



Review Paper

Portrayal of corruption and image of Nigerian leaders in written IGBO poetry: A mirror image reading

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Abstract

Corruption and poor leadership have been adjudged to be responsible for the present economic woes of Nigeria, forcing its many citizens into untold hardship. Earlier studies on corruption in Nigeria were more of political discourse; the views of Igbo poets who write in Igbo language have not been sought regarding the matter. To this end, this study investigates written Igbo poetry, with a view to examine how modern Igbo poets portray the menace of corruption in Nigeria and their views about Nigerian leaders, being the principal actors in the Nigerian project. Five poems written by four Igbo poets; two male and two females constitute the data for this study. The poems were randomly chosen to represent poems written in the four decades of the existence of written Igbo poetry (1975-2015), with a poem each representing each decade. Data were analyzed through the lenses of the Mirror image theory. Findings show that corruption in Nigeria has grown worse from the time the Igbo poets began mirroring it to 2015. Again the image of Nigerian leaders held up by modern Igbo poets in their works is that of corrupt and insincere elite group that cares less about the people they claim to lead. The study recommends a psychological and moral examination of anyone vying for political office in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption in Nigeria, poor leadership, Nigerian politicians, written Igbo poetry.

Introduction

The universality of corruption and its geographic-cum-ethnic peculiarities has remained the epicenter of scholarly discourse globally over the years. This statuesque is not likely to change in Africa, given the fact that the menace has now planted its seed in every sector of Africa, particularly Western Africa and, thus taken new forms. It has become a cankerworm that has continued to destroy the value systems in many parts of Africa. Virtually all sectors - health, financial, education, religious, political and, military sectors have all been adversely affected by the monster called corruption. Scholarly engagements on the topic of corruption in Nigeria illuminate its historical perspective¹, its causes and, effects² and possible ways out³. The view of modern Igbo poets (MIP) on the subject is only beginning to attract permissive attention as exemplified in the work of Solomon Awuzie and Ifediora Okiche, who studied corruption and politics in Chukwumalbezute's *Cries of the Downtrodden*⁴. However, there is a dearth of research on the views of MIPs who write in African Languages (Igbo in this case) on the subject of corruption and the image of corrupt Nigerian leaders. As a result, the views and contributions of MIP over the years are neglected, making it seem that poets that write in their native languages have nothing to offer to the larger societal discourse. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the views of MIP as it relates to corruption and poor leadership in Nigeria; compare how it has been chronologically

mirrored from the first decade of the existence of WIP (1975-1985) down to the fourth decade of its existence (2006-2015) and, also get their opinions on curbing the menace. Since poetry as a form of art, simply means thinking in images⁵, the study also hopes to understand how Nigerian leaders are mirrored in written Igbo poetry (WIP).

Studying works of literature of African language expression has become imperative in view of the fact that some modern African poets feel more comfortable expressing their views in their mother tongue, than in the English language, which is considered the language of the colonial masters. It has become imperative at this point to promote and seek the views of African writers who write in African language, since their works do not receive many studies as compared to their counterparts who write in the English language⁶. The importance of a study such as this is that it is not domicile in the department of English studies but advances the studies of works of literature written in African (Nigerian) languages.

Nigeria, the giant of Africa⁷, is up to this day mesmerized by corruption on every side. As a term, "corruption" is simply defined as the abuse or ill-use of one's office or power for personal gain⁸. According to Segun Osoba, corruption was introduced in Nigeria by the British colonial government¹ and subsequently taken over by the early Nigerian leaders who used it as a tool for their own aggrandizement. Poor leadership on the

other hand is the direct result of corruption, which is why, poor leadership, remains the foundation of corruption. Since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, poor leadership and corruption have continued to stifle the growth and development of the country and have now reduced the country to a state of mockery among nations. The strong moral and ethical value that pre-colonial Nigerians are known for has now been sacrificed on the altar of selfish gains by the political leading class, to the detriment of the masses. As a result, the citizens have seized trusting their leaders, while some of the people who have learned these corrupt ways have now continued to perpetuate corrupt acts at every level they find themselves, thereby making it endemic. This is why Shuaib Moyosore believes that Nigeria as a sovereign state is a place where corruption now abounds and also a place where greed for material acquisition had relegated moral and religious values to the background².

Literature as we know it mirrors society in many ways. The French critic, H. A. Taine considers literature as the collective expression of the society, embodying the spirit of the age at which it was written⁹. Wellek and Warren also believe that the essence of literature is to imitate life, and life in its entirety is a social reality. The poet as a member of a given society is largely influenced by a specific social status, through his art, he addresses an audience and in return, he receives some degree of social recognition¹⁰. Since the emergence of written Igbo poetry (WIP) that mirrors the sociological life of the Igbo in 1975 with *Akpa Uche*⁶, many contemporary societal issues have continued to attract the attention of MIP, one of which is the issue of corruption which birthed poor leadership in Nigeria. African poets have continued to air their views against all manner of exploitation and victimization carried out by corrupt political leaders in their countries⁴, and MIP is not left out as they have mirrored the issues of corruption and poor leadership in their works intending to depict the way it affects their milieu.

The qualitative research method is adopted in the analysis of data obtained from four Igbo poetic texts, written within the four decades of the existence of WIP (1975-2015). The texts were randomly selected while the poems chosen for analysis are poems that portray the views of MIP as it relates to corruption in Nigeria. Each text is chosen to represent poems written in a decade. The selected poems are Nolue Emenanjo's 'Uko n'uju' (Scarcity in plenty) in *Utara Nti* (n.d.); Iwu Ikwubuzo's two poems 'Orja Anyi' (Our Ailment) and "Dibja Adugburuja" (Fake medicine man) in *Omenka*; Nkechi Okediadi's 'Naijiria' (Nigeria) in *Ije Uwa* and H. Oleru's 'Ochichi' (Leadership) in *Akponauche*. These chosen poems were analyzed through the lenses of the mirror image theory in the sociology of Literature.

Conceptualizing the mirror image theory

The mirror image theory is a literary theory that was propounded by Louis-de-Bonald, a French philosopher, who argues that by carefully reading any nation's literature, a reader would be able to know the type of life the people lived. The

theory suggests that literature reflects society. It views literary works as a conscious attempt by the creative artist (poet) to depict events and happenings in his society¹¹. The approach performs its "mirroring function in poetry by identifying the social structures that are mirrored by the work of a poet, who is a participant in the sociological process"¹². The theory foregrounds the link between art and the society through which art is created. It also considers literature as a tool that gives a comprehensive picture of the nature of the society, its defined social facts and, specific historical periods in all its facets¹³. That is why Vatsa submits that every bad and good event in any society is portrayed in their literature¹⁴. Hence, literature is a mirror of life, a reflection and, also a social document. Therefore, in applying the mirror image theory to the reading of WIP in this study, the focus is on how different social realities are represented or rather portrayed via-a-vis its documentation in poetry texts.

How corruption and Nigerian leaders are portrayed in written IGBO poetry

Just like other social critics, MIP has continually criticized the Nigerian political class for the pains and hardship inflicted on Nigerians. They frown on the despicable state of the nation despite the abundant natural resources and human capital that the nation is blessed with. The poets all agree that corruption can be said to be at the root of the challenges bedeviling the nation. For instance, Nolue Emenanjo in his poem "Uko n'uju" (Scarcity in plenty) (Poem 1) is very vocal in his critique of the political class for their mismanagement of Nigerians economy which has plunged a lot of Nigerians into a life of hardship. Emenanjo wonders why Nigeria should have an abundance of resources, yet people suffer as if the nation is a poor country. The tone of his poem 'Uko n'uju' is that of anger and as such the poem evokes the feeling of rage towards the political class. The poet believes that the Nigerian political class is to be blamed for the economic woes of the nation, which is a result of the deep corruption that has now pervaded the Nigerian political and economic space. In the first stanza of his poem the poet makes his view known when he asks:

Kèdụ zi kà a gà-ési nòdụ n'anyịm	(How can we be in the ocean
Wèreasō na-àkwọ akā?	And be washing our hands with saliva?
Kèdụ kwanụ kà a gà-ési nòdụ n'iyī,	How can we also be in the river,
Kwere nchà ò bàānyị anya?	And allow soap to enter our eyes) ¹⁵

The questions raised by the poet here is the same question most Nigerians ask even to date. The poet here acts as the speaker of many Nigerians whose voices cannot be heard. The poet wonders why Nigeria, with all the resources it has, allows its citizens to suffer hunger and starvation. 'Uko n'uju' mirrors the lack, poverty or, deprivation people suffer in Nigeria, despite the nation's abundant economic resources. The poet's anger

becomes more vivid in stanzas three and four of the poem “Ụkọ n’uju” where he states:

Koṛoṛ m ihe kpatara na	(Tell me why
Mmadu ga-enwe mgbuli	Someone will have food
Ma mgbuliana-agu ya?	Yet hunger for food)
Ego a,	(This wealth
A si na anyi nwere n’ijelin’ijeli	That is said to be available in billions
Bu n’ikuku ka o di	Is only in the air
Ego a,	This wealth,
A si anyi na o bughị ya bu okwu	That is said not the problem
Bu naani n’akwukwo ka o di	Is only on paper) ¹⁵

Emenanjo in the above verses mirrors the effect of corruption on Nigerians. There are three basic needs of man; food, shelter and, clothing. Of all these basic needs, food is the most important since it guarantees man’s survival before he can think of shelter and clothing. This is the reason Emenanjo speaks of food as the key to the survival of many Nigerians. It saddens the poet to note that despite being the economic giant of Africa, given Nigerians’ agricultural strength, the poor masses can barely find food to eat amid plenty. The poet observes that this is a direct result of corruption and poor leadership in Nigeria. Emenanjo’s rage in the poem can be better understood when we recall that Nigeria as a nation is believed to have been ravaged by corruption which has now become a cankerworm to the development of the nation. Moyosore confirms this when he opined that Nigeria is a nation, where corruption is at its peak and a nation, where the quest for political power by the political class and greed for material acquisition has relegated morality that has been preached by various religions to the background². This explains why every society does all it can to reduce acts that can lead to corruption by any means necessary. From Emenanjo’s tone, it is obvious that when he wrote this poem, between 1977 and 1979, there was so much starvation and suffering in the country, despite it being a period of the oil boom in Nigeria. It is appalling to note that this situation still subsists today. Emenanjo’s worry at the time he wrote the poem in the 1970s was not out of place as it will puzzle the mind of anyone who knows the number of resources that Nigeria is blessed with and yet, due to corruption and the continuous subjugation of the poor by the ruling class through their anti-people policies, the poor masses still suffer a great deal. The poem ‘Ụkọ n’uju’ can be said to be a true reflection of the economic situation in Nigeria – scarcity amidst plenty.

Between 1986 to 1996, it appears that corrupt acts in Nigeria raised the more as things seem to be worsened by Nigerian leaders’ increasing taste for more material gains. Like Emenanjo’s poem ‘Ụkọ n’uju’ which x-rays the socio-economic situation in Nigeria, occasioned by poor leadership and corruption, IwuIkwubuzo’s poem ‘Orja Anyi’ (Our Ailment) also mirrors the how corruption affects Nigerians, metaphorically referring to corruption as an ailment. The literal meaning of Ikwubuzo’s poem title, ‘Orja anyi’, suggests a type

of community disease suffered by a group of people at the same time. Since there has never been a time such a disease was recorded in Igboland - the immediate community of the poet in Nigeria - we have to interpret the title with an associative meaning as the poem suggests. It is important to bear in mind that it is the associative meaning that makes imagery possible in poetry¹⁶. The associative meaning of Ikwubuzo’s title ‘Orja Anyi’ suggests a type of socio-economic ‘disease’. A reading of the poem, therefore, reveals that the type of socio-economic ailment the poet is referring to is the terrible effect of corruption on Nigerians.

In the poem ‘Orja Anyi’, the poet, Ikwubuzo brings to bear the image of the harsh economic conditions, that Nigerians are forced to endure. The use of the first person plural ‘anyi’ (us) as employed by the poet in his title, suggests that the poet does not exonerate himself as a Nigerian from the epidemic he writes about. This is another pointer to the fact that the poet (Ikwubuzo) as a member of Nigerian society has first-hand experience of what he is addressing. The poet portrays the irresponsibility of Nigerian politicians in handling public affairs and the lack of accountability as the bane of the nation of Nigeria. A reader who does not understand the thought in this poem ‘Orja Anyi’ or who exactly the poet addresses in the poem will have a full grasp of the poet’s message when s/he (the reader) encounters the second stanza of this poem (Poem 2), where the poet alludes to the sufferings of Nigerians as artificial, saying:

Obòdò anyi nò n’orjā	(Our country is sick
Orja ukọ	Sickness of lack
Ukọ akamèrè	Man-made lack
Orja anyi bu anyaukwu	Our Sickness of greed
“Naani m gà-èri	“I alone will eat
Naani m gà-àba”	I alone will be rich”
Orja anyi bu àsi	Our sickness is lies
Eziokwu gà-àgwọ ya	Truth will heal it
Orja anyi bu nchigbu	Our sickness is tyranny
Ogwu ya bu nchizi	Its medication is good leadership) ¹⁷

One cannot but agree with the poet that tyrannical leadership is indeed one of the many problems of Nigeria as a nation. Nigeria is a blessed nation, one which is blessed with both natural resources and human capital but is bereft of good leaders. It can be said that no nation can grow with insincere and visionless leaders piloting its affairs. This is the problem the poet thinks Nigeria has. This is why the poet considers corruption which has led to lack, as a disease that can kill. From the view of the poet, as portrayed in the above excerpt, some of the symptoms of this Nigeria’s ailment include artificial lack, greed, self-centeredness, falsehood and, tyranny. The above excerpt (poem 2) also echoes the burning desire of Nigerians to have good leaders, as seen in lines 2-4 of the poem, where the poet says:

...Orja ukọ	(Sickness of lack
Ukọ akamèrè	Man-made lack
Orja anyi bu anyaukwu...	Our Sickness of greed) ¹⁷

The greed and selfishness of the political class, which the poet speaks of in the above excerpt, has continuously plunged the nation into artificial lack and poverty. This is what the poet means when he says that the lack and poverty in Nigeria are man-made and it follows the self-centeredness and falsehood of the political class. Michael Ogbeidi in his socio-economic analysis of the political leadership and corruption in Nigeria since 1960 seems to agree with the poet's views when he states:

Pathetically, the logic of the Nigerian political leadership class has been that of self-service as some of the leaders are mired in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of broader national interests. Consequently, emphasis has been on personal aggrandizement and self-glorification...¹⁸.

The above view justifies the position of the poet when he describes poor leadership as a terrible sickness that Nigeria is suffering from. However, in another of his poem, 'Dibja Adugburuja' (Fake Medicine Man) (Poem 3) also in *Omenka*, Ikwubuzo goes further to mirror the negative effects of poor leadership and corruption in Nigeria and how much it has shaped Nigeria's political history. The poem 'Dibja Adugburuja' mirrors the incursion of the military in Nigerian political affairs, the series of failed leadership and, its causes in Nigeria. In the poem, Ikwubuzo mirrors the political experiments of Nigeria and the challenges – the problems of self-centeredness, greed, wrong economic policies and, insincerity on the part of the leaders.

It is important to state that this poet (Ikwubuzo) has been observed to always mask his title in a striking creative manner wherefore it will take a reader a lot of decoding effort to truly unmask most of his poems. From the title of the poem, 'Dibja Adugburuja', the poet paints an image of fake doctor or medicine man – the first one, on the invitation was more interested in his personal gains instead of solving the problems of the sick and the other, who imposed themselves on the sick, promising to have the solution, which they do not have. The 'Dibja' as mirrored by the poet is a person, who ought to be skilled in the art of healing, but they are said to be 'Adugburuja' (Adigboroja), which means 'adulterated' or 'fake'. The image of Nigeria as a sick nation in dire need of a doctor denotes its chequered experience of bad leadership, which has led to an increase in corruption, now affecting every sector of the nation's economy.

The metaphorical representation of Nigerian leaders (politicians) as fake doctors from the title of the poem simply says a lot about the creativity of the poet and the message of the poem itself. This poem sequels the earlier poem 'Orja Anyi' written by the same poet in which he describes poor leadership and other negative features of corruption as a major disease in Nigeria. Normally, every sick person needs to engage the services of a doctor, who is believed to be a professional in the act of healing, to heal him or her. However, in this case, Nigeria as a country is the sick one, which the poet acknowledges in

poem 2 'Orja Anyi', hence, the quest for a good doctor to heal the nation of all her diseases (years of neglect by the political class). But instead of getting good doctors (good leaders) to render the service, the Nigerian electorate (the masses) keep moving from one quack doctor to another, and this informs the title of this poem 'Dibja Adugburuja' (Adigboroja). In the poem, the poet mirrors the result of years of poor leadership in the nation's socio-economic life, which in turn has shaped the nation's political history negatively. Consider the first stanza of this poem 'Dibja Adugburuja' to see how the poet puts it, where he writes:

Dibja mbu anyi kp̄r̄ō oru	(The first doctor we called to work
Uweagbada ka o yiri bja	He came on agbada attire
Agbada onu ya miri emi	Agbada whose mouth is deep
Fojuchaa ji anyi n'ime ya	Filled it with our tubers of yam
Fojuchaa ego anyi n'ime ya	Filled it with our money
Maka dibja na-agwo	Because as the doctor heals
Dibja a na-eri	The doctor eats
O lawaran'inyo	He left in disarray
Hapu anyi n'uko	And left us in lack.) ¹⁹

It is worthy of note that this poem, 'Dibja Adugburuja' is divided into two stanzas, with each of the stanzas representing two types of leadership that Nigerians have experienced in their political history – civilian rule and military dictatorship. In each of the forms of leadership mirrored by the poet in the poem, he chronicles the failures, greed, and insincerity associated with past leaders that have piloted the affairs of the Nigerian state, up to the time the poem was published in 1992. The poet mirrors, first, the civilian leadership that Nigeria enjoyed after her independence from British administrators in 1960. The civilian leaders or politicians are depicted in lines 1-2 of the poem as doctors that are coming in *agbada* attire. The poet represents the electoral process in his first line with the phrase '... anyi kp̄r̄ō oru' (that we called to work for us) in line 1. The import of this clause represents 'collective agreement' in electing a leader, demonstrating the eagerness of Nigerians to see a democratically elected government emerge, having been under the leadership of colonial government which most Nigerians and scholars believe laid the foundation of corruption in Nigeria. Another mirror held up by the poet in the above stanza is the portrayal of Nigerian politicians in line 2 as 'doctors that came on 'Agbada'. Since Nigeria was presumed to be economically sick, a sickness it inherited, having been under the colonial rule for many years, it got her first set of doctors, who came in 'agbada'. In Nigeria, 'Agbada' is a type of long robe that men wear among the Hausa and the Yoruba²⁰. The 'agbada' is used here to depict civilian (politicians) leaders, who have ruled Nigeria in the past. Unfortunately, these civilian leaders that were democratically elected as the representatives of the people, failed Nigerians. Their administration was marred by gross mismanagement of Nigerians' commonwealth – an indication of their self-centeredness, greed, wrong economic policies and,

insincerity. This is why the poet describes them in line 3 in the above poem 3 as having ‘Agbada ọ̀nụ̀ ya miri emi’ (*Agbada* whose pocket is very deep), which means, civilian or political leaders with deep pockets. These were not the kind of leaders that Nigerians needed at a time when they were hoping to survive after the age-long milking of Nigerian resources, by the British colonial government. The view of the poet in the above verse is better collaborated by Michael Ogbeidi, who states that:

The First Republic under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and Nnamdi Azikwe, the President, was marked by widespread corruption. Government officials looted public funds with impunity. Federal representatives and Ministers flaunted their wealth with reckless abandon. In fact, it appeared there were no men of good character in the political leadership of the First Republic. Politically, the thinking of the First Republic Nigerian leadership class was based on politics for material gain; making money and living well.¹⁸

It is important to add at this juncture that it was not only the first republic leaders that the poet mirrored in his poem. The poet refers to politicians in general. The poet portray stanza 1 of poem 3, as shown above, to portray also the civilian rule of the second republic, which was headed by Shehu Shagari from October 1, 1979, to December 31, 1983. This historical revelation and record are what the poet means when he draws the attention of the readers to the function of the *agbada* worn by those politicians in lines 3-5 in the above stanza where he writes:

...Agbada ọ̀nụ̀ ya miri emi	(...Agbada whose pocket is deep
Fọjuchaa ji anyị n’ime ya	Filled it with our tubers of yam
Fọjuchaa ego anyị n’ime ya...	Filled it with our money...) ¹⁹

The ‘agbada’, according to the poet in the above excerpt from poem 3, signifies the means of siphoning monies meant for the masses into their bank accounts. By doing this, the political class bastardized Nigeria’s economy and promoted systemic corruption. The image of Nigeria’s wealth is depicted in lines 4-5 with ‘yam’ (line 4), which is stylishly repeated for clarity and emphasis in (line 5). In the pre-colonial Igbo society – the poet’s immediate society - a man’s wealth is judged by how big his barn of yams was and the number of his household. This is why ‘yam’ is used in line 4 to represent the nation’s wealth. The poor leadership that is encouraging economic looting by the civilian governments over the years leaves the poor masses suffering and worse than they were under the British colonial government. This was why the poet says in lines 8-9 of the above stanza from poem 24:

...Ọ̀ l w ran’inyo (He left in disarray
Hapụ anyi n’ kọ And left us in lack.)¹⁹

It was this despicable situation of Nigerians, caused by the mismanagement of Nigerian resources by the civilian political class that encouraged military incursion into politics, leading to the end of the first republic and marking the beginning of military rule in Nigeria. The military cited the excesses of civilian politicians and corruption as the reason for their intervention, promising to fix the problems created by civilian leaders. This insincere promise by the military to fix Nigeria’s problem is what the poet (Ikubuzo) mirrors in the opening lines of the second stanza of poem 3 where he says:

Anyi g�-agwota unu	(We will cure you
Anyi ji ajuogwu bia	We came with the antidote
Ka dibj�kpota onwe ya gwara anyi	Was what the self-imposed doctor told us
Dibja uwekaaki	Doctor on Kaaki uniform
Buru ogwu saapu bia	Came with S.A.P medicine
I sapu anyi unyi ukọ	To wash away the dirt of lack
Dibja agbadater� anyi	Which the doctor on <i>agbada</i> attire smeared on us with
Uwe ha bu �kp� akpa n’ahu	Their cloths had lots of pockets
Karjauweagbada anyi huru na mbu	More than the <i>agbada</i> we earlier saw
Mgbe a fọjuru akpa e bu bia	When they filled the bag they came with
Ihe e kwurun’obija	What was said on arrival
Abughikwa ihe e kwurun’ula	Was no longer what was said on departure
Isapu unyi ukọ ga-ewe oge	Washing away the dirt of lack will take time
Onye unyitere nwee ndidi	Whoever was smeared with dirt, be patient) ¹⁹

Just like in his first verse, the poet uses ‘Dibja UweKaaki’ in this second stanza to represent the military-led government that interrupted the democratically elected government in Nigeria. ‘Kaaki’ here connotes military uniform. Unlike the first line in stanza one of this poem 3, which shows collective agreement in electing a leader, the clause ‘dibj kpota onwe ya’ as used in the above stanza connotes ‘self-imposition’, ‘force’ and ‘undemocratic regime’. The poet uses the expression to refer to a government that was not elected by the people, instead, they self-imposed themselves forcefully on Nigerians, promising to fix the problems that were created by the civilian leaders, as seen in lines 1-3 of the above stanza 2 from poem 3, where the poet says:

Anyi g�-agwota unu	(We will cure you
Anyi ji ajuogwu bia	We came with the antidote
Ka dibj�kpota onwe ya gwara anyi	Was what the self-imposed doctor told us)

In their bid to turn the country’s economy around for good, the military under the regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida

created an economic recovery programme known as Structural Adjustment Program (S.A.P). This situation is what the poet is referring to in lines 4-7 of the above stanza 2 from poem 3 where he says:

...Dibija uwekaaki	(Doctor on Kaaki uniform
Buru ogwu saapu bia	Came with <i>Saapu</i> (S.A.P) medicine
I saapu anyi unyi ukọ	To wash away dirt of our lack
Dibija agbadaterè anyi.	Which the doctor on <i>agbada</i> smeared us with) ¹⁹

Corroborating the view of the poet as regards this programme of the military (Structural Adjustment Program) and also explaining the reason for its creation. According to the third page of a document released by the National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA), the S.A.P. was set up in 1986 as a fall out to the austerity measures that were put in place by the Nigerian government in 1982 to reverse the dwindling economic fortunes of the nation in terms of declining growth, high rate of poverty in the country, increased unemployment, inflation, worsening balance of payment conditions and enfeeble debt burden²¹. Much focus was placed on expenditure reducing and expenditure switching policies, as well as making the private sector the engine of growth of the economy vis-a-vis commercialization and privatization of government-owned enterprises. There would not have been a need for the introduction of the S.A.P. program if the past government was prudent in their spending, honest and above all, made policies that will benefit the general public and not just themselves. Unfortunately for Nigerians, despite creating this structural adjustment program, the military plunged Nigeria into a worse economic situation than the civilian leaders. That is why the poet describes them in lines 8-9 as wearing clothes that have more pockets than the ones worn by civilian leaders, where he says:

Uwe ha bu akpa akpa n'ahu	(There were lots of pockets on their cloths
Karjauweagbada anyi huru na mbu...	More than the <i>agbada</i> attire we earlier saw) ¹⁹

These military leaders were worse than their civilian counterparts because their system of leadership was autocratic. They did not seek approval before taking some key decisions relating to governance. The military was so corrupt that the promise of good leadership they made to the people upon taking over power from the civilian leaders was never fulfilled. This is captured by the poet in lines 10-12 of the second stanza of the poem where the poet says:

Mgbe a fọjuru akpa e bu bia	(When they filled the bags they came with
Ihe e kwurun'ọbija	What was said on their arrival
Abughikwa ihe e kwurun'ula...	Was no longer what they said on their departure) ¹⁹

Here (lines 10-12 above), the poet alludes to the disappointing statement the military made, to calm the disappointed people when the government's failure was obvious. The poet, however, ends the poem in his last two lines 13-14, by encouraging Nigerians that, although fixing Nigeria's problems will take a longer time than usual, they should be patient and hopeful for better days, by stating that:

...Isapu unyi ukọ ga-ewe oge	(Washing away our dirt of lack will take time
Onye unyitere nwee ndidi...	Whoever gets dirty, be patient...) ¹⁹

'Unyi' (Dirt) as used by the poet in these last lines above, is anything that symbolizes shame, which in the case of the above excerpt is lack, bad economy, occasioned by poor leadership and corruption. This is why the poet, having mirrored the effects of poor leadership and corruption, concludes by satirically crediting the concluding statement to the military, who were encouraging the people to be patient with the structure as it would take a while to fix things.

One would expect Nigerian leaders, having seen the suffering of the masses would be patriotic and begin to lead in a way and manner that would positively affect the economic situation of the country, but this was not the case. In the image of Nigerian leaders portrayed by the poet Nkechinyere Okediadi, it was obvious that between 1996-2005 nothing changed as it appears that corruption in Nigeria has taken a new shape and the leaders worse than their predecessors. In her poem "Najirja" (Nigeria) in *Ije Uwa* Okediadi mirrors corruption in Nigeria that has now taken a form of tyranny, bribery and, greed. Just like Emenajo in his "Uko n'Uju" earlier discussed, Okediadi also agrees that Nigeria is indeed a blessed nation, but the nation has been unlucky in terms of leadership. Okediadi starts her poem with praises for the Nigerian nation, itemizing the key blessings that Nigeria is endowed with. In her opinion in the first stanza of her poem, some of the blessings that God gave Nigeria include honey, milk, riches and, fertile land, where she says:

Obodo mmanuani,	(A nation of honey
Mmiri ara ehi na-eru n'ime ya	Milk flows in it
Akunauba ka Ekè ji chọọ gi mma	Wealth is what the Creator beautified you with
Ala oma bukwa ugwu nye gi	Good land is also a thing of honour to you) ²²

Indeed, the poet is right in her views as regards the Nigerian state in the above stanza. The blessings, which God gave Nigeria according to the poet in the above stanza is both natural resources and a landscape that is devoid of natural disasters like earthquakes, volcanoes and, other forms of natural disaster that are witnessed in other parts of the world today. The reason for this praise is to prepare the mind of the reader to see the point she is about to make in the poem. Despite all these praises for Nigeria, the poet makes a sharp turn and begins to satirize Nigerian leaders, whom she strongly believes is to be blamed

for the poor economic situation of the country. The poet refers to Nigerian leaders as tyrants, who enjoy bribery and corruption and by so doing, plunge the nation into shame and tough economic conditions. In her third stanza, the poet states:

Ndi ọchichị nchigbu	(Tyrants
Unu eteelaala anyị unyin 'ihu	You people have put our nation to shame.
Fonfoju akpa bụ egwu ọkuku na	Bribery is your beat and na
Egwu ọgbugba unu	Your dance steps
Ndi kama ọ ga-adọ n'ite	People who insist than rather than leave it in the pot
Ka ọ doro n'afọ.	Let it be left in their bellies) ²²

Two aspects of corruption portrayed in the above stanza are tyranny and bribery. The poet's reference to Nigerian leaders as tyrants here is to depict their cruel and wicked style of leadership, which they do by giving and taking bribes just in a bid to enforce anti-people policies that only serve their selfish needs and ego. The poet believes that these two weapons of corruption as identified in the stanza have indeed given Nigeria a bad name on the international scene. The idiomatic expression employed in line 2 in the above excerpt is used to depict the shame or disgrace the leading class has brought on the nation. The poet further notes that greed and covetousness are the major problems that drive Nigerian leaders into taking and giving bribes.

In her fourth stanza, the poet accuses Nigerian leaders of enriching themselves with the proceeds of the poor masses, and this is why she likens Nigerian leaders to mosquitoes. In the words of Okediadi in the fourth stanza of her poem, she states:

Chei! Unu bụ anwunta.	(Chei! you are mosquitoes
Unu amikpọla umu mmadu ọbara	You have sucked all the human blood
Nti unu dizi ka nke awonujuru mmiri afọ	Your ears is like a toad that drank water in excess
Afo unu dizi ka ite mmiri	Your tommy is like a pot of water
Onye rie, ọ ga-erifokwara onye ozo?	He who eats, will he remain for another person?) ²²

The metaphoric portrayal of the Nigerian political class as mosquitos in line one of the above stanza depicts their undying hunger to feed on the resources of the poor masses which is portrayed in line 2 as human blood. The above stanza 4 portrays the day-to-day experiences of the poor in a nation like Nigeria. The poor masses, who strive to feed their families, are daily subjected to several kinds of extortions by the political class. All these are what the poet refers to in the second line of the above stanza when she says, "Unu amikpọla umu mmadu ọbara" (You have sucked all the human blood). The 'blood', here, signifies anything that helps the poor to survive, which in this case is their resources. The poor are forced to pay taxes,

increased rents, bills (electricity, water, security, etc.) and increased prices of foodstuffs. In the end, these monies find their way into the pocket of the politicians in the corridors of power. That is why in lines 3-4, the poet uses the similetic expression "Your ears are like a toad that drank water in excess" to further satirize the Nigerian political class for their greed in amassing public funds. She further accuses Nigerian politicians of greed and covetousness which explains why they easily fall prey to the temptation of corruption. In her last stanza, she says:

Ndi oke ọchicho!	(Greedy people
Unu hiwreamuma di iche	You organised a lot of prophesies
Ọ bu nke gini?	What is it for?
I nyere ndi uwa na-atu n'onu aka	To help the less privileged
Onye ka o rukwaranu aka?	Who even received it?
N'akpa unu ka ha bachara.	They entered into your pockets.
Ndi ọchichị nchigbundu!	Tyrants sorry!) ²²

The poet here summarises her thoughts in the poem by alluding to all the false campaign promises the leaders make, as seen in lines 2-5, portraying them as sham. The poet believes that this is also the base of corruption, as these politicians raise the hopes of people, only to shatter them. However, instead of fulfilling those promises, they turn around to divert public funds to their bank account. This is what the poet is referring to in line 6 when she writes "N'akpa unu ka ha bachara" (They entered into your pockets). This view is supported by Moyosore who believes that corruption is responsible for so many dashed hopes and broken promises, which now characterized the lives of so many Nigerians². 'Pockets' as used in the above stanza represent individual bank accounts. Based on the thought of this poem, we can categorically state that Okediadi's portrayal of Nigerian leaders and their corrupt ways focus on how Nigerian leaders prey on the poor masses for their own aggrandizement.

Also adding her voice to the problem of corruption and poor leadership in Nigeria, H. Oleru bemoans the insincerity of Nigerian politicians and leaders who go about making campaign promises but when they eventually get elected into office, they turn their back on the electorate who voted them into office; therefore, basic infrastructures in the nation continue to deteriorate. The tone of her poem suggests that, just like every other Nigerian, the poet is unhappy with the way Nigerian leaders have managed the finances of the country. In her poem 'Ochichi' (Leadership) (Poem 5) in *Akonauche*, the poet (Oleru) holds up the mirror image of Nigerian leaders (politicians) as liars, depicting their nonchalant attitude towards the development of the nation's basic infrastructures. In the second stanza of her poem, the poet says:

Aga m aga n'elu gaa biri
 Ndi bi n'ala ahjuolaanya
 Tunyere m vootu, tunyere m vootu
 Aga m enye unu oku, mmiri,
 ezigbo uzo, gi tunyere ha, ha merie, n'ikpeazu

Ejuoleenne gi, kùkòròrò.
 Nruḡbu gbaa afò onye a na-arugbuamara
 Mmadu o na-emegbudibia na-agwo ya?
 Ndị ochichị ga-aza nke a
 (I will go to the sky
 Those living on the ground have seen a lot
 Vote for me, vote for me
 I will provide you people with light, water,
 Good roads, when you vote for them, and they win, at last
 Did they keep their promise
 When cheating is entrenched, the victim finds out
 Does someone maltreat the doctor that heals him?
 The leaders will answer this.)²³

From the image of the leadership style of Nigerian leaders, as presented by the poet in the above stanza, one can see the self-serving attitude of most Nigerian leaders which is a problem Nigeria still faces to date. They always know the need of the people and use it as a tool for their campaign, and people vote them in with the hope to have their basic needs met. However, instead of solving the already identified problems after winning the elections, they turn around to abandon the people. All the basic amenities identified by the poet in the above stanza, like electricity, water and, good roads, have always been issues of great concern to Nigerians, due to their poor state. This is why the poet, frowns at the insincerity of Nigerian leaders who turn a blind eye to these basic needs of the people when they get to the office.

Oleru further blames Nigerian leaders for the dilapidating state of the country, like the rising state of insecurity as obtained today in Nigeria, epileptic power supply and, fallen standard of education in the country. The poet, like every Nigerian, believes that these are the results of poor leadership and corruption in the country. The poet expresses this thought clearly in the third stanza of poem 5, where she says:

Aga m aga n'elu gaa biri	(I will go up and live
Ujọ uwa atugbuola	I am afraid of the world
Umụ mmadu ofufuofufu	People missing
Ego nri, i huru n'eebe?	Money for food, where will you see?
Oku mpinyumpinyu	Epileptic power supply
A guo akwukwo taa, onwa ato a gubeghi ozo	School in session today and three months not in session
Onye ga-achuru Mbieri ndi ara?	Who is going to drive mad people away for Mbieri?
Ndị ochichị ga-aza nke a.	The leaders will respond to this.) ²³

Here, the poet mirrors the daily experience of Nigerians, who bear the brunt of this corruption perpetuated by the political leading class. Every picture of the society presented in the third stanza above by the poet is the pain Nigerians go through daily. Kidnapping and banditry have now become a form of business for some people in the country, with many living in fear. In

some cases, the kidnappings are politically-engineered and targeted against political opponents. Some irresponsible unemployed youths have also taken to kidnapping and other vices as a means of survival. This is the view expressed in line 3 of the above third stanza when the poet says “Umụ mmadu ofufuofufu” (people missing). This goes to say that people are not even safe in the nation anymore. Apart from these unscrupulous elements terrorizing the society, some responsible Nigerians that want to make an honest living are denied the power supply needed for different small-scale businesses. The same goes for many other families and businesses that depend on the power supply to make a living. Incessant power outage in the country is the point expressed by the poet in line 5 in the above stanza where she says “Oku mpinyumpinyu”.

Conclusion

The nexus of this paper is on the theoretical investigation of WIP with a view to harness the views of MIP on the issue of corruption in the country and finding out how Nigerian leaders and politicians are portrayed in Igbo literature. The study found that Igbo poets are unanimous in their conviction that corruption and poor leadership are at the root of the myriads of problems confronting the Nigerian state. The poets exonerate the masses from corruption and strongly blame the Nigerian political class for corruption that has now destroyed the moral fabric of the society. The image of Nigerian politicians portrayed by the poets in their works is that of liars and cheats who only serve themselves and never have the interest of the masses at heart. The study recommends both psychological and moral examination of anyone seeking political office in Nigeria, as this will help to know who the masses can trust with their vote, especially as Nigeria prepares for the general elections in 2023.

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