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Corruption and Value Re-Orientation in Nigeria: A Look at an Igbo Poem

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of the present socio-economic and political trauma going on in most developing African countries, especially Nigeria, our leaders do nothing but misappropriate and loot the public funds instead of alleviating the sufferings of the poor masses. It is this ugly trend that has necessitated the attention of the study. Contemporary writers have continually used works on poetry to expose the ills in the society in order to help transform the society positively. The objective of this study therefore is to critically highlight the societal vices of corrupt practice arising from our abnormal society that treats lootings of public funds with non challancy; leaders siphon the wealth of the nation oversees and cares less of the poverty stricken masses. The study adopted the survey research method. **THE POEM 'O WUTERE M'** (I am Grieved) by Ugwunkwọ in the poetry text Akonuuche (2006) was analyzed. The research is based on the sociological theory of Karl Marx. Findings show that the country is plagued with corrupt leaders who amass in excessive wealth from stealing the nation's wealth, hoarding it oversees and neglecting the welfare of the common poverty stricken and suffering masses. The study identifies the language expression of the poem and concludes with some recommendation given, to help reposition with debased and highly corrupt society.

Keywords: Corruption, Value, Re-orientation and Igbo poem.

INTRODUCTION

The cancer of corruption as a disease has afflicted and eaten deep in each and every domain of our lives. The abuse of entrusted power for private gain and selfish interest by public officials has glaring consequences, leaving the poor exploited and defenseless. The world today is ruled by corruption. It has eaten deep into the entire human race and especially in Nigeria. This is prevalent in the political, economic, religious, educational and socio-cultural spheres/sectors in the society. People, civil servants, government officials, take kickbacks on any government, private or company contracts, policemen take bribes at check points, accept bribes and arrest innocent citizens while allowing criminals to go free. In the market, there are cheats selling fake adulterated and counterfeit commodities, the false prophets in the church keep prophesying to the congregation saying 'I will make you

rich'. Beggars in the street camouflage to be blind, deaf and dumb and sick in order to make money. Almost everyone is guilty of fraud and dishonest money making. Nigerian officials and the general public engage in corruption and mismanage the country's wealth thereby leaving the poor masses in perpetual sufferings and poverty. [1] writes that Osibanjo, the acting president has stated that 'greed by those placed in leadership positions who looted the nation's treasury was the root cause of the problems facing Nigeria.

Due to corruption, bribery, extortions, exploitations, lack of meaningful livelihood, most youths, well educated, cannot find jobs. They resort and find employment as political thugs, party big wigs, Kidnappers, robbers, cultists because of the drive to make it by all possible means coupled with the insatiable greed for gains without pain. The leaders, in their senseless bid to amass wealth, embezzle the nation's wealth thwart our future and ruin our fatherland and we fold our hands and do nothing to ameliorate the situation.

[2] Observes that successive regimes in the state lack either political will, innovation or have been so corrupt, hence the nation's resources have been misappropriated and wasted on personal and uneconomic ventures.

If these stolen resources are spent on education, social security, health, creation of jobs, infrastructure upgrade, constructing drainages and network of roads, improving transportation; urban renewal, prompt payment of workers salaries/pensions and other economic empowerment, the nation will soar high. Leaders and government officials should not take what belongs to the public because all these hamper the nation's desired accelerated development.

CORRUPTION

Wikipedia Encyclopedia defines corruption as a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted by a position of authority in order to acquire personal benefits. Corruption sucks away the very blood of the nation and favours a small group and leaves the rest of the masses unaided and poverty stricken. It is the albatross of the nation. Corruption by the common perception means stealing, embezzlement and all manner of fraud in public office. Stealing is stealing whether by pen or with guns. Corruption is not just giving or taking of bribes, or stealing of public funds and assets; it also includes all form of perversion, decay or degradation.

[1] remarks that corruption militates against socio-economic growth and has continued to destroy and weaken efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of public service. There is an urgent need for the government at all levels to device appropriate strategies to address the menace of corruption in Nigerian public service. These political looters hide their ill gotten money in foreign banks, storage rooms, bury them in the ground, buy and build gaudy edifice, then believe they have always been rich and come to such wealth by honest means. These are merely thieves in fine clothing. They are the people who bleed the country dry and do not have the best interest of the nation at heart.

RELEVANCE OF THE POET IN A SOCIETY

Literature is vital in the contemporary society. By the use of words, the play - Wright, prose writer or poet sensitizes his people on some political, economic or cultural changes with the hope that they would react positively.

The poet mirrors the society where he belongs. He exposes the societal vices and ills for a re-direction, re-evaluation and re-education in the society. He is a custodian of public interest in the society. The committed artist engages his art to make the audience conscious of the lapses, loopholes and shortcoming the given society. Poets influence the society by way of reformation through the right things. The role of literature to the writer through their writings is to persuade the group concerned to progress to reflection to mediation.

As [3] asserts that “the ruin, the human condition or the problems of mankind and society is the starting point of any serious thought about literature and its place in the society. Literature deals essentially and continually with the image of man, with the shape and method of human conduct. It embodies essential aspects of society and to study it is to be in touch with the deeper society and to gain a fuller understanding consciousness of the human situation and the real world in which literature and writers communicate their visions via the use of ‘stinging words’, to retrieve their country from her wantonness like the bad leadership, political recklessness, poverty, bride and corruption, unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure, incessant strikes by public servants, poor conditions of our roads, dilapidating of societal values, all in the bid to change, shape and sharpen the consciousness and drives of masses.

In the words of [4], he points that a poet is a visionary, a reformer, a political watch dog, a satirist, a praise singer, a chronicle of events, a teacher and a people spokesman. Literary artists through their poems give us a slice of life as they see it. Literature, especially poetry has been used in the history of social upheavals to mobilize people either to destroy tyranny or to build evolution and revolution. For example, Augustine Nelo used his poetry for the purpose in Angola while leading the nationalistic struggle. The influence of literature effected certain important legislation in England through the touching story of Charles Dickens. The poet’s objective in the poem under review - ‘O Wutere M’ (I am grieved) is to mock society for failing to rise to the occasion of lifting itself out of the morals of corruption, geared towards a positive re-evaluation and transformation.

O WUTERE M

Ala Naijiria
Olulu mmiri na-asu wuruwuru
Buzi ala kporo nku kpokiririm
O wutere m

I AM GRIEVED

Land of Nigeria
Deep water gushing with might
But now a land as dry as bone
I am grieved

Onye wuru gidigidi
 Ka ọ dara ogbi
 A nuzikwaghi kpim
 Ala Naijiria
 Olee umu
 Ha na-erikwa nri?
 Ha ọ na-agakwa akwukwo?

A mighty statue
 Has fallen
 Not a sound is heard from her again
 Land of Nigeria
 Where are your off springs?
 Do they feed at all?
 Do they attend schools?

O wutere m
 Ala Naijiria
 Akunauba gi niile
 Ka e bufusiri mba Ofesi

I am grieved
 Land of Nigeria
 All your wealth
 Have been carted to overseas

Cheta na aku ruo ulo
 A mara onye kpara ya
 Bullata ego gi n'ulo
 Ka ndi ogbenye keta oke

Remember that when wealth comes home
 The owner will be acknowledged
 Bring home all your wealth
 That the poor will get their share

Akajiakụ na ụba gi
 Oji akụ nwata welie aka ya elu
 Aka jiwe ya, o wedata aka ala
 hand
 Akụ fechaa, ọ daara awọ.

The wealthy and your wealth
 He that takes a child's wealth up
 When he becomes tired, he will bring down his
 For whatever goes up must come down [5]

It is a lamentative poem; it laments and criticizes the attitude of the corrupt leaders that loot and steal the nations' treasure and hide it in overseas bank while the poor masses suffer in abject poverty. The poet in grief wonders if the citizens still feed and attend school because of the amount of money being diverted to the foreign account. The themes are:

- A. Looting and embezzlement of funds
- B. Corrupt or selfish leadership
- C. Lack of concern for the poor masses

The poet is grieved over the corrupt looters we have as leaders in the country who divert public funds for their selfish use. Nigeria was formally a great country but today everything seems to be crumbling, crashing and almost everything is falling apart and the center cannot hold as the poet writes.

Na Naijiria	Land of Nigeria
Olulu mmiri na-asu wuruwuru	Deep waters gushing with might
Buzi ala kpore nku kpokiriri	Is now a land as dry as bone
O wutere m	I am grieved (stanza 1, line 1-4)

The country, Nigeria, used to be a pride and the giant nation in Africa. Businesses boomed, education soared, peace reigned, but today, the mighty nation is dry with poverty, the

agricultural sector that used to export the pyramid of groundnut has disappeared, tin ore, cocoa, due to the over dependence on oil, now imports everything including toothpick.

Corruption is everywhere. The poor masses face authoritarian leadership where every day the market traders face extortions from sanitation and security levies, loading and unloading, parking fee, gate fee, developmental levy, yet after paying all these fees, there is no drainage system, especially in markets, when it rains, it becomes hazardous and injurious to health and diseases break out. The situation of the country is saddening. In those days, people enjoyed some basic things like free education, upon graduation there is a job waiting; but today, there are no social amenities, no jobs.

Today people are rewarding corruption. A young man may start a job and within six months, comes up with a car of N7 million and people clap for him. Today, people live in expensive duplexes that they are not supposed to live in and drive cars they are not supposed to drive; wear expensive suits and gold they cannot afford ordinarily and people cheer them and clap for them, without knowing where the money comes from.

The country that once lived in peace is battling with bombings, shooting of innocent citizens by the dreaded Boko Haram sect and sending the entire nation into tears, bloodshed and disasters. The nation that once had good electricity supply now has an epileptic supply of light. International investors and business men that engaged in business transactions are now running for their lives because of the abductions, insurgencies and bombings all over the country. The educational sector is degrading as most students and pupils are taught under the trees for lack of infrastructure and poor funding, there are strikes in the educational and health sectors every now and then. Our people now abuse strikes as if they are at war with members of the public. These recurring strikes deal devastating blows more on ordinary Nigerians; who in those days of the early 60's, graduates are employed immediately they graduate from school but today, no job exists and millions of graduates, masters degree and Ph.D holders roam about the street, searching for jobs that never exist. In those good old days, in the aviation sector, people hardly ever hear of plane crash but today, rickety brand of planes are dumped at the airport to transport passengers to the next world. Plane crash's horrifying scenes are on the newspapers and media. What the leaders do is to battle over who occupies the seat of authority and who is smarter enough to steal the highest amount of the country's treasure and hoard it overseas, while the poor masses and the younger generations waste away in want and poverty. Hence,

O wutere m	I am grieved
Ala Naijiria	Land of Nigeria
Akụnụba gị niile	All your wealth
Ka e bupusiri mba ofesi	Have been carted overseas (Stanza 3, line 1-4)

There are lots of scandals daily on Nigerian politicians stealing money that is to surplus for them to use or need. They spare no funds, assets or public accounts because they are morally depraved and ethically bankrupt. They steal so much that no matter how lavish their life styles within the country become, they can only use a fraction of their loot in their lifetimes.

[2] laments that it is unimaginable that former minister of Petroleum resources Mrs. Diezani Allison Mmadueke, who in September 2007, publicly broke down in tears; lamenting the condemnable state of infrastructure in the country as a result of corruption in high places is now being accused of corruptly enriching herself to the tune of several billions of naira and thousands of millions of dollars, enough to rebuild Nigeria as an entire nation.

Most times the looted funds are hidden in foreign accounts, especially Switzerland because home is not safe. Nigerians lose the fund because the foreign countries thieves hosting the funds blackmail their families and Nigerians at their deaths. The ultimate loser is the ordinary Nigerian in the street. So when will Nigerian leaders stop looting the funds they cannot use. When will they start realizing that the public at home and their foreign deposit countries do not even like them, but love only what they bring to them, at the expense of their own people.

The US government recently proves about N483, 000 million looted by the former Nigerian dictator - Late Sanni Abacha, in the largest kleptocracy forfeiture action ever brought in the US (online). The culture of looting public funds in our country is alarming. The past and the present Nigerian politicians compete on who builds the best marble houses on hilltops overseas with looted funds, while the looting continues, the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions are in shambles, the universities are shut for months, no good quality roads, no quality pipe borne water. The health system remains so rotten that almost all the kleptocrats pride themselves in accessing health facilities abroad in their lavishly funded campaign. So when will Nigerian leaders start to realize that Nigerians are losing a lot to these greedy western banks and countries?

[2], writes that the African development bank has approved 1.1 billion dollars for five African countries including Nigeria, to fight climate change and famine. 'Where will this

money go and will it be properly used'? The issue is that those in the leadership sector are no more trusted. The fund will come but the real problem is that the whole money will be squandered and never used for the purpose for which it was meant for.

[6], laments those past leaders who have access to the nations treasury between 1960 and 2006 are believed to have stolen about \$20 trillion; that amount, however was six times the amount required to re-fix Europe from the ruins of World War II.

Such alarming greed by leaders is shocking. If these fraudulent leaders invested a half of the money on industries, unemployment could have been a thing of the past. When will African or Nigerian leaders start copying some of the great leaders in some African countries that came into power with a positive mission to accomplish, selflessly for the liberation of the poor and oppressed in society? The likes of Nelson Mandela of South Africa - A freedom fighter who never looted a dime but was ready to give up his life for the liberation of his country and the black people in South Africa, the Tanzanian President Julius Nwalimu (Teacher) Kambaraji Nyerere, Mzee (Chief) Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya revolution, Kwameh Nkuruma of Ghana, Late Odimegwu Ikemba Ojukwu - who fought for the liberation of the Igbo people in Nigeria, during the Biafran war, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (Kk), Captain J.J. Rawlings of Ghana, the back bone of Ghana's economic recovery which is still improved today.

These men of courage, selflessly served their fatherland and had the interest and welfare of the masses at heart, changed and effected positive changes in their different countries unlike some of their African counterparts and most of the corrupt military and civilian rulers in our country whose primary role is to loot and embezzle the economy of their country, to the detriment of the suffering poor masses in society. The poet urges them to bring back those looted wealth home and share them to the poor. Hence;

Cheta na akụ ruo ụlọ.	Remember that when wealth is brought home.
A mara onye kpara ya.	The owner will be acknowledged.
Bulata ego gị n'ụlọ.	Bring home all your wealth
Ka ndị ogbenye keta oke.	That the poor will get their shares. (Stanza 4 lines 1-4).

Nigeria has what it takes to be a great nation especially with her human and natural endowment, but with the diversions of funds, looting and embezzlements the common man suffers because most of the impoverished structures and shabby infrastructure which are in defect can be restructured with those stolen fund.

The public or government schools, government hospitals, pipe-borne water etc. During presidential campaigns, candidates would promise to fight against corruption but when they get to power, they would set a task of killing corruption with zest. After some time, the anti-corruption saga will fade away and today we are still where we are. The whole

campaign is a journey to nowhere. There are no concrete achievements to their campaign's credit. Of recent, we have seen people arrested and detained for corruption but hardly any conviction. Those arrested on corruption walk freely on bail. The horns in detection are locking horns with the government in different courts. It is lamentable that the looting of the nation's treasure has continued in spite of all efforts. A very large sum of money has been discovered and recovered from looters but where is the money? Where is it kept? Nobody knows. Certain lootings and looters have been discovered during the last administration; definitely embezzlers would also be discovered under the current administration too. Corruption and impunity has taken a new dimension even in the private sector – there are SMS fraud, price inflation and adulteration and there is no hope that things are going to change.

The looted funds could have been used to revive these failing sectors for the ordinary masses. The leaders travel to developed countries for better medical treatments, send their children to the best schools overseas and neglect the suffering people in our country.

From all these instances, we observe that the work aligns with the sociological theory of [7] that draws attention to the class struggle between the rulers and the ruled, the poor and the bourgeois class. Workers contribute to the accumulation of capital, therefore the products of their sweat should not be denied to them. In other words, the masses should survive with the wealth of their nation where they work and toil and not intimidated by the selfish ruler of the country that siphon the nation's treasure selfishly to the overseas while the poor masses starve in poverty. To this, the Marxist ideology encourages a revolt by the exploited masses against the rulers that are exploiters. Marxist's ideology in literature is concerned in using literary work to create awareness and institute a consciousness in the people to seek justice and be freed from the tight grips of corruption and mismanagement of fraud of the ruling class who continues to oppress and exploit the sweat and their labor.

THE POET'S STYLE OF WRITING IN 'O WUTERE M'

Persuasive Style: The poet uses persuasive expressions to make the readers think, reason and feel the way she does. She involves herself in the poem to express the sadness, bitterness, grief and lament on the leaders who cart our money to overseas, while the poor go hungry. Hence the topic, 'O wutere m' – I am grieved. 'Bulata ego gi n'ulo (stanza 4, line 3) – Bring home all your wealth. She beckons on Nigerians to bring home their wealth. This is an appeal expressed to persuade the reader to feel and reason with her in what she is saying.

Diction: The poet's choice of words is easy to understand in a simple language of sorrow and grief. The poet beckons and appeals to our leaders to bring back our looted treasures overseas.

Tone: The tone is passionate, appealing and full of pleadings.

Figurative Language: Some of the figures of speech found in the poem are:

Proverbs:

- i. Akụ ruo ụlọ, a mara onye kpara ya (Stanza 4, line 1-2)
When one's wealth comes home, the owner will be acknowledged.
- ii. Oji akụ nwata welie aka ya elu
Aka jiwe ya, o wedata aka ala (Stanza 5, line 2-3)
He who takes a child's wealth, up
Will bring back to him when he is tired
- iii. Akụ fechaa, ọ daara awọ (Stanza 5, line 4)
What goes up must surely come down

The poet uses the proverbs to deepen the meaning thereby making the reader think twice.

Onomatopoeia:

- i. Olulu mmiri na-asụ wuruwuru (Stanza 1, line 2)
Deep waters gushing mightily
- ii. Buzi ala kporo nkụ kpokirim (Stanza 1, line 3)
Now a land dry as bone
- iii. Onye wuru gidigidi - A mighty statue
- iv. A nughizikwa kpim - Not a sound from her again

The poet uses these sounds as words to depict meanings like; 'wuruwuru' (gushing waters), 'kpokirim' (dryness, desolate land), 'gidigidi' (mighty in statue), 'kpim' (nothingness). From the sounds, one can depict the meaning immediately.

The use of onomatopoeia appeals to the imagination, makes the writing vivid.

Rhetorical question

- i. Ala Naijiria, olee ụmụ gi?
Ha na-erikwa nri?
Ha na-agakwa akwụkwọ? (Stanza 2, line 1- 4)

Repetitions

- i. Ala Naijiria (stanza 1, line 1)
Ala Naijiria (Stanza 2, line 1)
Ala Naijiria (Stanza 3, line 2)

The poet's continual repetition of 'Ala Naijiria' creates emphasis on who she is addressing and equally makes the poem sound poetic.

Personification:

i. Ala Naijiria, olee ụmụ gị?

Land of Nigeria, where are your children?

Nigeria is addressed here as a human being.

ii. O wutere m. Ala Naijiria - I am grieved, land of Nigeria. The poet is talking to Nigeria as if Nigeria is a person.

This figure of speech provides freshness of expression which appeals to the imagination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The poet in '**O Wutere M**', criticizes the corrupt and selfish leaders who loot and cart away the countries treasures to overseas while the poor masses suffer in poverty. It is recommended that the high level of corruption and the flagrant use of position to amass personal wealth should stop. Leaders must realize that they owe the populace a lot and their words must reflect honesty, integrity, love and concern. Many people in the country are hungry and poverty stricken, while some are enjoying luxuriously. The move by President Buhari to bring back most of the nation's treasures hoarded in foreign banks through the help of the foreign leaders is a welcome idea because this would help rid Nigeria of corruption and ease the sufferings of the poor masses. The judiciary should refrain from unnecessary delay of persecuting corruption cases through frivolous injunctions.

The leaders should think of the future of the citizens and make it a priority to rule with transparency and probity. Leaders should honestly embark and emphasize more on the respect for rule of law, proper regulatory control and anti-corruption strategies should be implemented. The president must provide all necessary support to the economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to ensure successful prosecution of those indicted of corrupt practices in the public sector.

Leadership is a strong compelling force in the affairs of any nation. It transforms a poor nation to a great nation of power, industrial and economic revolutions. Leadership failure is one problem the nation has faced over a long period of time. The country needs visionary, transformational, inspiring, patriotic and creative leadership; great motivators who have the needs of the people at heart. Leaders need to understand that the essence of good governance and responsible leadership is the provision of a conducive environment, not an environment of chaos, thuggery, oppression, intimidation and insecurity.

Action speaks louder than voice. The future of the whole people is at stake and the future cannot be toyed with. It must be properly planned and protected. A new value emphasis should be created on wealth creation so that amidst the bribery and corruption which holds back our teeming youths from getting employed, self-development and skills acquisition would be used as a challenge to unemployment and poverty. Opportunities are many for

them when they drift to the 3Es of education, empowerment and entrepreneurship. This would provide the opportunity to explore their own identity, liberate their creative energies especially in the aspects of arts, music, film making, video production crafts, dress making, tailoring and catering etc. and not focus solely on white collar jobs that never exist.

Above all, these looters who suck the blood of the nation only for themselves and family should have a rethink because they have all the money without a single conscience. 1 Timothy 6:9 says "But those who crave to be rich, fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish (useless, godless) and hurtful desires that plague men into ruin and destruction and miserable perishing". For the wealth accumulated by these rogues, where is Abacha now and Dieziani down with cancer? With so many people hopelessly hungry and starved, with destitute and the unemployed youths roaming the streets helplessly. People in hospitals unable to foot the hospital bills, so many dying silently in want and sickness while the ruling class stocked their lives with too many wealth and riches enough to take care of their great, great, grand children! Our rulers should rethink and come back to their senses, bring back our stolen treasures, help the poor and rebuild our failed country.

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