato, the disciple of Socrates said that “the human race will never see the end of troubles until political power is entrusted to the lover of wisdom” (Dukor, 2004:V) and Francis MacDonald Cornford collaborated Plato's saying, “so long as power is valued as the means to wealth, the helm of the ship will be grasped by man of business whose Bible is his profit and loss account” (Dukor, 2004:V).

Who are the Plato's lovers of wisdom? They are the select few who embody and exemplify the Oracle of wisdom and truth through leadership, poetry, creative and philosophical writings and who impact societies and nations positively. The moral burden of the men and women of wisdom in their true or naive roles as representatives or subjects, of Oracles of wisdom or truth is there in ability to change the Nigeria's democracy and put it on the path of sustainable progress and virility through evocative literary and poetic equipoise.

The irony of Nigeria's nascent democracy is that it is a harvest of corruption of all moral spheres of human existence in the mist of abundance of literary flavor from dramatic arts, movies, poetry to philosophical narratives. Machiavelli, an Italian political theorist and the author of *The Prince* and *The Discourse* was a writer whose conception of power and principality in the *Prince* is in Nigeria absurdly reduced to maximization of power without any ethical of teleological goal which is a fallacy of *Redutio-absurdum*. The fallacy is entailed in the application of Machiavelli's *Prince* meant for power and principalities to Republican democracies like Nigeria's.

The paradox is that Machiavelli is not only used in explaining and cognizing political trends but is also practiced as a political tool in Nigeria's democracy. Hence, one of the political headaches of democracy in Nigeria today is the crisis of Godfather. “Socrates knowledge and virtue as means to power, Christian baptism and its ideals of Godfather and Godson, Kantian

categorical imperatives, Singers generalization principle, Rawlsian principles of justices as fairness are only a few of those thoughts that have anticipated the problems as well as preempting Machiavelli's *Prince* as the Bible of politics” (Dukor, 2004;V). These are oracular voices in the fight against explicit and implicit moral corruption of the society in any form, like godfatherism. On the other hand Wilfredo Pareto's circulation of elites around the podium of power and Richard Joseph's Patron-clients syndrome or Prebendal politics leave much to be desired in godfatherism and politics” (Dukor,2004;V).In Nigeria today by attributing immorality to politics one means the association of Godfatherism, circulation of elites inordinately and Patron-clients syndrome with the polity in their crudest forms which in turn dissipates their cancerous symptomatic phenomenon of corruption of the system, profligacy, unaccountability, crises materialism, inflation, dishonesty, economic hardship in form of high prices of consumer goods, poverty, wide gap between the rich and the poor, ethnicism, religious bigotry and insurgencies. These not only constitute a moral burden to Oracle(s) of wisdom but also an internal moral perversion different from external ones like colonialism, post-colonialism and imperialism to which Chinua Achebe, Kwame Nkunah, Julius Nyarere, Walter Rodney, Wole Soyinka and others in Oracular maner reacted poignantly.

### CONCLUSION

Moral issues perverted from within or from outside corrupts absolutely the tenets of democracy and Nigeria have had abundance of literatures, poetries, narratives and dramas illustrating, interlocuting and ex-raying them but the moral burden of authors and writers is to live up to the aesthetics, sublime epistemological and ontological status of Oracles of truth or wisdom. One outcome of critical thinking of oracular nature that have the capacity to visualize and positively influence the society is the manifesto of the international documentary festival which demands “a cinema culture that deepens democracy, advocates responsibility, elevates accountability, defends human rights and freedoms and exposes the vestiges of disease, poverty and illiteracy” (Bukola Oyebedo, 2016:25).

How many of our Nigerian writers and dramatists have the virtue and the knowledge outside the cave and ethnic cocoon or biases to discern the truth, say it and ready to die for it as

## The Moral Burden of the Artist and Oracle of Wisdom in Nigeria's Democracy

Socrates did? One is either an Oracle of wisdom or the oracle of truth like Socrates or not; there is no halfway to it, it is an absolute confession otherwise it is not oracular. All the social, economic, political and cultural problems of Nigeria are moral problems which are defaceable by morally oracular agents who are called oracles of wisdom.

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