

Unmasking Administrative Corruption in Time of COVID-19: A Correlative Discourse of Julie Okoh's "Who Can Fight the gods"?

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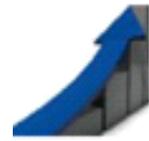
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Abstract

The study aims at unmasking administrative corruption in the Nigerian space during COVID-19 pandemic. Administrative corruption, envisaged through embezzlement and looting of palliative funds for the containment of the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in the Nigerian space has painfully resulted to inadequate provision of palliative measures for most vulnerable, thus has maliciously increased the issues of hunger, suffering, fear, pain, sickness and death of the people as portrayed in Julie Okoh's *Who Can Fight the gods?*. This cankerworm has unequivocally increased the issue of armed robbery, shop breaking, and other social vices that affects the people and threatens the existence of the Nigerian space. Among the major findings is that administrative corruption has provided impetus for creative punches in theatrical and dramatic representation by critics and playwrights, yet, the menace is still prevalent in the Nigerian state. Thus, with Textual Analytical Approach and Third Party Theory, this study investigates how Julie Okoh, a new generational Nigerian Playwright, attempts to establish the effect of administrative corruption on the Nigerian development using the instrument of drama. The effect of this study will distinctly create positive change amongst Nigerians, thereby effectuating change around societies. Amongst the major suggestions, the study insist that Economic and



Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and other crime agencies should as a matter of urgency investigate all financial transactions aimed at containing COVID-19 in the Nigerian state and punishment should be meted on offenders without fear or favour.

Keywords: Unmasking, Administrative Corruption, COVID-19, Correlative Discourse

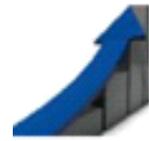
Introduction

The history of corruption may not be ironically expressed but can maliciously fathom to mean different things by different scholars, researchers and critics; due to different economic cum political inclination. But on a general term, Dike (2005) in Yetunde (2009) avers that corruption is as old as the world, because ancient civilizations have traces of widespread “illegality and corruption”. Various writers, according to Yetunde, unite on the view that corruption, as a malaise, is not the exclusive preserve of any nation, race or section of the world but transcends national boundaries and frontiers and symbolizes phenomenal universal unwholesomeness - politically, economically, religiously and culturally. This according to Yetunde does not, however, mean that the incidence and magnitude of corrupt activities are the same in every society.

For instance, corruption has thus become a way of life in Nigeria, one which existing governments neither wishes to, nor can control. It is against this backdrop that Frank and Gloria (2020) noted that “corruption in Nigeria appears to be ubiquitous and takes many forms: from massive contract fraud to petty bribery; from straight-up embezzlement to complicated money laundering schemes; from pocketing the salaries of nonexistent workers to steering plum jobs to relatives and friends”. Some officials according to them enjoy perquisites so excessive that they are widely seen as a form of legalized corruption.

Presently, the issue of corruption is visibly on the administrative strata, that is, public office holders, both governmental and non-governmental through bribe for identification. It is against this backdrop that Frank, George & Amgbadugba (2019) write that “out of all Nigerian citizens who had at least one contact with a public official in the 12 months prior to the 2019 survey, 30.2 percent paid a bribe to, or were asked to pay a bribe by, a public official”. They further instigated that “this means that, although still relatively high, the prevalence of bribery in Nigeria has undergone a moderate, yet statistically significant, decrease since 2016, when it stood at 32.3 percent”. Three out of the country’s six zones (North-East, North-West and South-West) according to Frank, George & Amgbadugba) have recorded decreases in the prevalence of bribery since 2016, with the North-West experiencing a considerable (and statistically significant) decline in the prevalence of bribery, from 36 to 25 percent, while the two other zones recorded smaller decreases.

This stigma of administrative corruption is presently prevalent in the fight against the sordid and novel COVID-19 pandemic that has maliciously affected the world in many fronts-economical, religiously, socially, health wise, and politically. Presently, the issue of COVID-19 pandemic (acute respiratory syndrome) had painfully become a lucrative business where public funds are daily looted, embezzled, and stolen in broad day light with the aim of combating the



spread in the Nigerian society. Administrative corruption can be fathomed on the aspect of distribution of palliative either through fund, and food for most vulnerable in the Nigerian society, the purchase of medical kits, and other medical materials.

It is to the quest of interrogating the issue of administrative corruption in the Nigerian society, in the time of COVID-19 pandemic and its negative effects on the people as portrayed in Julie Okoh are *Who Can Fight the gods?* This form the thrust of the study. To achieve this, Third Party Theory and Textual Analysis Methodology are distinctively adopted.

Concept and Meaning of Corruption

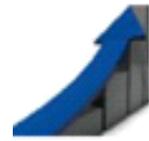
The meaning of corruption differs from one school of thought to the other such as opinions or suggestions are differently given by one to the other. The definition of the concept “corruption” is like throwing a net into the river expecting to catch a single fish but end up catching fishes of different species and different sizes. Is also like asking someone to get a bottle of mineral, forgetting that mineral can as well be Coca Cola, Sprite or fanta.

To this, Boris (2005) writes that “corruption is the intentional non-compliance with the arm’s-length principle aimed at deriving some advantage for oneself or related individuals from this behaviour”. To put more light, Boris noted that there are three basic elements of this definition. The first element according to him deals with the arm’s-length principle as it requires that personal or other relationships should play no part in the economic decisions that involve more than one party. Equal treatment of all economic agents is, according to Boris, essential for a well-working market economy. Bias towards particular economic agents definitely violates the arm’s-length principle and fulfills a necessary condition for corruption. If there is no bias, there is no corruption. There are two additional necessary conditions for corruption, or rather conditions that must be fulfilled for observed bias (non-compliance with the arm’s-length principle) to be specified as corruption. The first condition according to Boris (2005) is that the bias must be intentional – accidental violation of the arm’s-length principle because of, for example, imperfect information, does not represent corruption. Second, according to him must be some advantage for the individual who commits a violation of the arm’s-length principle; otherwise, there is no corruption.

The most common types or categories of corruption are supply versus demand corruption, grand versus petty corruption, conventional versus unconventional corruption and public versus private corruption. There are other categories or ways of describing corruption, such as “systemic” versus “individual” or “isolated,” corruption by “commission” versus by “omission,” by the degree of coercion used to perform the illegal act, and the type of benefit provided.

Types of Corruption

The understanding of the word corruption and its types according to Alamu (2020) has been divided into classes by scholars. Tolu and Ogunro (2012) in Alamu (2020) identified the types of corruption as thus:



- i) **Moral Corruption:** this according to is exhibited in sexual pervasiveness, greed especially in inter- personal relationships, loose tongue i.e. uncontrollable tongue such that leaks secrets or slanders or busy-body, indecent dressing or appearance etc.
- ii) **Economic Corruption:** in discussing, manufacturing fake drugs, adulteration of drinks, piracy i.e. copying another person’s intellectual work to illegally enrich oneself (Plagiarism), fraud at all levels amongst others.
- iii) **Political and Bureaucratic corruption:** It is illegal, unethical and unauthorized exploitation of one’s political or official position for personal gain. It has to do with public affairs – goods, fortunes, agencies and resources. It is therefore corruption against the state or its agencies by a person holding an official position in pursuit of private or personal profit.
- iv) **Electoral Corruption:** This has to do with electoral frauds such as election rigging, manipulations, ballot stuffing, registration of under age, and many others.

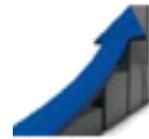
Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

It is pertinent to state that the causes of corruption in Nigeria are many as their effects are maliciously synonymous. Most critics and scholars has painstakingly drafted down their opinions of the causes of corruption in the Nigerian state as most identifies that the causes are many. Most are of the same opinion while few divers. It is on this note that Apia (2018) writes that “corruption typically flourishes in societies in which high value is placed on financial worth, power and status”.

This explains that corruption strives in a place where there is quest for power and richest. On this note, Oyewele (2016) in Apia (2018) aver that “our culture as Nigerians is that of materialism, where they accord so much respect for material possessions irrespective of how it was acquired; a culture that places premium on material things at the expense of integrity; a culture that breeds ‘scarcity mentality’, which is a deep-seated sense of lack that no amount of material supply can satisfy”. Little did one according to Apia wonders why some of the leaders have stolen enough for generations unborn, yet they still keep looting public fund. They see hustling, labour, and perseverance as epidemic, thus seek to store riches and wealth even for their generations unborn. Apia on this matter concludes that “other factors responsible for corruption in Nigeria include, but not limited to weak Government institution, poverty, ignorance and high level of illiteracy”.

Concept and Emergence of COVID-19 in Nigeria

In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) according to Frank & Gloria (2020) declared the outbreak of a new Corona virus disease, an acute respiratory syndrome, also called COVID-19. Due to its pensive nature, it is later regarded as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (Yusuf & Ashiru, 2020). Ironically, Chinyere and Lydia (2020) noted that “although the origin of the pandemic is so controversial, some scientists say that it is likely that COVID-19 originated in bats”. This is drawn based on their experience with other outbreaks



such as Ebola, Lassa fever, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Tuberculosis (TB) as well as our long history of malaria and HIV; whose distinctive nature has inflicted death, pain, suffering, and fear of the people and shackled the economic cum political strata of the world.

Lucidly, WHO (2020) according to Frank and Gloria (2020) observes that “there is a high risk of COVID-19 which originated from Wuhan, an industrial city in China, spreading to other countries around the world. Festus & Kenneth (2020) expatiated this statement when they obliged that “the Corona Virus (COVID-19) out-break was recorded in December, 2019, with first death record on January 11th, 2020 in the Chinese community of Wuhan, and spread to other cities of the world”.

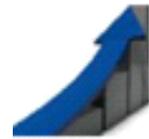
Bibiana (2020) quoting WHO (2020) avers that “COVID-19 exhibited several symptoms which includes fever, cough, and weakness of the body and shortness of breath just to mention a few”. These symptoms according to Bibiana are similar to the flu (influenza) or the common cold and in more severe cases; infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties which can be fatal

In Nigeria, the first confirmed case relating to COVID-19 according to Melvina (2020) was announced on 27th February, 2020 when a 44-year old Italian citizen that returned from Italy to Lagos tested positive for the virus and on 9th March, 2020, the second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian who had contact with the Italian citizen in February, 2020”. But following massive care, Melvina, quoting Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, (NCDC, 2020) avers that he was discharged from the hospital on the 13th March, 2020. Right from the incursion of COVID-19 into the Nigerian society, the nation has an outsized impact.

Against this background, Nigeria according to Agnes (2020) has taken the corona virus pandemic seriously only in the last few months, following the confirmation of its first cases. Agnes further writes that “initial responses included the closure of educational institutions beginning in the mid-March. Festus, Beauty and Vera (2020) agreed with Agnes (2020) on the Nigerian school closure when they averred that “the need to check the spread in the number of COVID-19 cases led to the lockdown of schools as well”. Bappah and Adamu (2020) further noted that “all educational activities in Nigeria were suspended following the directives by the Federal Ministry of Education to close all schools on or before 26th of March, 2020. Concisely, Melvina (202) avers categorically that “the emergence of the disease as a public health emergency by WHO has led to number of precautionary measures such as quarantine, social distancing or in some cases total lockdown in region or countries around the world”.

Principal Agent Theory

Principal Agent Theory, according to Frank, George and Amgbadugba (2019) quoting Linus (2018) defines corruption as a series of interactions and relationships existing within and outside public bodies. It also emphasizes the rational choices taking place in individual incidents of corrupt behaviours.



Extensively, this theory has, over the years, become increasingly concerned with historical, political, and ethical questions towards identifying the inherent nature of corruption and how it is practiced, even though literatures that analyze corruption from a collective action perspective have begun to appear, emphasizing the collective or even systemic rather than purely individual nature of corrupt behavior (Frank, George & Amgbadugba, (2020). While quoting Linus (2018), Frank, George, & Amgbadugba noted that “this theory is helpful in as much as it interrogates the nature of administrative corruption in Nigeria space and its effects on the people. If properly harnessed, it would provide certain guides required towards grasping in a lucid way the nature by which corruption is practiced in the Nigerian space and its effect on the people”.

Conclusively, the theory sees corruption exclusively as an agent problem, with the principal/employer (government or private entrepreneur) unable to play effective monitoring or oversight role on their workers/employees, mostly as a result of lack of information (Frank, George, & Amgbadugba (2019), quoting Andvig et al, (2001). Relating this assertion to the plaguing menace corruption in time of COVID-19, as prevalent in the Nigerian space, it is pertinent to state categorically that this cankerworm can be intensively understood when properly explained, for holistic and dynamic examination.

Methodology

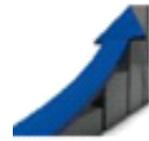
The nature of a subject matter often determines the kind of methodological approach adopted for researching relevant materials, thus, this research work employed the content analytical survey study. The methodological approach utilizes primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the researcher’s personal experiences and observations in the course of carrying out this research, regarding the magnitude of corruption in the Nigerian space in the quest of containing the novel Corona virus, while the secondary sources include written materials relevant to the topic from interne, articles, scholarly journals, conversations, interviews etc.

Synopsis of *Who Can Fight the Gods*

The play centers on the Narrator who painstakingly explains the ordeals of Doctor Lecturer who, due to his quest of investigating the cause and effects of the total blackout in the university community and other heinous issues that brought death and hardship to the people and underdevelopment to the university community, is arrested by the members of the State Security Service and relieved of his duty as a lecturer in the University Community.

At the beginning of the play, Frank , George & Amgbadugba (2019) observes that the narrator sums up the thrust of the text from the explaining of the role of the theatre in the society and to emphasizing the value of independent thinking and critical evaluation of our universe of existence. The narrator exposes the nature of corruption and its effects on the students, workers, and the university community at large.

The narrator strives to establish a scenario where the university community where the best minds are supposed to be trained not only in learning but also in virtue. However, the lived



experience is that neither learning nor virtue is anywhere to be found, thus decorum and ethics, phenomena guiding a better citizen are replaced by laws and activities of those who rule the system. He also explains that the real tragedy is not necessarily that tyranny is invigorated by the moral cowardice of the elite and the unintelligent ambivalence of the masses, but that those who condemn oppression and injustice are murdered in cold blood.

On this note, his emphases are more on Doctor Lecturer who has to stand against the oppressors, investigating how the infrastructures of the university community are dilapidated and how funds given by the federal government for rehabilitation are embezzled by corrupt administrators who see themselves as demi-gods.

Before then, the narrator explains the confrontation that occurred between Doctor Lecturer and the Campus Catholic Union Fellowship members led by Rev. Father and the Catholic Women Fellowship representatives over the rightful users of the University Convocation Arena. Doctor Lecturer whose quest is to administer his examination to his student's, claim that the arena was built for educational purposes and not for religious bigotry, while the Catholic Union Fellowship's claimed that they have been given permission from Dean of Student's Affair over the usage of the arena for their Sunday Mass. The confrontation led to the revelation that the cause of the total blackout in the university community is as a result of mismanagement of fund meant for the purchase of a new generator for the university community.

During the investigation, Doctor Lecturer observes that the generator bought for the university community was scrap, reconditioned and sold at a cheaper rate to the University Community while the balance was embezzled by the university administrators and the director of maintenance who happens to be the husband to one of the Third Catholic Women representatives. It is also revealed how funds meant for capital projects in the University Community were also embezzled.

From this discovery, other issues ranging from the inter cultism activities that claimed the life of Damian (Third Christian Women Organization and Director of Maintenance son) and the cause and effects of corruption in the university community are also enumerated. These discoveries lead to the recognition by the three CWO's and the Rev. Father that Doctor Lecturer who for long is seen as being mentally ill and hated by, all is actually the sane one who strives to restore sanity and sanctity to the university community by striving to expose the corrupt administrators who are the perpetrators of these crimes. The CWO's and the Rev. Father both vow to partake in the fight against the corrupt administrators as that would restore glory to the university community.

The narrator according to Amiriheobu (2019) goes on to explain how some Nigerian intellectuals such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, etc. have gone for self exile to avoid being maimed by the demi-gods who have succeeded in killing powerful activists such as Claude Ake, Ken Saro Wiwa, Kiobel Barinem, Baribo Bera, John Kpuiem, NorduEawo, Paul Levura, Dadiel Gbokoo, Saturday Dobe and Felix Nuate, amongst others, for their activism against the corrupt administrators in Nigeria.



The play comes to conclusion when members of State Security Service arrest Doctor Lecturer and the three CWO's and the Rev. Father decides to forfeit mass so as to testify against the corrupt administrators and their likes and then vindicate Doctor Lecturer.

Who can fight the gods? And theme of COVID-19 Corruption Cases in Nigeria

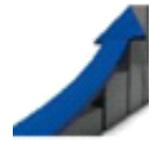
From the study, it is pertinent to deduce categorically and imperturbably that the play *Who Can Fight the god's?* is a microcosm to the macrocosm of the Nigerian space in the time when the novel COVID-19 pandemic was ravaging the economic cum political strata of the nations of the world. The malicious occurrences in the play, such as the bribery, looting, embezzlement, favouratism, divide and rule system, hoarding, and other heinous ordeals with which Dr Lecturer, the protagonist in the play castigates and ridicules were prevalent in the Nigerian state in the time when COVID-19 pandemic was ravaging the economic strata of the world.

These malicious acrimonies, such as portrayed in the play that lead to the arrest of Dr Lecturer by members of State Security Service and his eviction as a lecturer from the University community because of his refusal to succumb to the act of corruption presented to him by the Director of Maintenance and Dean of Students Affairs, unequivocally heightened administrative corruption cases in the Nigerian space, ranging from the billion naira corruption allegation on the NDDC frontiers, the burning of over nine hundred billion naira palliative fund in the office of the Accountant General of the Nigerian Federation as reported by Nigerian Minister of Finance, the disburse of palliatives to states that were wholesomely submissive to the ruling political elites, the ironical claim of spending of over two (2) billion naira on feeding of Nigerian school children whom were asked to stay at home, to contain the spread of the novel COVID-19 pandemic in the Nigerian space.

More so, the funds released for the revitalization and establishment of COVID-19 medical centres and purchase of COVID-19 materials were not adequately utilized as most of the centres are presently not properly equip. These oblivious dichotomies have rather increased the death, hunger, suffering, and pain of the people, must especially as the coercive measures such as the shorting down of economic centres, worship and recreational centres, amusement parks, airports, seaports, railways, and airways that aimed at containing the spread of the pandemic.

Unlike the university community where the nature of administrative corruption crippled the educational system, thus breed half-baked graduates from the University community to the Nigerian space, the resultant effect of theft, looting, embezzlement and the uneven distribution of COVID-19 palliatives by corrupt administrators have pragmatically affected the Nigerian society in all ramifications-economically, politically, socially, religious, and otherwise.

More so, such as the secrete cults activities and clashes in the University community in the play that claimed the life of Damian, the only son to Third Christian Women Organization and Director of Maintenance and other heinous issues that disrupted the academic activities in the institution, the issue, such as hunger, pain, sickness, suffering, and death becomes tensed in the Nigerian society due to the unscrupulous nature of corruption, envisaged by political



administrators in the federal, state, and local strata, that are positioned to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, thus, meeting to the needs of most vulnerable Nigerians. Due to these oblivion effects of administrative corruption in the Nigerian state in this time, issues of shop breaking, theft, vandalism, kidnapping, and other social and economic vices which further threatens the unity of the Nigerian state is further established. The resultant effect of his dichotomy is also witnessed in the increase in acts such as vandalism of oil installation, kidnapping, armed robbery, theft, illegal bunkering, and other forms of social vices, masterminded by the grieving youths..

Conclusion

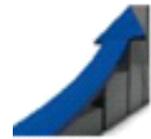
From the foregoing, it is pertinent to state that drama is distinctively a replay of life occurrences. It is a retell of life experiences, and laboratory of change. For instance, Julie Okoh's *Who can fight the gods?* ridicules the oblivion nature of political and administrative elites in the Nigerian society in the quest of containing the dreadful disease outbreak. More so, the study explains that the corruption issue in the containment of the novel corona virus is alarming as it directly affects the most vulnerable citizens and endangered the people that are affected by the virus. It is also plausible to aver that COVID-19 pandemic has unequivocally increased in the level of corruption, money laundering, looting, and bribery in the Nigerian state.

This clearly explains the notion that most Nigerian politicians in the federal, state, and the local level positioned one way or the other towards engaging fervently in the course of containing the dreaded virus either by issuing the fund or by executing the spending to the benefit of the less privilege and the affected masses frivolously embezzles, loots, and steals the funds meant for the masses, for their egocentric desires in detriment of the health and well being of the people and backwardness of the nation, thus endangering the future of the people and nation due to its consistent abolition of sanity and sanctity in the discharge of patriotic services to the people and the nation.

Suggestions

This study suggests the following.

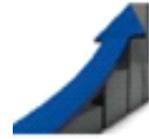
1. The Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and other crime agencies should as a matter of urgency investigate all financial transactions aimed at containing Covid-19 in the Nigerian state and punishment should be meted on offenders without fear or favour.
2. Funds and other palliatives recovered by the EFCC and other crime agencies should be used to better the lives of the people mostly on the improvement of medical care and other social amenities that help improve the lives of the people.
3. Financial palliatives should be paid directly into the BVN accounts of the most vulnerable and an account should be created for those who don't have to avoid the issue of administrative corruption.



4. A monitoring agency should be established to make sure that all development and human development contracts in the Nigerian society are executed.

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