

Perspectives on Corruption and Charlatanry in Politics: An Analysis of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*

Nelson T. Obasi¹, Dohoabasi Okon Uweh², Christian Maduka³, Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu⁴ & Stella Okoye-Ugwu⁵

¹Theatre & Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

²English & Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

³Theatre & Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

⁴Theatre & Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

⁵English & Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Email: stellaokoyeugwu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents a critical comparative inquiry aimed at discussing patterns of Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, portrayal, definition, situation as well as contextualization of political corruption and charlatanry in Nigeria. In addition, we are looking at how the texts' application of the same literary device in projecting similar messages through biting satirical undertones, scathing rebukes and grim humour. Hence, we shall examine the effectiveness of this device in specific instances. To this end, this study seeks to interpret the embedded messages in the texts' projections of corruption and charlatanry through two characters – Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People* and Mrs. Omeaku in *A Parliament of Vultures*. Furthermore, our aim is to explain what the texts view as the immediate and future consequences of the alluded negative vices to the society, espouse on the variables they adduce as the propelling forces, understand better their suppositions on why these vices fester, and adumbrate on suggestions from the texts on how these vices can be eradicated or contained. To carry out this discussion, we are applying theories espousing on reasons behind corruption in politics, and our discussion will be hinged on interpretive approach.

Keywords: charlatanry, buffoonery, satire, politics, corruption, criminality

Introduction

A widely held scholarly view is that corruption in politics has remained a major setback to the advancement of democratic tenets and principles in a good number of developing democracies such as Nigeria and other sub-Saharan countries. The widespread supposition is that in developing economies particularly, this problem is widely viewed as endemic, and the claim is that institutions and structures of democracy are still weak. According to Emeka Anaigo “the quest to propose functional solutions to subsisting socio-political challenges facing Nigeria have yielded and have continued to yield bountifully scholarly as well as pedestrian suppositions which variously subsume diverse varieties of theoretical and conceptual inclinations” (2017: 25). Therefore, it will not be out of place for some individuals to wonder why scholars should go on to engage in further studies in

related topic. In response to this, in a very poignant contextualization which encapsulates the need for further studies analyzing social realities in related topics, Aniago contends that more studies are relevant and crucial, because “in Nigeria’s social context, literally, most Nigerians think they understand the troubles with Nigeria” but “regardless, the troubles with Nigeria appear to grow as the days go by” therefore “until the troubles with Nigeria vanish, it will be odd to stop discussing the complex realities of Nigeria’s many troubles” (2017: 34).

Therefore, one of the benefits of further study through literary analysis is to widen and deepen evaluation of the embedded message(s) in texts from several trajectories for enhanced appreciation of the reflections of subsisting, archetypal or historical realities of the enacted society or societies. Hence, the core essence of this paper is to comparatively explore Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures* perspectives, inclinations and agenda in portraying contexts of political corruption and charlatanry in Nigeria. The essence of looking at the literary texts comparatively is premised on the hypothesis that even though two or more writers are exploring the same subject or theme as it relates to a particular locale, they may likely present similar or dissimilar point-of-views but not exact contextualization. We are looking at how both texts treat the same subject matter – political corruption and charlatanry – which they both generated from the same locale, to deepen the readers’ appreciation of the convergences and divergences in contextualization of this subject as reflected in their messages and didactic purviews. To this end, this study seeks to interpret the embedded messages in the texts’ projections of political corruption and charlatanry as presented in Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People* and Mrs. Omeaku in *A Parliament of Vultures*. We view the messages in the texts as relevant and significant because of the widely held view that literature is in many ways, describable as mirror and reflection of specifics in a society or societies. Meanwhile, to provide a clear understanding to our discussion, we shall look at what we mean by political corruption and charlatanry within the purview of this study.

Literature Review

Our observation is that there appears to be no consensus definition of the expressions ‘corruption’ and ‘political corruption’ (see Peters & Welch 1978; Johnson 1991). Illuminating on the divergences in societal point-of-view, descriptions, manifestations and dimensions of corruption, Dirk Tänzler et al observe that:

The meaning of corruption changes over time and from place to place, and diverse forms of corrupt practices and various modes of the perception as well as the evaluation of it can be observed simultaneously in one society, in different social groups and even in the behaviour of one and the same actor in separate social contexts. (2012: 3)

The above explanation locates corruption as a universal human reality that embodies locale specific shades even though its definition remains a matter of different point-of-views, inclinations, and perspectives of individuals either singly or collectively. The understanding here is that there remains the need to evaluate the realities of corruption from locale specific social contexts as well as on the basis of specific manifestations. Thus, behaviours and practices viewed as corruption in a given polity may not be viewed or taken as such in another. Espousing on the difficulty in finding a definition of corruption that may be viewed widely as all-encompassing and a consensus, Michael Johnson observes that:

Definitions are controversial, and solid evidence is often elusive. Descriptive accounts may be clouded by self-serving equivocations. Equally subtle is the question of the significance of a corrupt act- not only its consequence, but also its meaning as perceived by citizens and officials alike. (1991: 48)

Furthering, Johnson notes that when researchers attempt to “make the analysis comparative” it appears that “things get even cloudier” because the “definitions suited to one place and time fit poorly in others” (1991: 48). In addition, he explains that attempts at definition and denotation of behaviours and activities that are describable as corruption are primarily influenced by culture and society specific “legal and social norms” hence “state and nation are broadly congruent in some places and fundamentally at odds elsewhere” (Ibid). Looking at it from a broader point of view, Derrick W. Brinkerhoff describes corruption as that “subsuming a wide variety of illegal, illicit, irregular, and/or unprincipled activities and behaviours” (2000: 241). The idea here is that corruption can be viewed and discussed as a legal, political, and moral issue.

However, regardless of the difficulty in defining corruption, Johnson notes that holistically corruption “may be defined as behaviour seen as abusing – according to a society’s legal or social standards – a public role or resource for private benefit” (1991: 49). According to John G. Peters and Susan Welch “what may be ‘corrupt’ to one citizen, scholar, or public official is ‘just politics’ to another or ‘indiscretion’ to a third” (1978: 974). In their elaboration, Peters and Welch note that “several definitions of political corruption have been proposed and generally can be classified according to three criteria: definitions based on legality, definitions based on the public interest, and definitions based on public opinion” (1978: 974). They observe that “the definition of political corruption based on legalistic criteria assumes that political behaviour is corrupt when it violates some formal standard or rule of behaviour set down by a political system for its public officials” (Peters and Welch 1978: 974). Meanwhile, another definition provided in an earlier scholarly contribution, James S. Nye adds that a political act is viewed as corrupt when it “deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains: or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence” (1967: 416). However, Peters and Welch argue that:

This definition of political corruption becomes less useful as the formal duties of office or the appropriate rules of influence become ambiguous. Moreover, this definition suffers from being simultaneously too narrow and too broad in scope; all illegal acts are not necessarily corrupt and all corrupt acts are not necessarily illegal. (1978: 975)

Furthering, they observe that “definitions of political corruption based on notions of the public or common interest significantly broaden the range of behaviour one might investigate” (1978: 975). Meanwhile, they elucidate their contribution by pointing at the definition put forward by Arnold Rogow and Harold Lasswell, observing that “a corrupt act violates responsibility toward at least one system of public or civic order and is in fact incompatible with (destructive of) any such system” (1963: 132-133). Hence, Peters and Welch summarized their view pertaining to the subsisting difficulty in finding a definition of corruption that will be all encompassing by observing that “the researcher has the responsibility of determining what the public or common interest is before assessing whether a particular act is corrupt” or otherwise (1978: 975). Therefore, it is plausible to observe that in some cases an illegal act may not be corrupt, hence applying law as the standard of determining what may or may not be classified as corruption upholds the view that everything that is not legal is thus permitted. What this indicates is that “the legal foundation of political corruption is simultaneously too narrow and too broad, excluding too much (the unethical but legal) and

including too much (the illegal but not unethical)” (Jackson et-al 1994: 55 – 56). In line with the preceding inclination, a political system is said to be corrupt, when the weight of public opinion perceives it as so. In a view that touches on what constitutes corruption in politics in Nigeria in line with public opinion, Adera Paul Tse notes:

Nigeria elites in leadership positions usually betray the trust and confidence reposed in them by the electorates. They collect bribes and other inducements from government and individuals thereby abandoning their people at the most crucial times. (2016: 72)

Similarly, Uwem Jonah Akpan in his view on the consequences of corruption in line with the subsisting public opinion in Nigeria, opines that “corruption is undoubtedly the most pressing governance and development challenge that has confronted Nigeria in her contemporary history” (2016: 369). Furthermore, Akpan observes that, “corruption has debilitating and corrosive effects on progress, stability and development of the nation” (2016: 369). Therefore, he remarks that corruption largely “impedes economic growth by discouraging foreign investment, creates distortion in resource allocation and competitive markets, increases the cost of business undertaking and reduces the net value of public spending” (2016: 369). The clear reality is that most scholarly reports unreservedly blame corruption for the underdevelopment and poverty in Nigeria, thus it has also hampered the improvement of wellbeing for the greater number of people and the effective utilization of resources in Africa. In their reflection on politics and corruption in Nigeria, Emeka Aniago et al note that “poor leadership has unarguably been recognized as a major national question around which many socioeconomic and political problems revolve in Nigeria” (2021: 1). They contend that this reality “has led to decadence and a squandermania mentality which breeds all sort of vices, mass poverty, absent and decaying infrastructure, kidnapping, agitations, banditry, and all kinds of insurgency” and that “playwrights, like other social scientists, have continued to interrogate this ugly phenomenon, which make socioeconomic and political development a will-o’-the-wisp in the country” (Aniago et al 2021: 1). Consequently, creative literature as mirror and reflection of society, among other things, reflect corruption as a topical issue of national interest in Nigeria and beyond, hence the evaluation and contextualization in *A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures* are in line with established tradition. However, their individual approaches to evaluation and contextualization of corruption revolve around deft utilization of satire to create sublime effects and achieve functionality.

On the utilization of satire in creative literature and Buffon Metaphor

On the utilization of satire in creative literature, Northrop Frye observes that literature is “so far as we know an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries” (2000: 17). He describes comic fictional modes as having “the theme of the comic [which] is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it” (2000: 43). This is because each work offers different interpretation and meaning to different individuals. In his view Terry Eagleton, observes that “literature, by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes these habitual responses and renders objects more ‘perceptible’” (1996: 3). In addition, Eagleton observes that “by having to grapple with language in a more strenuous, self-conscious way than usual, the world which that language contains is vividly renewed” (1996: 3). The view here is that literature as a means of thought conveyance and expression continues to play a crucial role in reforming of man’s socio-cultural realities by expanding insight.

To Oswald Ducrot and Jean-Marie Schaeffer “a literary work can always be understood on different levels, so its generic identity is always relative to the level(s) that one considers as relevant”

(1995: 524). Hence the essence of deepening understanding of the dynamics of the reception and interpretation of a literary work by the reader remains important to the critic.

Therefore, the idea of narrowing the meaning of a work into a preferred vantage point is discouraged and frowned upon. It is necessary for this study to view the available reading existing on the buffoon figure in literary history. Some of the critics have explored these works from the viewpoint of themes, characterization, and technique, content or inter (textual) analysis but none of the critical writings on these texts has treated politics of buffoonery in Nigeria.

According to *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, the buffoon is a comic actor, a clown, jester and a foil, and Enid Welsford simply sees the buffoon as implying a parasite (1935: 117). Etymologically, a buffoon is someone who provides amusement through inappropriate appearance or behaviour, thus originally this term was used to describe a ridiculous but amusing person. However, buffoon is now often applied as a derogatory denotation to suggest or depict a person considered as foolish, or someone displaying inappropriately vulgar, bumbling or ridiculous behaviour that is a source of general amusement. The term originates from the Old Italian 'buffare', meaning to puff out one's cheeks which also apply to bouffon (1823: 780).ⁱ The buffoon in an act of buffoonery swells his cheeks, afterwards slaps them which will force the expelling of air to produce a noise that amuse the spectators (1847: 918).ⁱⁱ Explaining, Peter Murphy describes the buffoon as a figure, which has been represented in history as witty, intelligent and funny (2006: 1125). Furthermore, Murphy notes that this concept of the buffoon figure is evident in many classical texts, starting from Silenus' the Greek Demigod to Plautus' braggart soldier, and from Francois Rabelais's Panurge to William Shakespeare's Falstaff, and then, to Denis Diderot's Kameau's nephew (2006: 1125). From the deconstruction of the buffoon, we can input that there is a satirical undertone championed by buffoonery. Satire can lead to confusion when attempting to distinguish its characteristics as a genre. Leonard Feinberg aptly describes satire as an 'amorphous genre' before providing a working definition of satire as "a playfully critical distortion of the familiar, which laughs men out of their follies" (1967: 19). Satire is a literary vehicle applied to any literary work whose objective is to ridicule. Thus, satirical works are usually critical, as they expose follies in all its forms.

***A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures*: Overview Select Literature**

Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* for example, have been interpreted by many scholars and critics from several point-of-views. For instance, looking at the below expectation performance of parliamentarians, Uwem Affiah observes that the parliamentarians in Nigeria have not lived up to expectation, hence their activities in and outside the parliament corroborate the portrayal in *A Parliament of Vultures*. Therefore, like the vulture, some of the enacted parliamentarians are voracious, avaricious and gluttonous eaters whose driving force is self aggrandizement rather than the delivery of good governance (2012: 375). He elucidates his supposition by suggesting that those Nigerian parliamentarians who were at one point or the other enmeshed in certificate forgeries and scandals, bribery, public fund looting and mismanagement are in many ways similar to some characters in *A Parliament of Vultures*. Looking at authorial creative vision in the playwright's application of symbolism, metaphor and ambiguity in *A Parliament of Vultures*, Emeka Aniago observes that:

The symbolic portrayal of Nigeria's polity in the play *A Parliament of Vultures* is absorbing as well as realistic. From an insider's perspective, it is evidently telling, not just about that

society which it is mirroring, but also about other African countries, albeit the playwright's attempt to create aesthetic ambiguity. (2017: 68)

In addition, Aniago applies *A Parliament of Vultures* to explain his concept of 'gutter politics' which he states, represents "that kind of politics that is not peculiar to Nigeria even though it has distinct prevalence in Nigeria" (2017: 68). Explaining further, Aniago notes that:

Gutter politics is a global phenomenon that exhibits different manifestations from one culture to the other. Therefore, within the perspectives of this study, 'gutter politics' represents that kind of politics that is disgusting, unpleasant, dirty as well as mucky. (2017: 72)

Commenting on representation of ethics and behaviour politicians in *A Parliament of Vultures*, Ngozi Anyachonkeya observes that this drama is a satire that "dramatically unveils the regrettable gamut of corruption and hypocrisy that polarize the political atmosphere in postcolonial Africa" (2011: 125). Similarly, commenting on behaviour of politicians and the electoral process, Affiah notes that *A Parliament of Vultures* is "a hilarious political satire that takes a swipe at the abysmal performance of the legislature in Nigeria and the total misfits who though lacking in intellectual vigour and moral decency, find themselves in parliament as a result of a poor political culture and a flawed electoral system" (2012: 378). Sam Onuigbo and Adaoma Igwedibia in their assessment see *A Parliament of Vultures* as a deft attempt at satirical portrayal of socio-political realities in Nigeria. They are of the view that the playwright's biting satire is targeted at corrupt politicians that masquerade as servants of the people (2013: 380 – 391). In addition, they observe that Nwabueze is able to achieve this aim by deploying figurative tools such as irony, hyperbole, and invectives (2013: 380 – 391). Thus, we learn from Anyachonkeya, Affiah, Onuigbo and Igwedibia that a creative writer relies on the realities around him or her to invent and create a plausible story. Thus, *A Parliament of Vultures* is in many ways a reflection of the socio-political landscape of the present-day Nigeria and as a tool for social advocacy.

In Achebe's *A Man of the People*, many critics have focused on Achebe's diction, and others have focused on the text in relation to its historical underpinnings concerning the events in Nigeria during the time of its publication. These concerns include a critical portrayal of shades and nuances of moral decadence and crass mediocrity amongst those saddled with the responsibility of leading the people and husbanding the nation's scarce resources in post-independent Nigeria. For instance, Amechi Akwanya examines the text in terms of power relations; that is, the struggle for political power between Bruno and his grand-father, and between Odili and Nanga, using Girard's 'Theory of Mimetic Desire'. In this struggle for power among the characters, Akwanya argues that, power does not appear as it is in the real world of politics as enablement to act in the public sphere, or as a pure object of desire, disclosing a simple straight line which joins subjects and objects (2013). He also argues that *A Man of the People* does not share the same power tussle between chief Nanga and Odili. Furthermore, Akwanya notes that, unlike Bruno's grand-father who can be considered as a mediator, chief Nanga does not strictly fit into this mode since the 'mediator' of desire is hated and at the same time desired (2013: 7).

In his contribution, Charles Nnolim compares the character of chief Nanga as a leader with other leaders in Achebe's works – Okonkwo, Ezeulu, Obi Okonkwo and his Excellency, Sam – in '*Chinua Achebe A Re-assessment*'. Furthermore, Nnolim argues that chief Nanga is a representational typical reality of a leader who has failed his people. What he describes as the despair in the novel is that, both the corrupt illiterate politician (chief Nanga) and the intellectuals who lack popularity (Odili) fail in their leadership (2011: 47 – 48). For him, Odili spoils his case by

allowing his desire for revenge blind the rescue mission he enlisted for. The social rot the people live in is as a result of their unwillingness to revolt against retrogressive power grabbers, and highlights the pretexts that pervade the polity because wealth crumbs are usually difficult to resist after wallowing in overwhelming hardship. Therefore, the continuous excusing of the corrupt government and chief Nanga, a self-seeking politician, in *A Man of the People*, is a sole representative of pillage and decadence.

Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* have been extensively studied, and interpreted from various theoretical perspectives, however, not in the light of the archetype of the buffoons they portray. This may be because the buffoon figure has been marginal in African writings and dramatic genre. This study will establish that the buffoon is the archetypal figure that supports the discourse sequence of both works, thereby drawing the conviction that the buffoon figure also exists in African literature, and that it adds scintillating allure and metaphors to the portrayals.

Perspectives on Corruption and Charlatantry in Politics: *A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures*

The choice of texts *A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures* for this study is to deepen our understanding of the dimensions, similarities and dissimilarities of depictions of corruption in politics in Nigeria in the two texts. Thus, we intend to see how the texts project the enacted societies' positions on corruption in politics, the authorial projections of possible ways of containing and eradicating it. The primary focus of this study is on the characters of Chief Nanga and Madam Omeaku of *A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures* respectively, and the societal strictures and conditions that mould them. This study will also delineate the position of the buffoon in the society, survival and social adjustment motives, the symbolic depictions of evil in them as well as their position as harbingers of social ills, moral decadence, and the rust in the engine of social and infrastructural development of the nation as depicted. Furthermore, with the help of the buffoon concept, this study will analyze the two characters as archetypal figures and pin-point the recurrent pattern(s) they produce and the images they evoke.

In this study, the texts; *A Man of the People* and *A Parliament of Vultures* are critically discussed as political satires. In *A Man of the People*, the life-style of Chief the Honourable Nanga is an indication that he became affluent immediately after he was appointed as a minister (1966: 37). Chief Nanga sets out to make Edna his wife, and run for a second term in office. However, due to the differences in gender and personal experiences, it is evident that, the sole purpose of these characters is to loot the resources of the nation by which ever means possible. Achebe indicates that individuals scramble to become a minister because they view it as a good source of income, "...you know what his salary was as an elementary school teacher? Perhaps not more than eight pounds". But now Nanga gets a salary of four thousand plus a month (1966: 84).

In the case of Mrs Omeaku in *A Parliament of Vultures*, she pursues the desire to own landed properties in several major cities in Nigeria and beyond. Also, she aims to send her children abroad for studies, because she feels that formal education in foreign countries is better than the one in Nigeria. This mindset reflects the behaviour of elite politicians in Nigeria, who care less about the need to fund and project Nigeria's education sector accordingly. This penchant and behaviour is widely known and well documented, thus according to Dev Kar and Joseph Spanjers Nigerian PEPs' (politically exposed persons) purchase of Dubai property and Dubai property could be part of a

river of illicit financial flows out of Nigeria, which the think tank Global Financial Integrity conservatively estimated to total \$178 billion from 2004 to 2013 (2015). More so, there is the angle to parochial and self-centred behaviour of elite politicians personified in Mrs. Omeaku who uses her connection to secure job for her daughter in total negation of meritocracy and due process, which represent recruitment through proper interview and merit-based selection. Alluding to this ugly practice, John Owen Nwachukwu reports that the enemies of transparent and merit-based employments into the national agencies and institutions are very powerful men and women who are in the corridors of power hence any cosmetic measure to end the menace has failed ab initio (2020). Again, in *A Parliament of Vultures*, Mrs Omeaku, just like Chief Nanga, does not subscribe to her children study in Nigeria due to the poor nature of the Nigerian schools, which she, as a parliamentarian contributed to through their collaborative misappropriation of State funds. Mrs Omeaku calms that her decision to send her children abroad for studies is because:

Our universities are useless. No infrastructure, strikes all the time, and secret societies. And the lecturers are more interested in selling handouts than in teaching. My children deserve better than that. (2001: 103)

Thus, low salary leads to increase in poverty, and leads the lecturers into sourcing for other means of making money, or pushing people into joining politics. So, it is logical to think that low salary could be a source of poverty, and, poverty in turn, forces the officials to stay in power for many years and continue to exploit a nation because the leaders are afraid of returning to their previous life which was miserable, thus “a man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out than another who has been indoors all the time” (Achebe 1966: 37).

Another cause of corruption satirized by Achebe and Nwabueze in their literary texts is greed. Naturally man is selfish but Chief Nanga and Mrs Omeaku are projected as more selfish than others because of their ‘sick’ mindsets which mostly focus on how to exploit their nation regardless of the catastrophic consequences to masses’ wellbeing. In *A Man of the people*, Josiah, according to Odili was the wicked, reneged and outlawed trader that symbolizes the exploitative ministers, whereas the blind Azoge represents the exploited people in the society. When Josiah stole Azoge’s stick, one old woman cursed him saying, “so the beast is not satisfied with all the money he takes from us and must now make a medicine to turn us into a blind buyer (the public at large) of his wares [...] may he blind his mother and father, not me” [...] “Some peoples belly is like the earth [...]” (1966: 87). Here, Achebe tries to ridicule the unquenchable desire of the Minister for wealth. Azoge is blind and it is only with the help of his stick that he is able to move around and look for his food and drink. But the trader stole Azoge’s second eye, because without his stick he can’t operate sufficiently, and may die of hunger. The same is true about what the then leaders are doing. They first of all lure and deceive the society, and then mercilessly exploit them. The phrase ‘some peoples’ belly is like the earth’ is a metaphor that symbolizes the extent of selfishness of Nanga and his followers, which represents the greed propensity some African leaders and politicians exhibit.

In the two texts, the authors satirize different forms of corruption which are vividly illustrated in their narratives. These forms of corruption include bribery, embezzlement, fraud, favouritism, media corruption, even election violence and ‘gutter politics’ (Aniago 2017^b). In *A Man of the People*, Achebe satirizes bribery, using the buffoon: Chief Nanga. Nanga is so corrupt that he bribes the journalist, with bottles of beer, cigarettes, and then cash because in his view notes: “If I don’t give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me, said Nanga” (1966: 67 – 68). The Minister gives the journalist five pounds as a ‘dash’ expecting that the journalist in return will

not write bad things about him regarding his unpatriotic behaviours and conducts. Through this inducement, the journalist re-writes the story in a way that it would suit the corrupt Honourable.

In another story, the European building firm of Antonio and his sons built a four-story building for Chief Nanga in return for his giving them the half-million contract to build the National Academy of Science and Arts. The evidence is as follows: The house in question was the very modern four-story structure going up beside the present building and to get into the news later, it was, as we were to learn, a 'dash' from the European building firm of Antonio and Sons whom Nanga had recently given the half-million-pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Science (1966: 97). In addition to the gifts mentioned above, the Europeans also give Chief Nanga the opportunity of scholarship of doctor of laws, and he boasts, "[t]hey are going to give me a Doctorate degree in Law" (1966: 19).

Another form of corruption satirized by these two literary texts is embezzlement. In Achebe's *A Man of the People*, no one exploits and embezzles the rich resources of the nation more than Chief Nanga and his followers. Chief Nanga lives in a sophisticated and luxurious house and Odili describes the living standard of Nanga as, "[w]hen I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the laying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a lappa [...]" (1966: 37). Besides, Nanga also drives a popular state of the art car at that time and accumulates a lot of money, so much so that Odili once complains that, "[...] because the man was a Minister bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding in Cadillac and watched over [...]" (1966: 76). Chief Nanga lives in luxury while those he is supposed to serve are barely scraping by. More so, another form of corruption satirized in these two literary texts, using the buffoon characters, is fraud. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe tries to show how Nanga and his followers in particular and African leaders in general participated in direct and indirect trade activities and other business practices. This flagrant abuse and pilfering of the collective wealth of the populace by Alhaji Wagada, Chief Nanga's successor is captured this way:

As the whole world now knows, our Minister of Foreign Trade, Alhaji Chief Senator Suleiman Wagada, announced on New Year's Day a twenty percent rise in import duties on certain types of textile goods. On January 2nd the opposition Progress Alliance published detailed evidence to show that someone had told the firm of British Amalgamates of minister's plans as long ago as October and they step to bring in three shiploads of the textiles by mid-December. (1966: 100)

Wagada is actually not the only culprit but Chief Nanga started the entire charade in the first place. The *Daily Machete*, for instance carried a story detailing how Chief Nanga, who had himself held the portfolio of Foreign Trade until two years ago, had been guilty of the same practice and had built out of his gains three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats at three hundred thousand pounds each in the name of his wife and that these flats were immediately leased by British Amalgamated at fourteen hundred a month each (1966: 101).

Achebe and Nwabueze also satirize electoral manipulations, using the buffoonery of selfish and manipulative tricksters masquerading as public servants who are interested in improving the socio-economic lot of their people by providing social amenities and infrastructure. However, in *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga and his followers were afraid that in the second term election process that they may be defeated by the educated ministers. But according to Odili during the

second term election campaign there was no competent party to P.O.P, “[...] Mr. Nanga was an unknown back-bencher in the government P.O.P. and a general election was imminent. The P.O.P was riding high in the country and there was no fear of its not being returned. Its opponent, the Progressive Alliance Party, was weak and disorganized” (1966: 3).

Furthermore, when both the proprietor and Chief Nanga realize that Odili is campaigning against Nanga, he is not only dismissed from his job, but also is kicked, knocked and beaten by Nanga’s rascals (1966: 103). Of course, Chief Nanga has tried to stop Odili peacefully from running against him by providing money and the opportunity of scholarship but when Chief Nanga realised that he will not succeed, he resorts to brutal force to prevent Odili from emerging. Portraying this scenario Odili says, “...by this time blows were falling as fast as rain on my head and body until something heavier than the rest seemed to split my skull” (1966: 14). Even when Odili finds himself in the hospital, as a result of the attack, his car is set ablaze but the truth is, according to Odili, to prevent him from signing his nomination paper (1966: 430). Such measures are used by corrupt governments to prevent/avoid opposition party candidates from competing in an election. Moreover, in *A Man of the People*, election process is violated through massive rigging. Both Achebe and Nwabueze variously point at instance of what Aniago refer as ‘gutter politics’ (2017^b), the politics of winning at all costs with the attendant retrogressive, inhuman and dehumanizing consequences.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of corruption as an existential phenomenon. Nwabueze deploys satire, burlesque, caricature and dramatic irony to make us laugh at the follies of some politicians as he attempts to expose their negative behaviours which adds to the woes of Nigeria. As an experienced playwright, he gives us a good laugh while presenting very serious issues, thereby providing opportunity for robust public debates and actions. The grim picture of moral decadence and political ineptitude of the leaders is presented in an amusing manner at the same time not losing sight of the absurdities and cruelty facing the masses in a gilded age of political rascality and gargantuan corruption. Achebe just like Nwabueze uses his mastery of creative craftsmanship to present the foibles of people who see themselves as the solutions to the country’s problems when they are in fact the problem. He presents Chief Nanga who is an embodiment of corruption and criminality in a way that the seriousness of the issue is subsumed in the amusement derivable from it. As earlier stated, Chief Nanga and Madam Omeaku should not be crucified, but seen as exactly what they are; comic characters and portrayals of social construction of reality. The politics of buffoonery is what we find playing out in the fictive worlds of Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and Emeka Nwabueze’s *A Parliament of Vultures*, and how it has continued to remain part and parcel of politics in Nigeria. Another observation is that the major characters in the texts exhibit similar tendencies in their attempts to re-define their identities whenever they are involved in manipulating the collective will and trust of the electorate. Hence, both texts present the disheartening penchant of the corrupt politicians towards outrageous looting of the people’s commonwealth, reckless display of ill-gotten wealth and insane profligate wastage. Lastly, both texts provide directions towards eradication of these anomalies through well-coordinated mass action to end the retrogression and pain.

Notes

ⁱ*Encyclopædia Britannica; or A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature.* (1823). Vol. 4. Archibald Constable & Company.

ⁱⁱ*The National Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge.* (1847). Vol. III, London: Charles Knight.

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Nelson T. Obasi lectures at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he obtained a PhD in Theatre Studies. His scholarly papers are in several international and national journals.

Dohoabasi Okon Uweh is a postgraduate student in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She contributed papers in major journals.

Christian Maduka is a postgraduate student in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is a consummate media consultant and specialist. He has worked with several media organisations and NGOs. His papers appear in several reputable journals.

Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he obtained his PhD in Theatre Studies. His areas of interest include choreography, dance, dramatic theory and criticism, play-writing, and African literary studies. He has published several plays and amongst them are 'The Candles', 'Ebibi' and 'God Bless the Carpenter'.

Stella Okoye-Ugwu is a senior lecturer in the Department of English and Literary Studies at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where she earned her PhD in African-American Literature. Her scholarly papers numbering over fifty are in several international and national journals. She is also a Fulbright Fellow of the University of Louisville, Kentucky, U. S. A. Her research interests include but are not limited to Race and Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, American and African-American Literature, African Literature, English Literature, Caribbean and Asian Literature.