

A Cultural-Conceptual Analysis of Some Metaphors of Corruption in Nigerian Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the metaphors of corruption used in Soyinka's Samarkand, Osundare's Waiting Laughters and Olafioye's The Parliament of Idiots, examines how they are conceptualised within the Nigerian cultural setting and highlights the attributes that corrupt public officials share with them so as to portray how destructive they are to Nigeria and its people. The study, after analysing such metaphors as lion, dog, hyena, vulture, cobra, locust, leech, tortoise and virus, among others, reveals that their referents are destructive since they share with them such attributes as greed, selfishness, callousness, cunningness, wastefulness, brutality, recklessness, pretentiousness and moral rottenness, among others, which have wreaked havoc on Nigeria as a nation. The study also reveals that corruption has continued to thrive in Nigeria because the nation's moral fabric has been weakened and, thus, such vices as avarice, materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten wealth are celebrated at the expense of honesty, hardwork, patriotism, community service, commitment and selfless devotion, which ought to have been taken as symbols of national pride. Thus, there is the need for massive cultural re-orientation for attitudinal change so that those, who had earlier had the wrong orientation that corruption is a good way of life, can be persuaded to live a virtuous life and, thus, shun all forms of corrupt acts that can impede meaningful development. It is this responsibility of cultural re-orientation that the Nigerian literary artists have demonstrated in the selected works.

Keywords: Cultural, Metaphors, Corruption, Nigerian, Literature

INTRODUCTION

Corruption has today become a global problem. Its destructive pangs are felt not only in the poor developing countries of Africa, Asia and South America, but also in the developed nations. A survey by Transparency International (TI) in 2012 showed that, out of 170 nations, only 53 scored above 50 and were, therefore, adjudged to have a relatively clean record of corruption. The remaining countries, including Czech Republic, Turkey, Croatia, Slovakia, Italy, Greece and Russia, scored below 50 and were therefore considered heavily prone to corruption. The fact that none of the countries used for the survey, including the developed countries, scored 100% shows that no country is totally free from corruption and its destructive effects. Thus, corruption has inimical effects on all nations, either directly or indirectly, as what affects one nation also affects several others because of the close economic ties existing among nations globally.

In Nigeria, for example, corruption has stunted our development as a nation. Nigeria is the second largest African exporter of crude oil and the eighth globally. Ironically, however, it is one of the most under-developed countries in the world. Nigeria was overtaken in development by the mid-1990s by some other developing countries as Malaysia, Indonesia and Venezuela, which were worse than Nigeria in the 1960s. Similarly, Nigeria lags behind

many sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon, Zambia, Senegal, Ghana, Togo and Benin in GNP per capita. About two thirds of Nigeria's population of over 140 million people live on less than 1 US dollar per day, and the unemployment rate has been terrific over the years as it rose astronomically from 5.3% in 2006 to 21.1% in 2010 and to 23.9% in 2011. According to Salami (2013), about 80% of Nigeria's youth are unemployed while 10% are under-employed. Gyamfi (2006) also observed that, out of the 130,000 graduates turned out from Nigeria's tertiary educational institutions annually, only 13,000 (10%) get employment, leaving 90% roaming the streets seeking opportunities for legitimate jobs or social vices. As Eneh (2008) noted, a considerable number of youths have, because of lack of jobs, been pushed into the commercial motor-bike transport business, where a regrettable number of them encounter road mishaps on daily basis (see also Eneh, 2000).

Nigeria also lags behind in the basic requirements sub-index, which highlights the fundamentals for achieving sustainable growth, namely strong institutions, adequate infrastructure, a supportive macro-economic environment, and good basic health and education (Ujah, 2006; Famakinwa, 2006). In terms of infrastructure, for example, besides the fact that Nigeria does not have a strong infrastructural base that can drive meaningful development, the situation is further worsened by the poor maintenance culture prevalent in the country. As noted in Onah (2006), roads in Nigeria have deteriorated so terribly over the years that it costs more to send goods from Lagos to Maiduguri than to Europe. Due to the poor condition of the roads, 33,600 people died in road accidents from 2001 to 2005, while 34,200 people sustained various degrees of injuries. Osita Chidoka, Corps Marshal, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), also noted that between December 19 and 23, 2013 alone, 107 deaths were recorded with 1,398 persons injured in 214 road accidents, and that the situation was better when compared to what obtained in 2012 when, in the same five-day period (December 19 - 23, 2012), 156 deaths and 1,882 injured persons were recorded in 236 road accidents. Similarly, the power sector, according to Sobowale (2006), is in perpetual crisis and, thus, it is impossible to boast of a week within which there is uninterrupted power supply (Okonkwo, 2010). In the health sector, social indicators on health still remain weak despite the efforts that government has, over the years, made to improve the health care system, especially by increasing the health spending in the federal budget and by adopting several policy initiatives, including the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Health, health care, and general living conditions in Nigeria are poor. At an estimated rate of 5.3%, urbanization in Nigeria is among the highest in the world, occasioning overcrowding and its attendant socio-economic problems, including environmental degradation (United Nations System in Nigeria, 2001; Eneh, 2008). Life expectancy is 52 years, and just over half the population has access to potable water and appropriate sanitation. Njoku (2006) noted that, although there is an overdose of natural water in Nigeria, citizens groan daily under the weight of lack of safe domestic water. The average urban residents, who cannot afford to sink a borehole, resort to fetching water for domestic purposes from shallow wells or from streams up to 3-hour walking distances away, while others rely on vendors whose water is, in most cases, unsafe for consumption (Alao, Mukhtar, Abah, & Akinola, 2014) and are, thus, prone to various deadly water-borne diseases, including cholera and dysentery (Muta'aHellandendu, 2012).

All these, (and many more), are indications that Nigeria is grossly under-developed and is, therefore, far from being considered as a developed nation in spite of its rich natural and human resources. What then is the problem? The problem has been traced to various sources, chief among which is corruption. The level of corruption in Nigeria has become endemic and epidemic since it takes place even at the highest echelon of government (Achebe, 1984; Dike, 2001; Oloja, 2002; Agbase, 2008a, 2008b). Nigeria's position in TI's corruption ranking over

the years is, therefore, a testimony to the high level of corruption in Nigeria. According to TI's ranking in 1996 - 2003, Nigeria was, except in 1998, the most corrupt or second most corrupt nation in the world as it occupied either the last or second last position: 1996 (54/54), 1997 (52/52), 1998 (81/85), 1999 (98/99), 2000 (90/90), 2001 (90/91), 2002 (101/102) and 2003 (132/133). From 2004 onwards, although Nigeria no longer occupied the last or second last position, its rating was still not as encouraging as expected in spite of the various concerted efforts made at the time to fight corruption in the country. In 2004, Nigeria's position was 144/145, 2005 (152/158), 2006 (142/179), 2007 (147/180), 2008 (121/180), 2009, (130/180), 2010 (134/178), 2011 (143/183), 2012 (124/170) and 2013 (144/177). The foregoing data indicate that Nigeria, just like many other countries, is still neck-deep in the waters of corruption.

Corruption is inimical to Nigeria as a nation. Not only has it encouraged mismanagement and waste of huge amounts of limited national resources, but has also had severe negative consequences on Nigeria at the international level, including decreased Foreign Direct Investments and the denting of Nigeria's national image. Besides, corruption has eroded the social and moral fabric of Nigeria. This is so because it encourages such vices as avarice, materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of ill-gotten wealth, among others, at the expense of honesty, hardwork, patriotism, community service, commitment and selfless devotion, which ought to have been taken as symbols of national pride. Thus, as Abu (2008) opines, corruption is Nigeria's number one enemy because it is responsible for all the pains that we experience as a nation and as individual Nigerians. It must, therefore, be fought to a standstill, if Nigeria must achieve its developmental aspirations. To facilitate the effective control of corruption in Nigeria, there is the need for the general population to be re-orientated to a better value system. This is because Nigerians have for long been living on the "survival of the fittest" and "grab-whatever-comes-your-way" mentality (Dike, 1999). Thus, this re-orientation is necessary because it will go a long way in effecting attitudinal change in the Nigerian socio-political scene in the sense that the Nigerians, who had earlier had the wrong orientation that honesty, patriotism, hardwork, selfless service, etc. do not pay, will now be persuaded to have positive attitude towards these virtues and, thus, embrace and cherish them thereby fast-tracking meaningful development by shunning all forms of corrupt acts.

However, as Dike (1999) suggests, the task of re-orientating Nigerians should not be the responsibility of just one individual, but that of all Nigerians. This explains why the Nigerian literary artists have taken it upon themselves to re-orientate Nigerians to see the destructive nature of corruption. It is in line with this responsibility that this study contextualises the destructive metaphors that Nigerian literary artists have used to depict corruption in their works. With reference to Wole Soyinka's *Samarkand*, Niyi Osundare's *Waiting Laughters* and Tayo Olafioye's *The Parliament of Idiots*, the study analyses, within the framework of the cultural conceptualisation theory, such metaphors as "lion", "dog", "hyena", "vulture", "cobra", "locust", "leech", "tortoise" and "virus", among others and situate them within the Nigerian culture so as to portray how destructive their referents (the corrupt Nigerians represented by the metaphors) are and, thus, open the eyes of Nigerians to the havoc that corruption has wreaked on Nigeria and, therefore, the urgent need to take decisive steps to fight it to a stop. Specifically, the study identifies the metaphors used in the texts, examines how they are generally conceptualised within the Nigerian cultural setting and highlights the specific attributes that corrupt public officials in Nigeria share with them and, thus, bringing to the limelight the evils that these corrupt officials have, on account of their corrupt practices, brought upon Nigeria and its people.

The cultural conceptualisation theory is an emerging theory in cultural linguistics which complements studies in sociolinguistics, especially in bilingual/ bicultural situations, to account for the various cultural schemas and metaphors that embody the cultural beliefs and experiences of the users of a language (see Malcolm, 2001; Malcolm, & Sharifian, 2005; Kovecses, 2005; Sharifian, 2003, 2005, 2006). As Saviile-Troike (1989) observed, there is a correlation between the form and content of a language and the beliefs, values and needs present in the culture of its speakers and, therefore, “interpreting the meaning of linguistic behaviour requires knowing the meaning within which it is embedded.” Sharifian (2006: pp. 14 & 18) also supports this position thus:

...language is entrenched in conceptualisation, which is largely culturally constructed...and a thorough understanding of such conceptualisations may require long-time exposure to the culture and interaction with the speakers.

As Hudson (2003: p. 78) observed, culture, as socially acquired knowledge, is learnt from other people either directly by direct instruction or by watching their behaviour, and “since we learn our culture from those around us, we may assume that we share it with them, so this kind of knowledge is likely to play a major role when we communicate with them and in particular when we use language.” This shared cultural knowledge is significant since it enables us to interpret the contexts in which the cultural schemas and metaphors that embody our cultural beliefs and experiences are used and understood. It is, therefore, in relation to this shared cultural knowledge that the metaphors of corruption examined in this study are contextualised to portray the danger that corruption poses to Nigeria as a nation. Thus, the theory is useful here because it provides a sound cultural background within which this study situates the various destructive metaphors employed in the selected works to depict corruption in Nigeria and, thus, opening the eyes of Nigerians to see the evils that corruption has perpetrated in Nigeria and, therefore, the need to curb it.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHORS OF CORRUPTION USED IN THE SELECTED WORKS

In this section, the metaphors of corruption used in Soyinka’s *Samarkand*, Osundare’s *Waiting Laughters* and Olafioye’s *The Parliament of Idiots* are presented and analysed with reference to the Nigerian culture. The first metaphor considered here is that of the “elephant” killed and “sheared” by animals of prey as shown in (1) below:

- (1) They sheared the elephant:
Arms, legs, and limbs
Flesh, carcass, and tusks.
Its heart gulped in a flash
The foxes provided for themselves
And over gorged their esophagus
Like dogs they barked backwards...
They played the lions,
And wildebeests without tails.
These tribal hyenas...
Are the locusts that ruin the crops...
12 cars, police escorts
10 vans, burly guards
12 riders, with status horns

20 cars, for area boys, cooks and laundry men
A mansion, the people's sweat
6 doctors for emergencies
In case he caught a cold or dreamed
Some assassins: real or imagined...
A separate consignment at the halfway
In Enugu, in case he needed a rest
In the village.
Abuja, round the clock
Nothing went to sleep there
In case he sneezed from his chain snore
The madam too, her cortege of ghostly fops...
The vultures, tortoises ... and cobras... (*Parliaments*, pp. 24 & 28).

The elephant is a very big animal and, thus, a cultural metaphor for anything that is big and gigantic. As the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria often say, “àjànàkú kọ já ‘mo rí nnkaan firí’, bí a bá rérin ká gbà pé a rérin.” This, when translated, means “the elephant is too large an animal to describe as something flashing past.” This big size of the elephant is, therefore, what is used in (1) to reflect the vast resources of Nigeria and the richness of its treasury, which have been squandered by corrupt politicians, represented by the animals of prey. It should be recalled that Nigeria, Africa's second largest exporter of crude oil, is the 12th largest producer and the 8th largest exporter globally, and has the 10th largest proven reserves. Besides oil, Nigeria is also rich in such mineral resources as natural gas, coal, tin, iron ore, bauxite, limestone, lead, zinc, etc., as well as in agricultural produce like cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, rubber, kolanut, cassava, beans, rice, cashew nuts, sorghum and yams, among several others. In terms of human resources, Nigeria's population of over 140 million people makes it the seventh most populous country globally, the second most populous black nation and the most populous nation in Africa. Thus, Nigeria is an elephant, a giant in terms of its vast natural and human resources.

However, these vast resources have been made insignificant by corrupt leaders who, rather than spending them on improving the lives of the people, diverted them into their personal pockets and private accounts in foreign banks. Thus, as shown in (1), “they sheared the elephant: arms, legs, and limbs, flesh, carcass, and tusks”; they gulped its heart in a flash. This therefore reflects the callous manner in which the vast resources of Nigeria have been squandered by our leaders and their cohorts both within and outside Nigeria.

The next metaphor is that of the animals of prey. In (1), we have such carnivores as dogs, lions, hyenas, vultures and snakes, representing our present and past leaders and public officials who have, in one way or the other, destroyed the country through their corrupt practices. These are also reflected in (2), (3) and (4) below:

(2) And the vultures are fat...

My land is a desert
waiting for the seminal fury
of uneasy showers... (*Waiting Laughters*, pp. 45 – 47).

(3) Waiting

like a hyena

for the anniversary of its pounce...
And the multitudes waiting,
...in the corridors of hungry shadows
stretched skeletally out
in rice queues, bread queues
salt queues, water queues
long like a scarlet tear
from the short-tempered scourge
of the winkless sun... (*Waiting Laughters*, pp. 55 – 56).

- (4) Songhai laborers:
Will never climb
Out of the crypt of misery...
They are cursed:
Reined in by those they chose
To lift them.
No greater enemy
Than the one, in one's household
The python with which one sleeps
At night on the same bed. (*Parliament*, p. 26).

Each of these animals is culturally acknowledged as an animal of prey and, thus, a destroyer. As the Yoruba say, “bí ajá bá wọ agbádá iná, tí ekùn wẹwù eḡe, tí ológinní wọ àkísà şákálá, eḡbe aḡeran-ḡe ni gbogbo wọn í şe”, meaning, “if the dog's coat is as hot as fire, the lion's as red as scarlet and the wild cat's as wretched as the common rag, they are all carnivores” (Sotunde, 2009). Besides being an animal of prey, each of these carnivores has certain attributes that can be compared to those exhibited by the corrupt officials exposed in the texts. For example, the dog is culturally known to be servile and, therefore, loyal to its master (the owner-hunter) in the sense that when it kills an animal, it brings it to the owner. The dog in this context is the corrupt Nigerian leader or public official, while the owner-hunter is the external force to whom our leaders and public officials take their loot. Instead of being loyal to the electorates who elected them into office, they become loyal to the various foreign companies, corporations and individuals who assist them to get and transfer their ill-gotten wealth into foreign accounts and, thereafter, spend it for the development of their own countries at the expense of Nigeria. The dog is also culturally identified as being unreliable in the sense that it, especially when lured with food, does things that are contrary to what it is told to do. This attribute is reflected in an Izon folktale which explains the role the dog played in the contest between the ram and the he-goat. According to Okunrinmeta (2009: p. 67), it was a fight for supremacy, and it became so fierce that the horns of both animals got broken. Thus, to ensure that the fight was won, the ram sent the dog to its (the ram's) house to bring an extra horn given to it by the Creator, while the he-goat sent the she-goat to do the same. Both the dog and the she-goat were seriously warned not to do any other thing until the extra horn was brought since this was very crucial to the determination of the winner in the contest. On its way to the ram's house, the dog was invited to eat faeces and, in disregard of the urgent mission on which it was sent, it went and ate all that it was offered. Similarly, the she-goat was invited to eat plantain peelings but it declined firmly on the grounds that it was going on an urgent mission. Thus, the she-goat went straight to the place where the horn was kept and took it to the he-goat. But the dog was busy eating faeces instead of doing what it

was sent to do. At the end, it was the horn that the she-goat brought that the he-goat used to kill the ram. Just like what the dog did in this folktale, Nigerian politicians betrayed the electorates because of their selfish interests. When these corrupt politicians were campaigning to be elected, they promised the electorates so many beautiful things, including good governance and transparent management of resources. However, when they finally got to power, they abandoned all their promises and did otherwise. Finally, besides being servile and unreliable, the dog is also acknowledged culturally as being discriminatory in its attack on animals. As a Yoruba proverb says, “*ajá mọ ọmọ tirẹ fún lómú, ó mọ ọmọ oyà kímọlẹ*”, meaning, “the dog suckles its own litter but devours that of the grasscutter.” This is significant here because it reflects the way corrupt leaders behave as they use the powers of the state to terrorize and silence politicians who do not belong to their group. In fact, a major criticism against anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria is that they only apprehend those corrupt politicians who antagonise the government of the day, while those who are more corrupt are left untouched because they are loyal to the powers that be. For example, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), especially under Mr. Nuhu Ribadu, was accused of double standard and insincerity in its war against corruption. Many observed that Ribadu went after the perceived enemies of his boss, Obasanjo, while shielding the friends of the former president. Thus, *The Guardian* of Thursday, October 14, 2004 reports that, in reaction to Mr. Ribadu’s claim of “phenomenal” achievement of the EFCC, Senator Arthur Nzeribe retorted that the “EFCC goes after ‘small thieves’ and spares bigger thieves in government.” Just like the time of Obasanjo, the EFCC under Yar’Adua was accused of being used by the government in power to harass and hound Obasanjo’s main anti-corruption crusaders into exile. The cases of Malam el-Rufai and Mr. Nuhu Ribadu are ready examples that can be cited to support this assertion. Whether this accusation is right or wrong, the fact remains that the perception that the generality of Nigerians have of the EFCC is that of a dreaded instrument of harassment and coercion, especially in the hands of the government in power. Thus, just like the dog which “suckles its own litter but devours that of the grasscutter”, the EFCC and other anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria have been used to apprehend and harass those politicians who are not in the good books of the government of the day, while those who support the government in power are left untouched even when they appear to be more corrupt.

The lion as an animal of prey also has some attributes that corrupt Nigerian leaders share with it. The lion is culturally recognized as the king of the jungle. It is so powerful that it rules over all animals. However, rather than using its power as king to protect the animals over which it rules, the lion hunts and kills them for food. The lion is so terrific in its attack on animals that all dread it. To capture this, a Yoruba proverb says that, “*bí kinnìún bá tọ kájù, ẹranko tó bá gbaḅe ko ọrìire*” (“wherever the lion urinates in the jungle, any animal that heads towards that direction is unlucky”). There is also a Yoruba folktale which reflects the tactics the lion employs to lure animals into its den so as to devour them, especially when it becomes old and cannot therefore run after its prey. According to Babalola (1973), the lion pretended to be ill and, therefore, told the hare to announce this to all its subjects (the animals) and to invite them. Thus, all the animals had to go in turns to the lion’s den to console and wish it a quick recovery. As the animals went into the den one after the other, the lion killed them for food. However, when it got to the turn of the tortoise, it noticed at the entrance that the footprints of the animals only went in but did not come out. This suggested that none of the animals that went into the den came out. It then dawned on the tortoise that the lion devoured all the animals that went to greet it and so the tortoise, after raising an alarm to alert the remaining animals, had to run for its life since the animals which ought to have been protected by the king (the lion) are those that are now devoured by it. In the same

manner, the Nigerian leaders who ought to have protected the people of Nigeria have decided to roast them for dinner through their corrupt practices. People now die everyday of road accidents (Onah, 2006; Aminu, 2013; Egwuata, 2013) because the money meant for the construction and maintenance of roads has been diverted into personal pockets. Similarly, several Nigerians have, over the years, died of such water-borne diseases as cholera and dysentery because there is no good water to drink since the money allocated to the provision of potable water has been embezzled. The health care system which ought to have come to the rescue is even getting worse in spite of the increase in health spending in the federal budget. According to the United Nations' 2010 MDG Report, the infant mortality rate was 75 deaths per 1000 live births, the under-five mortality rate was 157 per 1000, the maternal mortality rate was 545 deaths per 100,000 live births and the proportion of births attended by skilled personnel was 39%. All these are caused by the brutality of our corrupt leaders. More worrisome is the fact that those who are courageous enough to challenge them are either "set up" and put in prison or assassinated. We can still remember the terror that Abacha's killer squad unleashed on innocent Nigerians. Thus, besides devouring the elephant (Nigeria's vast resources), the lions (Nigeria's corrupt leaders) have also metaphorically killed so many Nigerians through their corrupt practices.

Corrupt leaders are also compared to hyenas because of the common attributes both of them share. In (1), corrupt leaders are presented as "tribal hyenas", while in (3), they are described as "waiting like a hyena for the anniversary of its pounce..." The hyena is culturally acknowledged as being very powerful not only because it kills smaller and less powerful animals, but also because it devours such other powerful carnivores as dogs which also prey on other animals. Owing to this powerful nature of the hyena, the dog detests and fears it. As a Yoruba proverb says, "ki laj n bn ikook s? Olwa ba lo se won lonje ara won", meaning, "the dog needs not be angry at the hyena. God created them as prey and predator." There is also another Yoruba proverb which says, "ron ikook lo n paj." This, when translated, means that "it is the incessant thought about the hyena that kills the dog." The hyena, therefore, serves as a metaphor to reflect the feeling of oppression, terror and hatred which exists among corrupt leaders. This is reflected in the fact that as the hyena devours its prey (the animals it feeds on), it also devours the dog – another carnivore which terrorizes other less powerful animals. Thus, the dog (an animal of prey) has also become a prey to the hyena, which is a more powerful animal of prey thereby creating a scene where the devourer becomes the devoured. This suggests that, while corrupt leaders employ the powers of the state to terrorize and silence the ordinary citizens who challenge them on account of their corrupt practices, they also suffer in the hands of more powerful leaders (those who head the government in power), especially when the former are no longer in government. The fact that they are described as tribal hyenas, however, suggests that they often have the tendency to shield a corrupt person who comes from their ethnic grouping, while they pounce on another who is from a different ethnic group thereby portraying the insincerity with which the anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria is launched.

The vulture is another animal of prey whose attributes are used in the selected works to portray the corrupt practices of our political leaders. The vulture is culturally acknowledged as being greedy and wasteful. This is underscored by the Yoruba proverb which says "jgb ni ign n jb; jgb ni klmgb n j k", meaning, "with impunity does the vulture devour sacrificial offerings; with impunity does the scavenger bird devour carcasses." The vulture is also acknowledged as having the ability to sniff a carcass from the sky as reflected in the proverb "b k b k ly, kl   gbrun m" ("the vulture could sniff a carcass from high above in the sky"). Like the vulture, corrupt politicians and their cohorts are greedy, wasteful and callous, and they possess the ability to "sniff" the wealth of Nigeria

wherever it is so as to steal and squander it. This is exactly what is reflected in (1) where a single person uses 12 cars for police escorts, 10 vans for body guards, 20 cars for area boys, cooks and laundry men, and 6 doctors for emergencies, all at the expense of the comfort of the poor Nigerians whose lives ought to have been positively affected. Ironically, as these vultures (corrupt leaders) get fatter because of their ill-gotten wealth, the generality of Nigerians continue to be suffering as reflected in (2).

Besides being compared to dogs, lions, hyenas and vultures, corrupt politicians are also likened to such snakes as cobras and pythons in (1) and (4) to portray how dangerous they are. Culturally, a snake is seen as something dangerous to man. According to a Yoruba proverb, “a kíí fí ejò sóri òrùlé sùn”, meaning, “we do not sight a snake on our roof top and go to sleep.” There is also another Yoruba proverb which says “àgbà tó réjò tí kò sá, ara ikú ló n yá a” (“an elder who does not first flee upon sighting a snake wants to commit suicide”). All these point to the general belief among Nigerians that snakes are dangerous. However, one major attribute that snakes and corrupt leaders share in common is the urge to keep the prey (the looted wealth of Nigeria) to themselves alone and, thus, portraying their greed and avarice. This attribute is reflected in the Yoruba proverb, “ẹran tí ọkà bá ẹ, ẹnu ọkà ní gbé sí” (“any prey bitten by the cobra remains in its fangs”). Just like the snake that keeps its prey in its mouth, Nigerian leaders, rather than ensuring that the vast wealth of the country is equitably distributed to raise the standard of life of the generality of Nigerians, often corner it for themselves and the members of their immediate families. Thus, as noted by Abu (2008) and Agbase (2008a & 2008b), Nigeria’s wealth benefits only less than 1% of the population (the privileged few), while the vast majority of the people wallow in poverty and misery in the midst of plenty.

The next metaphor is that of locusts. In (1), there is the metaphor of the locusts that ruin the crops. Here, we see the picture of the crops in a farmland whose leaves are stripped naked and the veins made bare because of the invasion of locusts. The farmland here represents Nigeria, while the crops/leaves represent its vast natural and human resources. The locusts, which invade the farmland and ruin the crops, are the corrupt Nigerians who have, because of their selfish interests, squandered the resources of the country. Also, in (5), the advent of corrupt military leaders is compared to the “hour of locusts” leading to the “silo’s depletion” since the mission of these “khaki boys” is to invade the treasury and ruin the economy:

(5) Whose feet are these upon the storehouse loft?

Shod in studded boots or jewelled sandals,

Khaki crisp or silk embroidered – who are these?

...Their advent is the hour of locusts – behold

Cheeks in cornucopia from the silo’s depletion... (*Samarkand*, p. 80).

Thus, they, just like the corrupt politicians, are destructive and are, therefore, compared to locusts. Culturally, locusts are known to be indiscriminate and reckless in the manner they invade and destroy farmlands. As a Yoruba proverb says, “eşú kò mọ olóòótọ, eşú fí oko olóore jẹ”, that is, “the locust does not know a nice person, it destroys the farm of a good person (the way it does to that of a bad person).” Thus, the locust is culturally known for being highly destructive. Just like the locust, corrupt Nigerians are portrayed in the selected texts as being highly destructive since their corrupt practices have ruined our economy and have, therefore, caused untold hardship to Nigeria and its people.

We also have the metaphor of a leech sinking its proboscis into an open vein as reflected in (6):

(6) We know which way they flew, what leeches –

...Sank sly proboscis deep in open veins

And piped our life blood through indifferent seas. (*Samarkand*, p. 10).

The leech is a metaphor for the exploitative tendencies of corrupt Nigerians who often drain the treasury in the same manner a leech sucks blood from the skins of animals. The fact that the leech sinks its proboscis into an open vein indicates that Nigeria's resources and treasury are unprotected and are, therefore, exposed to the exploitation of these callous people who, because of their positions and links in government, have the power to silence anyone that challenges their corrupt actions. Besides being exploitative, the leech is also known culturally for being wasteful. According to an Izon proverb, "bou akula duhin bai zu ikiyo gha", meaning, "when a leech sucks blood, it does not consider leaving some for tomorrow." This wasteful attribute of the leech is, therefore, what the corrupt officials in Nigeria manifest as they drain the resources of the country and "pipe" them "through indifferent seas" into foreign accounts with the aid of their equally corrupt foreign partners in crime.

There is also the metaphor of a virus living amidst the leaves of a plant and, yet, decimating it. This is reflected in (7):

(7) 7000 naira* wages, slashed to the bone –

Before the cock crows...

The Mekunnus* are dying

Talakawas* eye the moon for delivery...

They ate unhappiness for dinner...

The virus that decimates a plant

Lives amidst its leaves. (*Parliament*, pp. 26 – 27).

The plant here represents Nigeria, and the leaves, Nigeria's vast resources, treasury and people. The virus here represents those corrupt Nigerians who, though living within Nigeria, destroy the country with their corrupt practices because of their selfish interests. According to Okunrinmeta (2008), this metaphor, which is derived from the translation of the Yoruba proverb, "kòkòrò tó n jefò, ara efò ló wà", suggests that the problems Nigerians face today are caused by their fellow Nigerians who, because of their greed and selfishness, have decided to mortgage the general interest of the country. Thus, as suggested in the proverb, "alátiṣe ní m̀tiṣe ara rẹ" (everybody takes his/her fortune in his/her hands), there is the need for Nigerians to put their destiny into their own hands and fight to put a stop to the agony, hardship and embarrassment that have been caused by these bad eggs within our political system.

Another metaphor is that of the tortoise in (1) above. The tortoise is a metaphor for cunningness and, thus, represents the cunning nature of corrupt politicians. They are so cunning that they post cheques mystically in foreign accounts so as to defraud the nation, and sign contracts with their toes to cover up their misdeeds:

(8) Non-intended corporations

Siphoned away thousand millions:

Cee Chris, Centre & Point, Asso Logistics...

Many checks posted mystically in accounts

Contracts approved without process

Where possible, they signed with their toes... (*Parliament*, p. 25).

However, as the Yoruba proverb says, “*enikan kii gbón tán*” (“nobody has the monopoly of wisdom”). To buttress up this assertion, there is a Yoruba folktale where the tortoise, according to Babalola (1973), thought of gathering all the wisdom on earth into a big gourd so that it alone would be wise enough to rule the world. After doing this for three years, the tortoise decided to keep the gourd on top of a palm tree behind its house. One day, the tortoise put the gourd on its chest and tied a rope on the neck of the gourd to its own neck. It then closed the mouth of the gourd and attempted to climb the palm tree on the top of which it earlier kept it. The tortoise made several attempts but the gourd on its chest prevented it on each occasion. At this point, the snail got to the scene and laughed loudly. It wondered how the tortoise could be so stupid, and so advised that the gourd be moved to the back so that the tortoise could climb the palm tree. With the brilliance displayed by the snail, it dawned on the tortoise that, in spite of all the efforts made to become the wisest on earth, it was not as wise as the snail. The tortoise then smashed the gourd on the ground in shame and frustration. Thus, though corrupt Nigerian leaders and their cohorts may possess the skills to post cheques mystically in foreign accounts and sign contracts with their toes to cover up their misdeeds, all will end up in shame and disgrace.

The tortoise is also culturally known for being greedy and selfish. However, these traits often lead to self-destruction. In a folktale in Opatotun (1994), we saw how the tortoise got itself smashed to pieces because of its greed and selfishness. According to the folktale, all birds were invited by the eagle to accompany it to a feast organised by its in-laws somewhere in the sky. Despite the fact that the tortoise had no wings to fly, it insisted that it would accompany the eagle. It therefore appealed to the birds to donate a feather each so that it could also fly to the venue of the feast – a request that was graciously granted by the birds. On their way to the feast, the tortoise suggested that each animal should have for itself a name that it would bear at the feast. The tortoise was the first to provide a name for itself: “all of you.” All the birds also gave themselves new names. When they got to the venue, the eagle’s in-laws were very happy and, thus, came to entertain them. They brought food and drinks, and announced to the animals (the tortoise and the birds): “this is for all of you.” Since the tortoise was the only one known by the name, it took all the food and drinks, meant for all the animals, alone. The birds became so hungry that they could no longer bear it. They begged the tortoise to give them some food to eat so that they could have enough strength to sustain themselves, but it refused. So, they had to endure the hunger till the end of the feast. When they were on their way home, the birds felt that they had been cheated and, thus, decided to take revenge on the tortoise for the wicked manner it treated them. Each bird therefore took back, in mid-air, the feather given to the tortoise, and so it crashed and got broken into pieces. The greed and selfishness of the tortoise therefore led to its destruction. Thus, just like what the tortoise experienced in this folktale, nemesis will catch up with our corrupt leaders who have, because of their greed and selfishness, caused untold hardship, pain and agony to the generality of Nigerians. Today, they may appear to be cunning and smart; but the future will certainly pass judgement not only on them, but also on their entire generation. Thus, as suggested in the Yoruba proverb, “*bó o bá lè dáná lórí igi oro, tó o lè sunṣu jẹ lórí ìròkò, ọmọ tó o bí n kọ?*” (if you could cook on a tree and roast a yam on another while displaying your magical prowess, think of your offspring), they should think of the future of their children and stop these corrupt acts.

Finally, there is the metaphor of a spoilt fish, with a rotten head which represents the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria. This is reflected in (9) below:

(9) If you want to know a spoilt fish

Go ahead, smell the head. (*Parliament of Idiots*, p. 48).

The rotten fish is a metaphor for the moral decadence prevalent in the Nigerian society. While the head represents the Nigerian government and leaders, the body represents the followers. The fact that both the body and the head are rotten implies that corruption has become an institutionalized norm in Nigeria because both the followers and the leaders are involved in it and, thus, instead of fighting it to a stop, it is being encouraged to thrive. The fact that corruption takes place even at the highest echelon of government is, therefore, an indication that leadership, rather than giving Nigerians a taste of true patriotism that can put the country on the path of sustainable development, has only succeeded in encouraging, tolerating, entrenching and institutionalizing corruption and glorifying the perpetrators. This singular attitude of the leaders, no doubt, gives wrong orientation to the followers and, as such, the virtues of honesty, patriotism, community service, etc. are less valued, while avarice, materialism and parochialism become national phenomena; thus, the prevalence of moral rottenness in every facet of the Nigerian society, which the rotten fish represents here.

CONCLUSION

The analysis done in this study shows that such metaphors as lion, dog, hyena, vulture, cobra, locust, leech, tortoise and virus, among others share some traits with the corrupt officials that they depict in the selected works. Corrupt officials, just like the metaphors that represent them, are greedy, selfish, dangerous, discriminatory, exploitative, oppressive, brutal, callous, cunning, wasteful, reckless, pretentious, unreliable and morally rotten. They are therefore highly destructive to Nigeria as a nation. From the foregoing, it is clear that corruption, rather than being seen as an entrenched national norm that must be celebrated, must be seen and condemned as a destroyer and must, therefore, be fought to a standstill.

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