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YORÙBÁ ỌMỌLÚWÀBÍ PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ESU AND THE VAGABOND MINSTRELS AND ANOTHER RAFT*

Abstract

Playwrights, like other literary writers, have been reflecting and refracting the events and happenings in their society. They do these through the characterisation and thematic concern of their texts. One of the recurring motif in most African drama is corruption, which is treated with commendable interest and vigour by the playwrights. Femi Osofisan, a Nigerian playwright, has made a commendable contributions to the discourse of corruption in drama with series of his plays. His *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft* are selected for this paper because of their shared thematics in the reflection and refraction of corruption in Nigerian society. The two plays are interpreted with Ademola Dasylva's Yorùbá ọmọlúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics. With the analysis of the plays, the findings reveal that there is no society that is free of corrupt practice. With the findings, the paper holds the view that humanity is at the crossroads of corruption because the just action of humans can also precipitate corruption. The conclusion of the paper is that concerted efforts should be made to reduce the spate of corruption in our society because it cannot be eradicated.

Keywords: Femi Osofisan's plays, Nigerian playwrights and motif of corruption, Sociology of literature, Yoruba concept of Ọmọlúwàbí, Nigerian Dramatic Literature

Introduction

Professor Ademola Omobewaji Dasylva's concept of Yorùbá ọ̀mọ̀lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics awakened the imagination on the moral implication of corruption for the growth and development of Nigerian society and series of questions began to emerge in our collective consciousness. We have failed to get it right in Nigeria and corruption has become our culture in the country because we have failed to integrate the concept of ọ̀mọ̀lúwàbí into our lives. This concept of Omoluwabi is linked with two of Femi Osofisan's plays, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft*. These plays reflect and refract on the trajectory of corruption in Nigeria. The subject matter of one of the plays, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, is drawn from the socio-political history of corruption of Shagari's civilian administration in Nigeria and the anti-corruption crusade of Buhari-Idiagbon's military administration. Thus, the play provides a reliable source of data on the nature, pattern and manifestation of corruption in the post-independent Nigerian society. The second play, *Another Raft*, presents the leadership-followership continuum in the trends of corruption in Nigeria. The most important point for the choice of the plays as the source of data for paper on corruption is the thesis they offer that corruption is endemic in our society because we have lost our sense of humanity for common welfare.

In the light of the above, Dasylva's Yorùbá ọ̀mọ̀lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics is seen beyond a concept. It is an ideology and at the same time a theory of reading indigenous literary texts. It is seen as a theory because it forms part of the cultural configuration of most African communities to foster humanity and sustainable humane society. It is a theory because it suggests a sort of reading kinesics of literary and social texts in the form of satire, didacticism and societal concretisation. As a theory, it has undergone series of [re-] formulations and practical demonstrations in the analysis and understanding of human relations across ages and historical epochs. In African cosmos and ontology, Yorùbá ọ̀mọ̀lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics espouses self-reflectivity as against the backdrop of self-determinism. In this context, self-reflectivity is adopted as a philosophy of 'do unto others as you want them to do unto you'. Beyond this, self-reflectivity also promotes empathy – an important variable in the

promotion and sustenance of humane society for all. Humanity, humility, self-consciousness, collectivism and communalism are inherent qualities of the theorisation of Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics. These factors and many others inform the idea of hermeneutics in the ideological orientation of the concept.

Sofọ́la's notion of 'character – structure' is apt in the description of the inherent qualities of the concept of ọmọ́lúwàbí in Yoruba cultural episteme. An ọmọ́lúwàbí is someone with unquestionable character formed from the neonate stage of development through the adolescence to adulthood. This 'character-structure' is 'said to be more stable and more difficult to change' (Sofọ́la [1978: p. 1]). While adopting 'character-structure' as an important ingredient of Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics, this paper proposes three important components of the former. The three important components of 'character-structure' are *ìwà rere* (good character), *ìtìjù* (shyness) and *ìkóra ẹni ni ìjánu* (self restraint/control). Of the three components, Yoruba people place much emphasis on *ìtìjù*, as reflected in their language aesthetics such as proverbs and figurative expressions. The expression, *ìtìjù se àgbà oun gbogbo* (shyness supercedes every other thing) summarises the application of *ìtìjù* in Yoruba behavioural sciences . The belief of Yoruba people is that with shyness, individuals will avoid any form of criminality or corrupt practice. It is through shyness that individuals strive to make and sustain good name for him/herself and the lineage. Thus, there is a popular saying that *orúkọ rere sàń ju wírà àtí fàdákà lẹ* (good name is better than silver and gold). The opinion of this paper, therefore, is that the corruption in our society becomes endemic because majority of Nigerians are no more conscious of good names in the society. In Yoruba cultural episteme, good name is wrapped with morality, which is evident in 'character or moral rectitude' (Adegbindin, 2012: p. 170). Adegbindin, like Abimbola (1975: p. 393), Abiodun (1983: pp. 13-30), Akintola (1999: p. 121) and Gbadegesin (1991: p. 79), holds the view that good character is the hallmark of humane society devoid of all forms of immorality and corrupt practice. These scholars argue that the concept of ọmọ́lúwàbí is primordial with reference to Ifá corpus, which upholds truth-telling, justice and altruism. It is, however, disheartening that most political and public office holders in Nigeria do not demonstrate altruism with their calculated actions to siphon common wealth of the nation for their personal use.

To check the ugly trend of corruption in our contemporary Nigerian society, Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics is expected to start and progress with the developmental process of a child. Unfortunately, the contemporary economic challenges and materialism have had negative impact on the moral socialisation and character development of a child. In the past, the growth and development of a Yoruba child was taken as the responsibility of the adult members of the community who ensured that the child grew within the norms of the concept of ọmọ́lúwàbí through the instrumentality of the tangible or intangible culture. The focus here is to engage the intangible culture such as folk arts and literature in the promotion and sustenance of ọmọ́lúwàbí concept. Yoruba people, and by extension, African people, had utilised the functionality of folktales to ensure that children grew towards the realisation of ọmọ́lúwàbí concept. The expected result was usually achieved because the young member of the society grew to embrace good character and shun all forms of criminalities and corruption that can dent the name of their families.

The adoption of Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics to discuss African perspective on corruption with textual reference to Osofisan's *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft* is premised on Dasylyva's (2017: p. 34) 'glocalization of Yoruba ọmọ́lúwàbí ideology'. Dasylyva goes further that:

Ọmọ́lúwàbí glocalization underscores the local relevance of *Ọmọ́lúwàbí* and the possibility of its pluriversity. In *Ọmọ́lúwàbí* emergent ideology, there is a plurality of poetics, not just one. Therefore, it remains a unique concept in the Yoruba ... knowledge system and practice that possesses the capacity for gauging socially approved human relations of global magnitude.

Based on the above position, the analyses of Femi Osofisan's *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft* is situated in the inherent attributes of Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics. This is necessary because of the durability of the playwright's subject matter of corruption and manifestation of corrupt practices in the contemporary Nigerian society. While reflecting on the trends of corruption in the country, Osofisan reveals how the transition from tradition to modernity has bred corruption and corrupt practices. In these two plays, the playwright interrogates the collapse of traditional configuration of society cum the loss of humanity. The characterisation, language aesthetics and overall dramaturgy of the plays establish

the ideology of the text as a sort of surreptitious insurrection against corruption and its agents in the country. The themes of the plays also project corrupt practices that are manifested with different magnitude across African continent. These two plays engage the past and the present in critical dialogue with the intention, perhaps, to uncover the loss of humanity in the transition and relocation of the past ethos to the contemporary capitalistic and materialistic modern ethos which place self far and above others in a community.

Corruption Motif in Nigerian Drama

Corruption is endemic and contagious in Nigeria's socio-political realities. Everybody, overtly or covertly, is involved in one form of corrupt practice or the other. This is so because of the unbridled materialism which has plagued the country in the years before and shortly after the attainment of political independence. This unbridled materialism is a 'by-product' of social and economic caste system which is evident in the country. In Nigeria, therefore, corruption is transactional as shown in the mindset of Nigerians which is revealed thus: 'for every favour, there is a need for graft in the form of "compensation"'. This mindset has wrought havoc on the national image and integrity of the country. The high profile of corrupt cases in Nigeria, perhaps, has affected the national integrity of the country at the global platform. If nothing else validates it, the TI Corruption Perception Index locates us in the extremities of highly corrupt nations (Egbokhare 2015: p.22). The extremities of corruption in Nigeria might inform Soyinka's (2015: p. 68) statement that "nearly all of us must share in the burden of blame for the culture of impunity that threatens to overwhelm society in the department of corruption".

The endemic state of corruption in Nigeria, therefore, has become a source of worry to Nigerian playwrights with the motif of corruption running through their plays. Some of these playwrights, however, only reflect the situations and manifestation of corruption in the country without offering any possible way out of the problems. The very first attempt to hint at the theme of corruption in Nigerian drama is the 1960's aborted performance of Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* for the celebration of the country's independence on October 1, 1960. The federal government of the time was not satisfied with how Soyinka reflected the future of the country through the characterisation and the subject matter of the play. In the play, Soyinka offers a thesis that the country's political independence was too early because of some perceived indexes

of corruption among some individual nationalists who aspired to take over from the colonial master. The corruption in the court of Mata Karibu suggests that the judiciary will not, at a certain point in future, uphold the principles of rule of law. In the contemporary time, there is a manifestation of corrupt judiciary with series of bribe and corruption scandals which are levied against some of the serving magistrates and judges of the country's judicial arm. The play, *A Dance of the Forests*, also foreshadows sectorial and regional corruption in the country with the police collecting graft from the driver of a lorry with overload passengers. What Soyinka foreshadows in *A Dance of the Forests* is consistent with the recent findings by National Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the corruption in the police and the judiciary. The editorial of *Punch* Newspaper entitled "Corruption Report on Police and Judiciary" reveals thus:

The ranking of the police and the judiciary as the most corrupt public institution in the country, in survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, only confirms widely held belief, which not a few Nigerians would posit. The integrity barometer, which covered a broad spectrum of government agencies, revealed that about N400 billion is committed to bribing officials annually to get things done.

(Sept. 21, 2017)

Apart from Wole Soyinka, some notable Nigerian playwrights such as J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Ahmed Yerima, Esiaba Irobi and Femi Osofisan, etc. have been focusing attention on the motif of corruption in their drama texts and plays. These playwrights, with rhetorical tropes and dramatic techniques, comment on and condemn the open corruption that takes place in all facets of Nigerian society. In some of their plays, they link the source of corruption to politics and all sorts of political malpractices that are prevalent in the country. Many of Nigerian politicians, like their counterparts in other African countries, have seen politics as their licence to free and unquestionable access to 'national cake'¹. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, through the characterisation of Rahman Lejoka-Brown, posits that most politicians join politics with the intention of wealth acquisition through corrupt practices. Lejoka-Brown sees politics as

¹ In Nigerian context, national treasury is taken for national cake which anybody with opportunity should eat with satisfaction without any sanction. With this slonganeerism, Nigerian politicians and their cohorts do not see it morally wrong to loot the treasury at the expense of the masses.

self-serving. He does not have any ideology or manifesto to execute while in power. His mien is an exemplification of the mindset of Nigerian politicians and political elites. Erroneously, politics is construed as an avenue to amass and accumulate wealth rather than a platform to serve the people and contribute meaningfully to the general wellbeing and development of the society (Bagu, 2015: p. 124). This political culture, as exemplified by Lejoka-Brown, breeds corruption in Nigeria and the rest of African continent.

At the wake of 19th and 20th centuries, some Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Esiaba Irobi and Bode Sowande extend the coast of their theoretical and ideological inclinations towards corruption. They do this by exposing the complicity of the Western powers in the corrupt practices which have become emblematic of African identity. Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* indicts Western powers such as Russia and United States of America (USA) with conscious involvement in the perpetuation of corruption on the whole of African continent. These Western powers have presented themselves as the necessary evil in the fight against corruption, dictatorship and maladministration on the continent of Africa. They selectively institute action against a corrupt and dictatorial government especially when the incumbent is no more in rapport with them.

Bode Sowande shares in Soyinka's ideology of Western conspiracy in the perpetration and perpetuation of corrupt practices in Nigeria. Sowande's *Long Story*, a socio-historical play of Nigerian political debacle, reveals the interference of Western powers in the manifestation of corrupt practices in the country. The play's subject matter is on the failed transition to civilian rule with the annulment of June 12 presidential elections in Nigeria. The playwright interrogates how the Western powers, through corrupt practices, have manipulated the tension that came up after the election to their own favour. The playwright does not exonerate America, like every other European country, from the cases of corruption that characterised the whole of electoral imbroglio.

Femi Osofisan changes the pattern of discourse of the motif of corruption in his plays. Unlike other Nigerian playwrights such as Ola Rotimi, J. P. Clark, Ahmed Yerima and Bode Sowande, etc., Femi Osofisan reflects and refracts his society. In his dramaturgy, he identifies peculiar societal problems such as corruption and leadership problem and before the end of the play, he

offers some solutions through the performance aesthetics of Bertolt Brecht's Alienation effect (A-effect) – a performance aesthetics which creates a consciousness in the audience that they are not in any way faced with reality. Osofisan's *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft* suggest a practical solution (the adoption of ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics at the private and public domains of human relations) to the contemporary scourge of corruption in the country.

Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels and Another Raft in Sociological Perspectives

Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels treats the contemporary issues of power politics, corruption and the quest for sustainable humanity. The vagabond minstrels are displaced of their jobs as minstrels to corrupt politicians after the military coup. The minstrels, therefore, become abject and hapless with no means of sustenance. On the advice of Omele, the minstrels go to a crossroads to feast on sacrifice meant for Èsù. At the crossroads, the minstrels meet an old man who gives them power that will grant the wish of anybody who is in need or distress. He (the old man) warns that the minstrels should use their power properly as he will come back to reward individuals accordingly. The minstrels act according to the instruction of the old man by granting the wishes of their respective victims/clients. As promised, the old man comes to give reward to each of the minstrels.

Another Raft treats issues of governance and corruption with the thesis that one has corresponding effect on the other. A community, Ayedade is in distress with the incessant attack of the sea that overflows its boundary. The community sees the need to appease Yemosa, the god of the sea. Their efforts require a recall of the priest, who will go to the middle of the sea with other appointed 'officers' to appease the angry god, Yemosa. The whole experience becomes tragic with the murder of Abore. Only three people are able to make it to the end of the journey.

These two plays are part of the playwright's dialogue with the government and the governed on the trends of corruption in the country. *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* engages us in a dialogue on the need to uphold the tenets of humanity in our attempts to reduce the nature and pattern of corruption in the country. The playwright is critical on the need to relocate the centre of our humanity to the grassroot where there is communalism and sustainable communal welfarism.

This view is presented considering Omele's approach to their hunger, frustration and abject lack after the successful military coup. Omele advises other minstrels that they need to visit a crossroads for a feast with Èsù. He offers this advice because he understands the philosophy of the community that it espouses the principle of live and let others live. The community members see themselves as their brothers' and neighbours' keepers. The proplems and trials of a person/group is shouldered as the problems of the whole of the community. The philosophy of live and let others live, in theory and practice, upholds the tenets of ọmọ̀lúwàbí because individuals in a community are always conscious of the consequences of their actions on the rest of the community. Every member of the community is nurtured into this philosophy from neonate stage through the childhood to the adulthood. A growing child, therefore, becomes aware of the need to be honest, accountable, kind and just. He, however, laments his disappointment at the latest development in his community which he has left some years back. He laments:

Omele: Charity! That was the creed we were all raised on, and the whole village practiced it! Not even a stranger passed by without finding a roof, or a warm bed. They taught us to always give, freely like Mother Nature. They said God owned everything, and that every man was a creature of God. Created in his image! So, how was I to know that in just five years, five years since I left, all that would have changed? How could I have foreseen it, that a day would come when these same people, my own people would see men in torment, and drive them back into the wind?

(Esu... 19)

The creed of communalism and popular welfarism for all are displaced because of the phenomenon of urban dislocation. The whole of the community has been restructured physically and morally to the extent that Omele cannot easily identify some locations. The great cause of Omele's lament is the inhumanity of her people at the sight of someone in need of help. In her argument, someone's predicament is the communal problem in the years back, particularly before her sojourn to the town.

There is an important message in Omele's view, as revealed in the above excerpt. This argument is based on Hope's broad categorisation of corruption into two: petty corruption and grand corruption. Petty corruption is experienced daily by ordinary citizens of a country. On the other

hand, grand corruption “(usually but not always synonymous to political corruption) refers to corruption at the high or elite level” (Hope, 2017: p. 3). Omele’s reaction is that petty corruption has made people forget about charity, an index of humanity and communalism. The petty corruption, in most cases, translates to grand corruption in the contemporary Nigerian society. Petty corruption begins from home, the basic unit of child’s socialisation. Most parents do fail to ensure a proper moral socialisation of their children – they [un] consciously make their children understand that the essence of public or political office is to enrich themselves. This new mindset is inconsistent with the traditional conception of leadership, which places much emphasis on service to humanity.

This paper, therefore, concedes to the view that our contemporary societies have been subjected to ‘urban dislocation and postcolonial transformation’ (Raji, 2008: p. 219) because of the pattern of human relations that privilege self far above others. This urban dislocation and postcolonial transformation foregrounds the themes in Osofisan’s *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft*. The two plays emphasise a sort of distancing of individuals in distress from their source which places much emphasis on humans as gregarious and communal beings. It is this distance from the source and the quest for return that contribute to the development and advancement of the conflicts of the plays and their eventual resolutions. Urban dislocation and postcolonial transformation encourage a reckless abandonment of traditional values in the name of modernity and civilisation. In the course of this unwholesome mindset and practice of privileging modernity and postcolonial transformation over traditional practices, so many indigenous practices and ontology are endangered in the form of negligence of the custodians of such practices. The homily ground of Èsù in *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* and the shrine/sea in *Another Raft* reveal the conscious negligence of the custodians to advance the communal course in the advancement of humanity and humane society between humans and the gods. The disconnect between the illusion of modernity and the reality of humanity enshrined in traditional values and norms create a chasm in the evolution and sustainability of virile society with equity, justice and fairness. The more people move away from the traditional values and norms which promote humane society, the more chaotic and disorganised societies become. A quick reference to *Another Raft* suggests a point that urban people become carried away with the felicities of towns and urban centres to the extent that they forget their source. They also forget that they

have responsibilities to promote human values and dignities in the local communities of their origin. Omele and other minstrels, in *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels*, are guilty of this ‘crime’ because they only think of their community when they are in need. In fact, the point is that in the present urban dislocation and postcolonial transformation, some people only develop consciousness for what they stand to gain from their immediate communities without thinking of how they can contribute to the development of these communities. This consciousness only breeds corruption because these individuals adopt all [corrupt] means at their disposal to get what they want. For instance, Ekuroola in *Another Raft* does not understand the pain and challenges of people of Ayedaade because he lives in Lagos. Lanusen complains of this situation when the going is tough on the sea. Lanusen complains:

Yes, we insisted! And I am tired of your complaints, Chief Ekuroola! Did we have a choice! You live in Lagos, far away, on soft cushions and padded chairs. You’re the Abore, but you prefer to live away from us, on safe ground. Your roofs are solid. When it rains you don’t have to hear it. But what of those of us who have no other shelter except our homes in Aiyedade?

(Another Raft, 33)

Ekuroola, by the moral standard of representative democracy, is not qualified for the appointment as Abore of Ayedaade. He is a stranger to the rites and traditional practices that such office requires. There is, however, a displeasure with Lanusen’s resignation to fate that the people have no choice but to make Ekuroola Abore of Aiyedade even with the latter’s estrangement to the communal values and ethos. A critical analysis of the whole situation suggests that the whole community has engaged in corruption to make Ekuroola their Abore based on some other extraneous and materialistic qualities: Ekuroola is rich, ‘modern’ and influential. With these extraneous qualities, he is able to strike the right string. These extraneous qualities, however, bounce back on the quality of leadership and the attainment of humane society. One important area where these extraneous qualities affect the entire populace is corruption. In this light of argument, there is corruption at the level of government and at the level of the governed: corruption at one level responds to corruption at another level. The playwright hints at the fact that no regime (civilian or military) is exonerated from the allegations/charges of corruption/corrupt practices. This paper, therefore, corroborates the view

of Akorede (2006: p. 59) that ‘the play highlights the political instability caused by the corruption of the people in power’. *Another Raft* indicts the governed in the charges of corruption in society. The ensued argument among Lanusen, Orousi and Ekuroola highlights this indictment:

Lanusen: Then you shouldn’t have taken the title! It was not too long ago, you know, when you came crawling to the palace, you and your agents. Against my advice and against good sense, they allowed you to take the title.

Orousi: No, no, prince, don’t say these things here! Please!

Ekuroola: You had no choice, it was the title of my fathers and my grandfathers! And I paid you well for it, damn it! It was my money that made you change your mind, Lanusen! The house I built for you in Alagbede quarters, your sixth wife lives there! Deny it!

Orousi: Prince, and Abore, I say this is –

Lanusen: So what, if you spent money? A pittance wasn’t it? Which you’ve since more than recovered! The lands of the Abore yield rich harvest every year, not to talk of the Gbaguda farms at Ifetedo –

(Another Raft 35)

The above exchanges among the characters generate critical issue of governance and corruption in Nigeria. In this direction of argument, there is a link between the country’s electoral process and corruption. Chief Ekuroola is not qualified for the office of Abore because he lacks credibility but for his wealth, he is able to get to the office. His argument is that the office is his birth right apart from his wealth. His assumption of office consequently breeds poor governance as revealed in his reckless abandonment of the people who actually put him in power. The chief makers have committed an error in their judgement because of the graft they have received from Ekuroola. The situation is further read beyond this point. There is a correspondence between bad leadership and poor followership In Nigeria. The electorate who collect graft from their candidate know that their action is not morally right. What Ekuroola suggests in his response to Lanusen’s allegation of recklessness in office is that he is not alone in the crime. Lanusen and

others are also expected to share in the blame because of the graft they have collected from Ekuroola while the latter is canvassing for support. The expected outcome of the people's act of corruption is misappropriation and poor governance as in the case of Chief Ekuroola in *Another Raft*. The recently released reform of the electoral age by National Assembly of Nigeria is a reflection of Ekuroola's view that the office of Abore is the 'right' of his family that nobody can claim despite his incompetence and irresponsibility. In the release, the National Assembly legislates that the qualifying age for the office of the president and vice-president is 35 years while for the senate is 30 years. The house of representative members should be 30 years and the governorship aspirants should be 25 years. Aspirants for the states house of assembly should also be 25 years. This age reform for elective post in Nigeria is a reflection of the endemic state of corruption in the country. Apart from the new age reform aimed at recycling government, the emerging trend of corruption in Nigeria is the creation of a ministry or an office where none actually exists. A recent case of Imo State where Governor Rochas Okorocha appointed his sister as the Commissioner for Happiness and Purpose Fulfilment was the height of corruption in the country. This was an attempt by the governor to design a means of siphoning public funds at the expiration of his tenure as the governor of the state. In fact, the Commissioner for Happiness and Purpose Fulfilment had no portfolio and official responsibilities. This appointment was an indication of the rot in the overall governance of the country. This is because no appointment is made without ratification and screening by the lawmakers. The members of Imo State House of Assembly have compromised the goodwill of Imo people with the approval of the office of the Commissioner for Happiness and Purpose Fulfilment such as we have seen in the people's choice of Ekuroola as the Abore of Ayedade.

With the new age reform for elective positions of the president and lawmakers, among others, contemporary Nigerian politicians and political class have surreptitiously mapped plans for their children in generations to come to replace them in power. This is not a new trend in Nigeria but the newness is in the deception with which the lawmakers have approached the matter – legalisation of replacement without suspicion from the masses. When a child replaces his/her father, he/she will not question the corrupt practices of the father. This new age reform may not impact positively on the political system of the country, particularly in the fight against corruption. Osofisan, in *Another Raft*, is of the view that the hope of the country to attain humane

society free of corruption is bleak. The dialogue between Agunrin and Gbebe suggests the political ideology of Osofisan that the country will not perform better under administration of the new age. The excerpt reads:

Agunrin: I took your side. I could have cut all your throats the first night. (*Gbebe turns his back*). I admire you, when you confronted your father and I found you were not part of it all. I thought I heard the beginning sounds of a new age.

Gbebe: (*Softly*): There is no new age, Agunrin. The sounds you hear, they're only the echoes of a tune we've been hearing all our lives. History reconfirming itself, reminding us that we're trapped, as we've always been trapped.

(*Another Raft 55*)

Osofisan's view in the above excerpt is consistent with the recent action of the National Assembly of Nigeria. With the legislation on the new age for elective positions in the country, the assembly of law makers has provided a platform for the recycling and regeneration of corruption because they have practically made it possible for their children, siblings/wards to take over from them. These individuals in the new age have also been socialised into the culture of corruption and brazen materialism. Gbebe is practical and realistic in his position that his society should not rely on him for any positive change. In *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Omele also expresses the playwright's ideology that corruption persists in our society because of its regeneration and recycling. Omele avers:

We learned the trade our fathers taught us. And we learned it well.
Pity, that the season turned bitter, and the leaders grew corrupt. We
had to eat! And how those politicians sprayed when we sang for
them!

(*Esu... 26*)

Apart from the fact that corrupt politicians replace themselves with successors who will not question their excesses while in power, the masses also aid and abet corruption as a result of their poverty. The minstrels see themselves as poor individuals who need to praise the excesses of the politicians for some paltry sum. The action of the vagabond minstrels is an act of petty corruption which encourages grand corruption. This view is consistent with Egbokhare's (2015: p. 18) that:

In larger society, the practice of going for the birthdays and thanksgiving ceremonies of corrupt individuals, paying false tributes to individuals, using *bottompower* and *longleg* constitute corruption.

Osofisan's *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* holds the ideology that every individual in a corrupt society has the possibility to be infected or affected by corrupt practice. This is evident in the character of the vagabond minstrels. The thrust of the argument of Osofisan in the play is that corruption comes with the acquisition of power but in this paper's opinion, it goes beyond this situation. After getting the seed of wishes from the old man, the minstrels become conceited and arrogant. Their intention is how to become rich forgetting the counsel of the old man that the seed of wishes is a power as well as a test. All of them, except Omele, use the power corruptly to satisfy their selfish ends. The view here, however, differs to Osofisan's ideology that power breeds corruption. Power does not breed corruption but it is how power is used that breeds corruption.

The argument that the use of power breeds corruption is buttressed with reference to the issues of three business men from Lagbaja Trading Company in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*. These businessmen are given the contracts to import rice but with the corruption in the country, they do not supply any rice. The new military government is set to prosecute them for failed contract. The excerpt of the play reveals this situation:

First Stranger: Six months ago, we are able to win the bid for an import license. To bring in two million bags of rice.

Sinsin: Two million bags!

First Stranger: A paltry sum, my dear, considering what we paid out for the contract. And then – our Manager vanished with the license! Can you believe that! No one has seen him since! Not even his family!

Third Stranger: Six months now! Six months since he disappeared! But we're probably boring them with our –

Redio: No, please, go on! I am interests!

Second Stranger: Well, the Manager disappeared. At that time, with the old government, it didn't seem to matter at all. They had all got their kickbacks and didn't care a hoot for rice. Even the

Minister told us not to bother ourselves, to simply put in for another license. For fertilizers. (Esu... 55)

Osofisan reveals the pattern of grand corruption in Nigeria in the above excerpt. It is fashionable in the country that before contracts are awarded, there should be gratification. With this ugly situation in the socio-economic reality of Nigerian society, contracts are not awarded based on merit, competence and track records of prospective awardees. Reading the play within the socio-historical situation of corruption in Nigeria, reference is made to the high level of corruption during President Shagari regime of the Second Republic (1979-1983). The regime was notorious for corruption and all forms of indiscipline among political and public office holders. Ogeidi's (2012: pp. 8-9) evaluation of Shagari regime is relevant here:

No politician symbolised the graft and avarice under Shagari's government more than his combative Transport Minister, Alhaji Umaru Dikko, who was alleged to have mismanaged about N4 billion of public fund meant for the importation of rice. However, on 31st December 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari led a popular coup that again rescued the economy from the grip of corrupt politicians of the Second Republic. The 1983 coup was carried out with the aim of halting corruption and restoring discipline, integrity and dignity to public life. General Buhari's regime promised to bring corrupt officials and their agents to book. Consequently, state governors and commissioners were arrested and brought before tribunals of inquiry.

Like Umaro Dikko and other politicians in the Second Republic of Nigeria, the three businessmen in the play demonstrate the political and economic decadence through the non-execution of contracts. The overthrow of the civilian government that is their collaborator in corruption, makes the three businessmen seek help from the vagabond minstrels. This situation is also a reflection of zero tolerance for corruption of Buhari-Idiagbon administration (1983-1985). The new military administration in the play detains the wives and children of these corrupt businessmen, confiscates their properties and seizes their passports until they return the money collected for the contracts or produce the rice and the fertilizer. The Buhari-Idiagbon military administration in Nigeria was known for its seriousness and commitment to fight corruption in totality. The regime matched is (sic.) pronouncement with action by not only promulgating

draconian legislation to control and prevent corrupt practices but brought to book people considered to have been fraudulent of corruption (Oghenethoja, 2010: p. 16).

The pathetic situation of corruption had been one of the important excuses offered by the military to take over power from the civilian government. This view is substantiated with the events which caused the first military takeover of power in 1966. One of the reasons given by the military to topple the First Republic of Nigeria was corruption among the politicians. Siollun (2009: p. 17) aptly captures the situation thus:

Corruption among government ministers was also rife. The ostentatious lifestyle of prominent ministers such as Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh raised eyebrows, to say the least. Okotie-Eboh's original surname was "Edah" but he altered it to that of a more powerful family. Ministers were accused of taking "kickbacks" for large government contracts. As many civil servants lacked experience and training in governmental and parliamentary practice and affairs, they could easily be manipulated (wittingly or unwittingly) as pawns in ministers' corrupt practices. The name of the Finance Minister Chief Festus Samuel Okotie-Eboh was frequently mentioned in the corrupt allegations.

With the ideological framework of the military, one will assume that they will be better than the civilian government in their attitude towards corruption. Nigeria's political and economic history has revealed that the military are not exonerated from the spate of corruption in the country. From the first military government to the last, there have been reported cases of grand corruption in the country. The military, in Nigerian politics, have played controversial roles in the fight against corruption and indiscipline. Adeoti's (2003: pp. 111-127) "the military in Nigeria's postcolonial literature: an overview" evaluates various activities and actions of the military in Nigerian politics and economy. Osofisan's *Another Raft* reviews the controversial roles of the military in their fight against corruption. The excerpt from the play reveals this situation:

Gbebe: You are a soldier. You accuse the politicians and the Chief of exploiting the people, and leading us to damnation. But what of you, sir? What else do you do except milk the land?

Agunrin: I see! I see now! You envy our lives in the barracks. But you don't talk of our putting our lives at stake. And all of you!

Gbebe: For what war, tell me? Is it the war for which we have waited for so long that our best generals grow bored and retire in their prime, to live lavishly on stolen oil blocks?

Agunrin: It's good to hear you talk! Talk is so easy! But nobody has heard what you yourself have done so far! Except talk!

(Another Raft 76)

Osofisan's characterisation of Agunrin in *Another Raft* is a reflection of the controversial roles of the military in Nigerian politics. In this line of thought, Adeoti's view (2015: p. 46) that "the military is a major factor in Nigeria's post-independence politics" is apt in to describe Nigerian political culture. From the regimes of Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi to General Sanni Abacha, the military government in Nigeria has been charged with series of corrupt cases and abuse of human rights. The military government had displayed extravagance and recklessness in the way they spent oil money of the country because they were fortunate to rule the country in the era of oil boom. The situation of oil boom in the country afforded the military government the opportunity to embezzle and launder money into their foreign accounts. Apart from the embezzlement of public funds, the successive military government in Nigeria had the habit of giving out oil rigs as gifts to their loyalists, mistresses, relatives and associates. This also constitutes an act of corruption in the country. The money realised from these oil rigs is not subjected to accountability and probity. The beneficiaries of these oil rigs turn the public properties to their personal properties. In the instance of corruption and embezzlement of public funds, Abacha's military government was notorious. The notoriety of Abacha's administration has attracted various national and international commentaries. One of the notable instances of these commentaries is Peel's (2010: p. 115) empirical review of Abacha's military administration in Nigeria. In his commentary, he writes:

The grand- daddy of all Nigerian corruption cases, which had been rumbling for years before I arrived in the country and continues to this day, was the international pursuit of money allegedly looted by the late dictator General Abacha and his associates. This epic, ongoing hunt has involved billions of dollars and has embarrassed banks, companies and governments across the world. Foreign countries have enjoyed a grotesque double benefit from the Abacha theft. Not only did they buy Nigerian crude, but their banks took a hefty portion of the proceeds from the sale of it. It is

yet another thread linking the wider world with Nigeria's continuing failure to register the development surge the world's oil century ought to have allowed it to enjoy. The scale and importance of the Abacha theft is evoked by Enrico Monfrini, the lawyer charged with recovering the stolen assets for the Nigerian government.

Humanity at the Crossroads of Corruption in Nigeria

Osofisan's use of the crossroads and the sea in the two plays is symbolic. The crossroads, particularly, reveals the confusion which humans face in the contemporary state of urban dislocation and postcolonial transformation. Yoruba cosmology holds the belief that Èsù is a residence of crossroads as revealed in its epithet, Èsù oní ilé oríta (Èsù, the man whose house is in the open). With this understanding, most Nigerians have attributed their misfortunes to the mischief of Èsù or the will of God. Consequently, they are no more pragmatic with their decisions and actions. They fast and pray to find solutions to their problems without evaluating how their (in) actions have contributed to their present mishaps. This is the current situation with the fight against corruption and efforts at attaining sustainable human capital development in the country.

In the two plays, Femi Osofisan raises a concern for the contemporary troubles of humanity. His concern is based on the ubiquitous presence of corruption in all spheres and sectors of society. He is of the opinion that the young and the old, the priests and the humans as well as the civilian and the military are not absolved from the spate of corruption in the country. *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft* are critical of the pattern and consequences of corruption on human society. The trustees of the gods and the governance of the society, in *Another Raft*, are 'fantastically corrupt' without remorse. This is reflected in the actions of Chief Ekuroola, Omitogun and Orousi who manipulate the messages of the oracle for their selfish benefits. The Ifa priest makes the community members of Aiyedade believe that Yemosa is angry for years of neglect without any worship. He, therefore, attributes the incessant flood of the community to Yemosa's anger. This is an act of corruption against humanity and gods. Yemosa is not angry. The flood is as a result of the poor drainage. The funds for the drainage have been embezzled by the political elites – Ekuroola and Lanusen, the Local Council Chairman. Erroneously, the community believes that there is a need for cleansing at the shrine across the sea that can be

reached through a raft. The journey to the shrine is tragic. On this note, Awodiya's (2010: p. 88) view is corroborated that:

However, the raft is adrift not due to the whims and caprices of the gods, but owing to the intrigues and corruption of some members of the cleansing mission aboard the raft, who, ironically, have had their hands soiled by embezzling the drainage contract funds.... In the end, the shrine cannot be located and six of the nine characters who set on the ill-fated journey get drowned.

The fate of Aiyedade community, particularly with the incessant attack of flood, is a reflection of the common experience of Nigerians during heavy rainfall. The 2011 flood experience of the country raised concern in the international community. This prompted the release of ecological funds for drainage and reclamation of the water-lodged areas. It is, however, unfortunate to witness the incessant flood attacks at different locations in the country till date. The ecological funds have been mismanaged and embezzled.

Similar to the above is the award of contracts which are not executed. In the contemporary postcolonial transformation, award of contracts is a new stratagem of embezzling or siphoning public funds. Before contracts are awarded, the government officials and their political associates do get their share. The consequence of this action is that no contract is executed and the masses are further subjected to great misfortune. Osofisan's *Another Raft* reveals this situation in the altercation between Ekuroola and Lanusen, specifically in reference to the non-implementation of contracts meant to advance humane society for all. The excerpt of the play reveals thus:

Ekuroola: Fine speech, my dear prince. But your Council could have started with building a good drainage for instance, Lanusen. You know the money was voted, the plan approved. The records also show that the money was spent. Years ago.

Lanusen: Hear that! Always trying to discredit me and the Council, isn't it? What of the canals we built?

Ekuroola: According to the plan approved, or according to the size of your greedy pockets?

(Another Raft 34)

The above excerpt also reflects the nature and pattern of corruption that permeates the award of contracts. What makes the situation pathetic is that the health and lives of people are involved in

the scam. There are many instances of abandoned projects in Nigeria as a result of act of corruption between the government and the contractors.

This paper, therefore, returns to its argument that power does not breed corruption but how power is used breeds corruption. This position shall be explicated with reference to the dialectical roles played by the vagabond minstrels in their attempts to attend to their respective clients-victims. At the first reading of *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels*, one is tempted to conclude that of all the vagabond minstrels, only Omele passes the test given by the priest of Èsù. This is because the other vagabond minstrels use their power to oppress their clients-victims. They institute a strategem to extort their clients-victims based on the instructions given by their ‘examiner’, the priest of Èsù. The priest instructs that they should be careful to select whoever they want to assist because they cannot use the power twice. This instruction tempts the other vagabond minstrels to attach too much material benefits to the power without any iota of compassion.. All the vagabond minstrels are at the crossroads of corruption where their humanity is tested. The other vagabond minstrels: Epo Oyinbo, Sinsin, Redio and Jigi fail in the test of humanity. They do not key into the elements of ‘character structure’ [*ìwà rere* (good character), *ìtìjú* (shyness) and *ìkóra ẹni ni ìjánu* (self restraint/control)] that makes up the component of the concept of Yorùbá *omolúwàbí* philosophical hermeneutics. They use their power without any moderation and they do not exhibit self-restraint in the use of their power. The case of Omele is only different because he does not attach material benefit to the use of her power. She believes that humanity should come first before any other thing. Despite the good characters or behaviour of Omele, this paper still sees her as a person who is not to be absolved from the charges of corruption. The opinion here is not consistent with Awodiya’s (2010: p. 208) who sees Omele as someone with clean records of corruption. At the crossroads of corruption, Omele’s humane character becomes questionable. Her sense of duty and kindness when she assists a pregnant woman of so many years of misfortune of carrying the burden in her womb is acknowledged. She heals the woman with nothing but thank you. This is a good sense of kindness and a call to duty to serve humanity. On the other hand, Omele spoils her chance to be applauded because of her second attempt to assist a couple with leprosy. The second attempt contravenes the rules guiding the use of the power. The old man ‘s warning (the law of the game) is clearly stated thus:

That's enough. Songs alone
Do not prove a man's sincerity.
But I am going to give you **a chance**
To help yourselves. Come forward. (Esu... 33)

(Emphasis, Ours)

Omele contravenes the above law by assisting a couple with leprosy. In the light of this argument, Omele has failed to be consistent with the third principle of character structure for the concept of Yorùbá ọmọ́lúwàbí philosophical hermeneutics, which is *ìkóra ẹni ni ìjánu* (self restraint/control). Her too much of compassion is a weakness that may generate acts of corruption such as nepotism, favouritism and ethnicity/racism in our contemporary society. She has been found guilty of breach of the rule of law.

The lessons derivable in the two plays is that there is no society with clean records of corruption. What is only necessary is the collective action to reduce any act of corruption in our society for humane and virile society. The plays reveal that humans are the architects of their misfortunes through greed and self-centeredness of some privileged individuals. *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* ends on the note that:

ESU DOES NOT exist
And if evil does not persist
We must each search our soul
What we've set ourselves as goal:
If wealth is all we seek
And don't care what means we're using,
If our ways seem so sleek
When we keep strange rendez-vous,
One day we'll come to reason
At some Sepeteri
Where Esu - or - History - waits in ambush
With his noose!

(Esu... 95-96)

Similarly, *Another Raft* ends when Yemosa One, Two and Three encourage the three surviving characters, Orousi, Oge and Reore that the survival of their community lies in their unity and collectivity. With these elements, they will be able to fight any act of corruption. With this advice, the strenght to move the raft comes as Reore excitedly exclaims:

It's turning! It's moving! You see, Orousi? There's no goddess but our muscles! The strength of our forces combined! Rowing together, working together! Oge, Oya, take over! Give us a song, a working song! Sing to the recovery of our spirit! Wisdom is the human race!

(Another Raft 100)

Conclusion

Corruption has generated endless discourses from different academic disciplines such as history, political science, economics, literary and cultural studies as well as sociology and anthropological studies. The postcolonial transformation of many African societies has particularly generated reconcilable arguments on trends and pattern of corruption on the continent. African literary writers have particularly taken up the fight against corruption in Africa through the motif of corruption which runs through their literary texts across genres. Femi Osofisan, a Nigerian playwright, has reflected and refracted the motif of corruption in *Èsù and the Vagabond Minstrels* and *Another Raft*. These two plays treat the motif of corruption with some close reference to the actuality of Nigerian history. The interesting thing about the treatment of corruption motif in the two plays is the proposal for collectivity and objectivity in the fight against corruption in any society.

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