

Off the Mic Semantics and the Trajectories of Vulture Mentality in Nigerian Political Milieu: An Appraisal of Nwabueze and Irobi's Selected Works

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Abstract

The incessant underdevelopment and impoverishment of many African countries despite being richly blessed with an abundance of natural resources is informed mainly by corruption and non-accountability. Oftentimes, the masses are denied the right to ask questions about what affects them, and even when they do, most times, they are ignored, with the government often choosing the part of silence, which the paper captures metaphorically as 'off-the-mic.' Although Nigerian playwrights have over the years highlighted the recurrent challenges of bad leadership, not much has been done in the area of probe panels often set up by the government to investigate and probe matters concerning financial mismanagement and corruption. The researchers isolated two plays to guide the research—Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* and Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*. A documentary methodology was used to examine the effectiveness or otherwise of probe panels in Nigeria over the years and the outcome of the reports. Prebendalism was adopted as the guiding theoretical framework. The paper concludes that the problem of leadership in Nigeria can be located in its leaders' penchant for greed and manipulation of data and the fact that not much has been done to deter fingered culprits over the years. The researchers recommend adopting transparent probe panels and timely and appropriate penalties and retributions to deserving culprits and urge Nigerians to 'on their mic' intending to salvage the country.

Keywords: Corruption, Off the Mic, Vulture-Metaphor, Probe Panel, Nigeria, Prebendalism

Introduction

These are revolutionary times, all over the globe men are revolting old systems of exploitation and oppression. The shirtless and

barefooted people of the world are rising up as never before. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.... We must move past indecision to action...if we do not

act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

One of the major challenges bedeviling contemporary Nigeria's political system is the phenomenon of corrupt leadership with its antecedent insatiable quest for material accumulation; hence political officeholders keep looting the nation dry. This trend is growing by leaps and bounds especially from the inception of the 4th republic to the present time. Corrupt practices are often accompanied by unbridled and brazen mismanagement of the nation's resources, falsifying of financial figures and records, awarding of padded and non-existing contracts, inflation and padding of budgets, converting national monetary resources for personal and family use, and money laundering acts among others. It also involves a lack of accountability to the people who voted them into power, diversion of revenue generated for the day-to-day running of the country, and misappropriation of funds meant for other projects. Similarly, Ezeugwu, Omeje, Erojikwe, Nwaozuzu, and Nnanna submit that "the progress of a nation no longer depends on the wealth or natural endowment of the nation, but on the core values espoused by that nation; values like responsibility, transparency, honesty, accountability and hard work among others, and it is the responsibility of a leader to drive these

core values especially by the examples they set" (129).

These are some of the issues crippling the economy and pushing the masses to the point of boiling over, despite the abundance of resources that the country is blessed with. This Prebendal phenomenon is linked to the country's inept, parasitical, and predatory style of leadership.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2021, "Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa; its population has risen to over 200 million in 2021, with a multi-tribal system of over 250 ethnic groups and three major tribes" (2). Each of the tribes desires to maintain some level of relevance above the others politically and otherwise. In addition to the challenges associated with tribal sentiment, are socio-economic disparities among the groups, which have the potential for conflict on religious grounds, especially among religious groups. These scenarios of regionalized sentiments often trump political leaders with questionable characters who seize the opportunity to aggravate the problems for some clandestine reasons. Attempts by previous governments aimed at tackling them can only be categorized as superficial and fraught with deceit and insincerity. *Loc online News* captures it thus:

After being willed into existence by Lord Lugard and Miss Shaw's colonial laboratory of artificial insemination, Nigeria has lived with multiple issues affecting her system. The bulk of these problems do not get solved because each administration

shifts it under the sheets after each tenure. The ones who barely try to address these issues do so with partial attention. At the same time, there has been massive looting and disrespect for what democracy means in saner climes (Loc News.com.ng, 2020).

In light of this, when leaders are voted into power in Nigeria, the narrative hardly changes, as the masses are often riddled with stories of repeated cycles of looting, diversion of public funds and property, embezzlement, and cover-ups. Even though the nation is rich in mineral resources, it is highly regrettable that vultures in the guise of political officeholders, hiding under the cloak of democratically elected leaders often see the national treasury as their personal wealth. Many attempts to address this threat in the name of sifting out the truth through probe panels, often lead to dead ends, cover-ups, and 'Off the Mic' scenarios.

Theoretical Considerations

The theory of Prebendalism was propagated by Richard Joseph in 1987 and later validated in 2013. It seeks to highlight scenarios where (s)elected political office holders, assume unauthorized power over state and national treasury, government revenues, and income which they loot to enrich themselves, benefit their families, cronies, ethnic groups, and party loyalists, to the detriment of impoverished masses. As Abada et al submit:

The main central argument of Prebendalism is premised on the description of patron-client relationships in politics for self-appropriation. The theory posits that state offices are regarded as Prebendal and can be appropriated by officeholders who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their accomplices. The theory provides a framework for examining the issue of corruption and corrupt practices within the Nigerian government (6).

Prebendal theory captures in vivid terms, the state of affairs in Nigeria where corruption, embezzlement, ethnicity, and unaccountability have become the order of the day. As Abada et al added, "People become rich overnight once they join politics, then state or government treasury becomes the national cake which everybody struggles and fights to have a share...embezzle and squander state resources"(7). With this mindset, instances of corrupt practices abound in Nigeria and oftentimes, the government is compelled to set up panels to probe some of the cases.

Concept of Probe Panels in Nigeria

A probe panel refers to a selected group of people brought together to thoroughly examine, investigate, and question a situation, event, allegation, or phenomenon to uncover truths, establish a fact, or reconcile burning issues with the final aim of making recommendations to the appropriate quarters. Regrettably, 'probe' and 'probe

panels' in Nigeria, have come to be regarded as a jamboree or a panel of cover-ups, whose findings are either dead on arrival, suppressed, compromised, diluted, or never get to see the light of the day. Supporting this view, Fredrick Nwabufo describes it as;

Another word for political maneuvering, horse-trading, chicanery, and blackmail—in the Nigerian milieu. Probes are launched here not for righteous ends but for some predetermined recidivist motives. In particular, the so-called “corruption probes” are themselves felonious panels set up to exact vengeance, broker deals or cause distraction from national discontent. Beelzebub cannot cast out demons (18).

Given how probe panels are being perceived in Nigeria, the researchers selected some of the established panels that the federal government of Nigeria had at different times set up to investigate various allegations of corrupt practices bedeviling the nation. Some of these panels were examined based on the controversy surrounding the probes. In 2004, there was an outcry about the sale of government assets by Nasir El Rufai the Director of the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE). Thus, some senators were selected to probe the allegation of corrupt purchasing of the assets by the cronies of El Rufai, and in a twist of fate, the hunters became the hunted. It was alleged that some of the senators who were members of the panel demanded a bribe in millions of Naira from the Director but till now, the

findings of that panel never surfaced, and neither was anyone indicted.

In 2009, a corruption probe on the power sector was set up during President Olusegun Obasonjo's regime, led by Ndudi Elumelu as the chairperson of the House Committee on Power. Midway into the probe, Elumelu and some members of the panel were accused of allegedly collecting bribes and padding the rural electrification budget to a whopping sum of 5.2 billion. It is shocking to note that several years after these allegations, the findings arising from the probe remain suppressed, and nobody has been indicted.

As Nigerians were still recovering from the shock of that futile probe panel, they were treated to another one. Nwabufor describes it as “perhaps the grandest of all fiasco probes – the Fuel Subsidy probe involving Farouk Lawan, ‘Mr. Integrity’, in 2012.” As the chairman of the House Committee probing the fuel subsidy saga, Mr. Lawan was allegedly accused of requesting a mind-boggling sum of \$3 million bribe from the oil Magnet Femi Otedola to enable him to exonerate his oil company Zenon Oil from allegations of fuel subsidy fraud. The ‘Microphone literally went off’ on that probe and it never saw the light of the day.

In July 2020, Nigerian President Muhamadu Buhari inaugurated yet another probe panel on Asset Recovery, corruption, and alleged gross infractions which bordered on lack of transparency, abuse of office, and mismanagement of recovered assets by former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission boss, Mr. Ibrahim Magu. The probe panel on

Magu's alleged corrupt practices was headed by Justice Ayo Salami. At the end of the probe, The News Agency of Nigeria as cited by *The Guardian Newspapers* reported that "the report containing four boxes of exhibits were presented to the president in Abuja" (The Guardian Newspapers, 2020). Long after the panel report was submitted to President Buhari, nothing more has been heard about the probe. Not only has the microphone been muted on the report, but Magu was also promoted to the rank of Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG) in May 2022.

Just recently, on Channels Television News, and in a viral video that made rounds on the internet, the Minister of Niger Delta Development, Godswill Akpabio, appeared before the National Assembly probe panel in July 2020, set up to probe the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on alleged stealing of N81.5 billion. The interim management of the commission headed by Kemebradikumo Pondei, brazenly admitted to having spent N1.32 billion on themselves as 'COVID-19 palliative' in a period that most of the citizens were struggling to put food on their table as a result of the nationwide lockdown on Covid -19. In addition to that, they also admitted to having spent over N81.5 billion in just eight months without anything to show for it. While trying to make some clarifications during the investigation about the alleged misappropriation of funds and fleecing of billions of naira from the NDDC coffers, Mr. Akpabio clearly explained what happened thus; *"I just told you that we have records to show that most of the contracts in the NDDC are*

given out to members of the national assembly, but you don't know about it, but the two chairmen know," Akpabio insisted but he was interrupted and instructed by Hon. Ereyitomi who desperately pleaded with him thus; *'Honourable member, Honourable minister, it's okay'. That is okay...it's okay...Honourable minister off (sic) your mic,"* (2). This is to further hush Akpabio up to prevent further disclosures, revelations, or clarifications on who the illegal beneficiaries of NDDC contracts were and how money was diverted. The shouts of "honourable, it's okay, it's okay, off your mic" rend the air (Blaze Africa, December 2020). This slang has since become a common joke among Nigerians, whenever they intend to shut a person up or make a mockery of corrupt leaders.

Furthermore, the nation has also witnessed the arrest and trial of several other past and serving public office holders who were uncovered by whistle-blowers for diverting stolen public funds. Instances include the case of 43.4million dollars recovered by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in Osborne Road Ikoyi, Lagos, and linked to the former Director General of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) Ayodele Oke in April 2017. President Mohammadu Buhari then ordered a thorough investigation of the discovery which ended up in blame and counter-blames until the panel report died unresolved. Similarly, the former Secretary to the Federal Government Babachir Lawal was also linked to the N2.5billion misappropriation of funds scandal. A

crime that earned him mere suspension after facing a panel for the allegation. Other probe panel include that of Hushpuppi/ Abba Kyari whose probe report was submitted in 2021 and nothing have been heard about the probe. As Punch editorial of January 2022, explains, “the inexplicable delay cements public perception that the anti-corruption war is floundering... several other high profile probes and reports meriting swift action and closure are in abeyance...” (Punch Newspaper, January 23, 2022).

‘Off-the-mic’ Phenomenon

In providing insight into the ‘off-the-mic’ phenomenon, Tade Oludayo submits that “off the mic’ is a tactical strategy or metaphor to conceal the truth, ignore a genuine concern, silence opposition, frame constructive criticism as ‘corruption is fighting back’ and tyrannize being accountable to national assignments” (Vanguard, October 20:2020). Lending credence to this, LocNews, further laments that “the generation that prefers to ‘off the mic’, is noted for leaving issues as they are, covering up crimes and fix make-ups for consciously inflicted bruises. The researchers added their voice to the phenomenon by stating that ‘off the mic’ metaphorically implies to ‘stop talking, to keep quiet, let it be or maintain the silence, or to sweep the truth under the carpet.

It is assumed that crimes, when covered up over time, boil over to spark off protests like the #EndSars protest that propelled a younger generation of Nigerians to speak out against the atrocities

going on in the country in 2020. These atrocities according to James Yeku, an Assistant Professor of African Digital Humanities at Kansas University, can be described as #jenusoke, politics of thievery and political corruption whose necessary anti-thesis became the #soro soke slogan”

(<https://jamesyeku.com>).

Presently, a country that used to pride itself as the giant of Africa is fast becoming a laughing stock; even more alarming, her teeming number of unemployed youths now take up various demeaning crimes like robbery, kidnapping, banditry, cybercrime, and ritual killing as a means of sustaining themselves. Furthermore, many (s)elected politicians boldly confiscate and share funds that should be used to develop the country among themselves, just the same way they diverted palliatives meant for the people during the Covid-19 lockdown, and many of them were later discovered in different warehouses in different parts of the country. Lending his voice about the level of corruption in Nigeria, Okwoeze Odey John submits that:

When the world says Nigeria is the most corrupt country in the world, it thinks about the many contract awarded by the President and his men; how many times the contracts were reviewed;

the meager amount of the said sums that goes into the contract proper and the mind-boggling percentage of it that goes into private accounts; the world thinks of the many occasions where non-existence works are said to have been awarded in millions of naira completed and commissioned by people who put the money in their private accounts and go free with it (11).

When faced by a probe panel, the reports emanating from such kangaroo panels are hardly made known to the public. Anecdotally, this may be because many of the panel leaders themselves have proverbial skeletons in their closets, as they are 'known vultures that do nothing but look out for carcasses to devour'.

The Political Class and the Vulture Metaphor

The holy writ aptly captures the vulture axiom thus; "where there is a carcass (ruin/loot), there the vultures will gather" (assemble) (Mathew 24:28). This infers that as predatory birds, the vultures are always on the lookout for carcasses (ruins, controversy, and filth) where they can gather and make feasts out of it, and they hardly get satisfied. They are always known to perch patiently waiting for their roost or hover around until they can find a decaying carcass they will feed on and still love one another despite the stench, filth, and

ruins from dead bodies. Similarly, the panel members who are mostly selected from the same political groups, affiliations, and classes often grab whatever they can get from indicted victims and fly away to consume their loot while looking out for the next carcass (scandal). Vultures are scavenging birds and do not attack healthy animals (innocent people). In the same vein, the panel does not attack or prey on people who are innocent (healthy). It is on this premise that the metaphor of vulture is used to describe the nature of the people who are often constituted as members of several of these panels and the nature of the type of people who are often probed. Oftentimes they are recommended by the political class who are usually their cronies, friends, members of the same political parties, and partners in crime among others.

Overview of Drama as Political Critique

In the words of Oyibo Nobert Eze:

Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Brecht, Ngugi, and Rotimi among others know that if leaders live to satisfy their inner cravings, there will be trouble, even chaos. So, they beam their searchlight on the activities of leaders to ensure that those who control should be above criticism in order to have the moral courage to deal with their subjects when they do wrong (97).

In view of Eze's assertion above, the use of drama and literature to draw

attention to leadership issues is an age-long culture. The license of tongue enjoyed by the Greek playwrights empowered them to make bold political statements; they are known to adroitly mix political wisdom with didactic essence to correct leadership errors. During the Elizabethan era, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare used their works to satirize kings who deploy high-handedness, tyranny, and misrule. Confirming this, Ezeugwu posits:

The phenomenon of the social function of drama dates as far back as the classical Greek era when Aristotle examined the utilitarian values of tragedy. Today, playwrights have exploited this function and dynamism of drama to articulate many socio-political issues among which is the leadership problem. We have read, seen, and heard of situations where certain atrocities or the likes perpetrated by people that are viewed as untouchable by the law are exposed to the public, through the theatre, although not without dire consequences to the dramatists', recourse to good conscience and equity (15).

Similarly, Simon Umukoro, explaining one of the social functions of drama posits that, "Drama like other art forms undeniably reflect ways of ordering the society in which it is based" (11). During the Greek era, Aristophanes, one of the foremost dramatists, in his play *The Bird* addressed the leadership challenges of Athenian society at that time, while during the Roman period, dramatists

were known to avail themselves in public space to address and attack corrupt and unproductive elected officers. Since the origin of theatre, drama has continued to pay critical attention to the timeless issues of leadership, providing avenues for checks and balances, as many politicians are usually regarded as agents of social dysfunction and often become targets of satirical dramaturgy.

Arising from the symbiosis of corruption and looting of the national treasury within the Nigerian political system is the outcome of many dramatic texts depicting this reality. In Nigeria, many notable playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Emeka Nwabueze, Esiaba, Irobi, and Ahmed Yerima among others have often lent their voices, through their works, against corruption and mismanagement of public funds by politically, elected leaders. It is on this premise that Nwabueze and Irobi's works are selected as the study plays for this research.

Synopsis of *A Parliament of Vultures*

The ill-advised activities in the House of Parliament are replete in Nwabueze's play, *A Parliament of Vultures*. The play mirrors 'wolves in sheep's clothing' (corrupt politicians) and vultures who disguise themselves as honorable parliamentarians but whose main stock in trade is varied and it includes those who embezzle and mismanage funds budgeted for developmental projects and those who cover up the acts. The play also depicts those who are in the business of diverting funds meant for other things and those awarding

contracts to themselves at the expense of the nation.

The play highlights the legislators' filthy activities in the so-called hallowed chambers. It opens after the parliamentary election, which trumped-up representatives like Madam Omeaku an illiterate bar owner, Nathaniel Habamero, Mr. Brown, and dubious Rev. Jossy, as the winners of the election. These (s)elected individuals represent different shades of vultures in the hallowed chamber who set out to enrich themselves and their cronies through corrupt practices. Thus, on assumption of office, audience members' sensibilities are first assaulted by myriads of corrupt practices being perpetrated by the newly elected parliamentarians. They observe these leaders emptying the national treasury, through funding their frivolous fancies. Eventually, the audience witnesses a bid to stop the only two honest patriots in the parliament from exposing the 'rape of the future' of the citizens, as the two characters are arrested. Towards the end of the play, the President holds a press conference refuting all the allegations of corruption charges against the parliamentarians. *A Parliament of Vultures* ends with the arrival of militant youths protesting the corruption and looting by parliamentarians and the failure to bring the perpetrators to book despite the overwhelming evidence against them.

Textual Analysis of *A Parliament of Vultures*

In Nigeria, many of the appointments to significant positions are still being guided by sectarianism, kickbacks,

godfatherism, tribal sentiments, bribery, and primordial instinct. Given these recurring trends, one cannot fail to wonder at the quality of individuals who are (s)elected to defend the legislative and executive seats. In the play, to ensure the secrecy and security of their corrupt practices, the parliamentarians are made to take their oath of office using fetish objects instead of the conventional swearing in using a religious book. The swearing-in is administered thus:

Anyone here who reports any other member to the journalists, or who accuses another member of any offense without going through the chairman, anyone who talks evil about anyone here, especially concerning financial gratification, may Ogbunabani (deity) rub that fellow with ash (38).

Given the unconventional swearing-in oats administered, it becomes obvious that the parliamentarians have resolved to 'off the mic' for one another's atrocity in case of any financial crime or recklessness long before the main business of legislation starts. This is in line with the popular belief that 'one cannot recover what was never declared missing.' The meaning here is that they would be looting the national treasury and covering up the traces and in case of any need for a probe panel, their cronies are on standby to get their own share of the loots and cover up for them. Thus, should any reason for a probe come up, nothing implicating would be found. *A Parliament of Vultures* suggests that these politicians despite their pretending to run a democratic

government emit rotting odour, similar to that of carcasses that the vultures enjoy devouring. These dishonorable parliamentarians indulge in all manner of gross displays of wastefulness and materialism, without minding the dire consequences to the nation. In the first scene of the play, the playwright exposes where the grant meant for educational advancement and payment of salaries are diverted to the party's purse and subsequently to their individual accounts. This act of funds diversion is captured by Habamero thus: "You can start with a hundred million. If you need supplementary funds, we can always divert some funds from the education allocation"(22).

In the play, the parliamentarians seem willing to 'dip their hands' in government treasury at will, because they believe that probe panels are always shallow and inconclusive. Habamero justifies their actions thus: "We should not forget our culture. Our people have a saying that "he who blows the pipe also wipes his mouth" (30). By this, Habamero, is implying that he who is given an official assignment also eats from the money given to him for the assignment, the same way that Akpabio, Pondei, and others were caught looting the money meant for the development of the Niger Delta, a region that is passing through so much hardship as a result of corrupt representatives and environmental pollution arising from oil exploration. Armed with such a view, the parliamentarians make sure that they surround themselves with questionable people the likes of market sellers, party touts, criminals, pretenders, illiterates,

and people with forged certificates; electing them to manage critical positions to loot the country's reserves while the party members are always available to defend them if the need for probe arises. In situation three of the play, two million Naira is approved for each parliamentarian as an 'inconvenience allowance,' even when it has been demonstrated that they do not deserve such an allowance. In the same situation, 3, a whopping 3.6 billion naira (three billion, six hundred thousand naira) is heartlessly approved as a supplementary budget for the parliament's inaugural party at the expense of the Hungry masses.

It has remained a sad reality that after over sixty years of attaining independence, the narratives of corruption and looting still rend the airwaves, and in a country of over two hundred million people with only a few political officeholders controlling and enjoying the nation's resources while turning deaf ears to the plight of the people. An interview in the play granted by the president exposes the gross indifference and selfishness displayed by people in power in Nigeria:

3rd JOURNALIST: Mr.

President, the masses of this country are suffering because of food scarcity. Does Your Excellency have any programme to curb food scarcity in the nation?

PRESIDENT: Food scarcity? There is no food scarcity in this country. Whenever I take time to travel out of the presidential mansion, I see people carrying

food everywhere. I see so much food that I begin to wonder how the traders are going to sell all of them (65).

The 'president's' response to the 3rd Journalist can be compared to the response offered by a member of the NDDC probe panel who hurriedly urges Godswill Akpabio to "off the mic, that it is ok". Akpabio affirmed that most of the illegal contracts awarded for NDDC projects were awarded to members of the senate and long after looting a whooping sum of 81.5 billion naira, the projects are yet to take off. This kind of blatant hypocritical attitude towards hiding the truth about how and where public funds are often channeled suggests that the 'off-the-mic' scenario is far from being over in Nigeria. As Habamero states, "Many people view 'truth' as a matter of logic, and honesty and integrity are relative" (48). To ensure that their antics are not undermined and as a way of 'putting off the mic,' they ironically had the two honest members of parliament, Parkers and Otobo who speak of decorum and accountability arrested. The arrest is endorsed immediately by the president, on his arrival, without offering them a fair hearing, as doing so would be detrimental to their corrupt practices. The president hurriedly explained:

The president is a very busy man. He has no time to listen to disgruntled elements that complain about everything whether good or bad. They are merely men and women who are jealous of those whose bread God has buttered by placing them in

positions of power and authority and of course the good things that go with them. (Raises his voice) and I am making it clear that I will deal very ruthlessly with anybody accused of such offense (63).

The hunters have suddenly become the hunted just like the likes of Ndudi Elumelu who was the chairman of the 2009 corruption probe of the power sector suddenly became the hunted in the case he was chairing, the same goes for Nasir El Rufai who accused some senators of asking him for money before they could confirm him as a minister and Farouk Lawan among others. With such heavy skeletons in the cupboard of the panel members, the researchers are of the view that it will appear a herculean task for justice to be dispensed as it seems many of the so-called probe panel chairmen and their members are not 'going to equity with clean hands' as it is expected of them to be above board and men of integrity.

With the hunter becoming the hunted in such scenarios, the possibility of unraveling the much-desired truth may become almost impossible as oftentimes, we find out that many of the probe findings do not ever see the light of day. Some of the accused members of the panel who have in one way or the other soiled their hands often lack the moral courage as Oyibo Eze stated above, to deal with the culprits (the people under probe) when they are indicted. The statement by the president in *A Parliament of Vultures* seals the faith of Parkers and Otobo, prompting Habamero to boast that "this Parliament

now has absolute peace” (71). It is quite ironic that the chairman can talk of peace while the whole nation is on fire with little or no food in sight.

In the play, appointments are based on sharing, kickbacks, and godfatherism instead of merit. The following scenarios capture how the parliamentarians share national appointments as they disregard academic credentials and qualifications as a prerequisite for the appointment of chairmen of the board of parastatals.

HABAMERO: The next board is that of Radio and Television and that is not open for nomination by this house.

PARKER: Why?

HABAMERO: Because the party chairman has nominated no, he approved the appointment of Chief Anu Mpoma to lead this organization.

MR. OTOBO: Objection, Mr. Chairman. This man Anu Mpoma was detained and tried by the previous administration for embezzlement of public funds.

HABAMERO: But he was pardoned. Anyway, we don't really have any say in this matter (58).

From the conversation between, Habamero, Parker, and Mr. Otofo, one sees a breakdown in the democratic system of the country, with Nigeria becoming a laughing stock in the comity of nations. For the chairman of the party to assume the power to appoint whoever he wants, irrespective of the person's pedigree shows the nature and caliber of people at the helm of affairs in the country and explains why probe panels are not effective. Mr. Anu

Mpoma, an embezzler and a corrupt man, has been tipped to head one of the organizations. The implication of this continual embezzlement is such that if Mr. Anu Mpoma runs afoul of the law, he would be assured of protection by his 'godfathers.

We can thus conclude that the motivation for desiring to go for public office is “lust for money” and as Madam Omeaku explains “Now that God has buttered my bread, I will never allow myself to be poor again. Not in this world, nor even the world to come” (68). Implying that she has seen an avenue to freely enrich herself and her family, through the looting of the national purse, as she has no intentions to improve the lives of the citizens she made promises to protect. Nwabueze seizes this point and harps on it through his exposition of the parliamentarians' fastidiousness in sharing monetary allocations meant for developmental projects.

As in the play, any time the two arms of the National Assembly are inaugurated, the first order of the day is to approve for each member allowances in the likes of furniture, car, hardship, and entertainment allowances. Despite the anti-corruption crusade by the successive government, corruption and financial recklessness remains the hallmark of each administration. It is a fact that the legislature is the organ of government that makes the law and is saddled with the responsibilities of delivering good governance, but, regrettably, the reverse is mainly the case in Nigeria as our parliamentarians are gluttonous eaters and voracious spenders and their only driving force is

self-aggrandizement rather than the quest for good governance.

Synopsis of *Hangmen Also Die*

The play takes place in Izon State, a fictitious oil-rich region that is bedeviled with massive oil spillage which results in environmental degradation and pollution of the rivers and other natural habitats. After several protests by the people, the federal government compensated them with the sum of N3M (three million naira). The compensation is to be disbursed by a son of the soil, who is a politician, Chief Erekosima, the State Commissioner for Employment, Chieftaincy Matters, and Rural Development. However, he confiscates the money meant for the entire community for his personal use; using part of the money to pay the school fees of five of his children schooling at Cambridge and Harvard universities. He further diverts a huge sum towards the renovation of his house and for taking up a chieftaincy title as the Amatamaso 1 ("He who is greater than God"), of Izon State. This diversion of funds by Chief Erekosima infuriates Tamara who solicits the support of the "Suicide Squad" (SS) who swears to disrupt Chief Erekosima's coronation, intending to retrieve the remaining funds that he squandered. The Suicide Squad, made up of unemployed graduates, invades the coronation venue, kidnaps the chief, and later kills him when he refuses to return the money. After a fierce battle with the police, the SS is overpowered and sent to jail, waiting for the day they will be hanged for murder.

Impact of corruption on the people

In *A Parliament of Vultures*, many people especially the youth are without jobs because they have no money to buy jobs, nor do they have godfathers who will appoint them to the numerous federal and state board memberships. The impact of this economic deficiency is that the youths end up joining the wrong groups.

In *Hangmen Also Die*, the compensation given publicly to the entire community is diverted by a politician, who decides to use the money to take care of his flamboyant lifestyle and family at the expense of the people who are battling with unemployment, environmental degradation and poverty. The frustration and lamentation of the youths can be gleaned from the lines below:

We have no jobs. Therefore, we have no money. Which means we can't have children? We are the rejects of the world... We are a generation of young men and women who have nowhere to turn to. Who are not sure where our next meals are coming from...We have been marginalized out of existence (31-32).

The people of Izon State are also afraid to inquire about the money. Those who dare to ask, like the Chief Superintendent of Prisons and a few prominent citizens of Degoma Local Government are all bribed to 'off-their-mic' on what they know about the money and to suppress their findings. This is portrayed thus:

EREKOSIMA: I gave my god-son
Petertulubo

Daminagbo...200,000, a bribe to
placate some eminent citizens
from his local government area
who were threatening to write a
petition to the federal
government when they heard
that I had confiscated the
compensation money (88).

Although most eminent people in Izon
State failed to expose the Chief's crime,
it is the frustrated youth, who refused to
be gagged that disrupted the coronation
ceremony and kidnapped the chief.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the impact of probe
panels in contemporary Nigeria setting,
through the lens of Prebendalism
theory. It also reviewed the shades and
nature of political leaders as portrayed
by Nwabueze and Irobi in the selected
plays, *A Parliament of Vultures* and
Hangmen Also Die. It exposes the erosion
of moral values among political leaders
who wallow in the quagmire of
corruption and materialism. *A
parliament of Vultures* is an urgent call
for immediate and positive change in
the status of leadership in Nigeria;
especially in the manner of
appointments, and the nature and
qualifications of the people they present
to represent them. In the play, all
manner of people are (s)elected into the
parliament, from a petty trader, a fake
man of God to a fake certificate holder
and criminals among others. Because of
the vultures in the parliament, the
majority of Nigerian graduates are
without jobs thus, many have taken to

cybercrime, banditry, militancy, and
kidnapping among others as means of
sustenance. Others are taking more
daring steps like ritual killings and
organ harvesting etc. Insecurity and
terrorism are fast relegating the nation
to one of the most dreaded countries in
sub-Saharan Africa. Foreign investors
fear bringing their businesses to Nigeria
and inflation is visibly high. *Hangmen
Also Die* mirrors shameless embezzlers
who only care about themselves and
their immediate family and who can
pay what it takes to settle people who
should ask questions to look the other
way or to 'off their mic'.

Severally, efforts to cut down on
the humongous salaries and allowances
of National Assembly members have
never been addressed, yet, a Professor
in a university earns pittance as salary
because the ruling class created a lot of
discrepancies in the wage system and
the government refuses to address it.
Whenever the treasury is depleted
through 'naked looting', it is the
common citizens who are made to pay
for it, through hidden or increased taxes
and levies, while being urged to 'tighten
the belts' any time they attempt to
complain. When the nation goes a-
borrowing, it is the ruling class and their
associates who benefit from the money,
while the citizens have to pay back,
through inflation, ruined markets, the
devaluation of the currency, shortage of
essential commodities, and all such
penalties that are usually imposed by
the world-lenders like International
Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

Arising from this, many people
have gone against the norm to say

enough is enough through probes and mass protests, however, as in the two plays studied, they are often ignored or their 'mics' turned off, such that what seems viable after such protests and probes is still corruption and a perpetuation of the cycle. In light of this, the researchers, recommend a change of tactics, which include that offenders including public office holders be held accountable and be made to give detailed accounts of their stewardship at any given time. People of questionable characters including convicts and ex-convicts should not be made to hold public offices. All political office holders and contractors facing any panel if found guilty, should be punished appropriately and the report of the probes made public to serve as a deterrent to others. In addition, there should be due process in the award of contracts, while checks and balances should be maintained while disbursing government funds.

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