



INTERROGATING ENFEEBLING SYNDROME: CORRUPTION AND ABUSE OF PUBLIC OFFICE IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S TRILOGY

Onyeka Ike ¹  

¹ Ph.D., Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke Bayelsa State, Nigeria



Received 04 December 2022

Accepted 02 January 2023

Published 15 February 2023

Corresponding Author

Onyeka Ike, onyeka_ike@yahoo.com

DOI

[10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i1.2023.4604](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v11.i1.2023.4604)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2023 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The sickening and enervating stench named corruption is a global malady which robs many nations of their endowed fortune. In a developing country like Nigeria, the situation is exacerbated by the absence of strong institutions as opposed to the palpable and pervasive cults of strong personalities. The aftermath of the unwholesome scenario is that poverty takes the seat of prosperity while pieces assume the place of peace. Indeed, corruption and commodification of public office are twin cankerworms actively devouring the supposed brilliant destinies and destinations of nations as amply foregrounded and demonstrated in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americana* (2013). Utilizing Michel Foucault's New Historicist theory of power and qualitative research methodology, the study uncovers that although Adichie's home country, Nigeria, is beautifully endowed with unequivocal elements of greatness, it is yet to attain such a noble status principally on account of corruption and abuse of public office as brazenly perpetrated from inception by the operators of its political, administrative, and bureaucratic machineries. The study avers that for the nation to realise and maximise its baronial endowments, the putrefaction of corruption and commodification of public office must be firmly dealt with, and that the evolution of formidable and dependable institutional frameworks/processes at all levels should be the active engagement and concern of the citizenry.

Keywords: Qualitative Research Methodology, Corruption, Concern of the Citizenry

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption and abuse of public office by the operators of Nigeria's political, administrative, and bureaucratic systems have been identified by many as one of the major stagnating, even retrogressive factors in the wheels of development and advancement in the country right from inception. This implies that right from the country's First Republic, many operators of the nation's political, administrative, and bureaucratic machinery at various levels and strata have been identified to be corrupt and abusive of such hallowed public offices. In fact, if there is a single word in the English lexicon that can be said to be most pronounced in the nation's public space, it is corruption which often goes hand-in-hand with abuse of public office.

Advanced English Dictionary defines corruption as “lack of integrity or honesty (especially susceptibility to bribery); use of a position of trust for dishonest gain.” It also describes it as “moral perversion; impairment of virtue and moral principles.” For [Bergovic \(2005\)](#), p.2, “Corruption is the intentional non-compliance with the arm’s-length principle aimed at deriving some advantage for oneself or for related individuals from this behavior.” Also, [Aluko \(2009\)](#), p.1 perceives corruption as “an antisocial behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authorities’ capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens.” From whichever perspective it is described, defined or demonstrated, corruption is a negative, pervasive and retrogressive act which often portray the perpetrator as unprincipled, dishonest, even immoral in the eyes of the public. This is why in sane and organized societies, corrupt individuals or public officials usually stand the risk of losing their positions, respect and even friends hence many usually abhor all appearances of corruption. In such domains, those found guilty of corruption are usually given short or long jail sentences, in addition to losing positions, respect and friends, depending on the degree of corrupt practice which they have perpetrated. Apart from having few sincere hands fighting corruption in the Nigerian public space, one of the greatest challenges in the combat against the menace of corruption is that the menace itself often has a way of fighting back those fighting it. Corruption, no doubt, is a universal phenomenon. It is from this perspective that [Aluko \(2009\)](#), p.1 maintains that “some countries are obviously more corrupt; yet others have better plans in managing corrupt activities.”

The thematisation of corruption in the Nigerian literary space can be said to be as old as early post-independence Nigeria and not particularly a novel phenomenon. First generation Nigerian literary artists like Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark and others have portrayed corruption and its cancerous consequences in some of their early works. In highlighting some of the dimensions as well as the evolution of corruption in Nigeria, [Aluko \(2009\)](#), pp.3-4 states:

In Nigeria today, there are many unresolved problems, but the issue of the upsurge of corruption is alarming. Corruption is endemic in Nigeria. The damages it has done to the polity are astronomical. This menace has led to situations like slow movement of files in offices, police extortion of toll fees, port congestion, queues at passport offices and petrol stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities among others. Thus, it is believed by many in the society that corruption is the bane of Nigeria. Consequently, the issue kept recurring in every academic and informal discussion in Nigeria... In contemporary Nigeria, corruption in public offices predated Nigeria’s independence. Nigeria’s post-independence history has been overshadowed by the depredations of a series of corrupt, abusive, and unaccountable governments.

Chimamanda Adichie’s trilogy under investigation chronicle a myriad of issues relating to corruption and abuse of public offices by those entrusted with them. In chronicling them, Adichie demonstrates that such proclivities negate national progress and sustainable development and should therefore be checkmated. For every public office one occupies, there is a clearly stated purpose; a reason why the office or institution exists. To abuse such an office therefore means to alter the inherent purpose, function, or functionality of such an office in anyway. Thus, from the office of the president of the country to that of a headmaster of a village primary school and so on, there is a written or unwritten purpose for which the office exists, which ultimately will result to the upliftment of society. Adherence to such a purpose usually implies progress for the people on whose behalf the office is occupied while non-adherence often implies abuse and perpetration of corruption in one form or the other. Bribery is the twin sister of corruption and often goes hand-

in-hand with it. It is the practice of giving something in order to gain an undue or illicit advantage. Bribery can be offered in cash or in kind for the purpose of advancing a particular interest or gaining illicit advantage for one thing or the other. This study evaluates and interrogates the representations of corruption and abuse of public office and their crippling effects on national life in Chimamanda Adichie's trilogy.

2. EMERGING ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

It is on account of Eugene's human rights campaigns and pro-democracy stance; his insistence that military men - people he usually refers to as "Godless men" should not be ruling Nigeria but should return to the barracks that the military government approaches him to bribe him with a "pickup load of dollars" in order to silence his vociferous agitations as it has successfully done to several "other Big men in the country" (p.4). Kambili presents the situation thus:

But even the government agents, two men in black jackets who came some time ago, yanked at the hibiscus as they left. They came in a pickup truck with Federal Government plates and parked close to the hibiscus bushes. They didn't stay long. Later, Jaja said they came to bribe Papa, that he had heard them say that their pickup was full of dollars. I imagined the truck full of stacks of foreign money, wondered if they had put the money in many cartons or in one huge carton, the size our fridge came in. (*PH*, P.9-10)

By this representation, Adichie reminisces on the historical character of General Ibrahim Babangida who she mirrors as Big Oga in the novel. Babangida is widely known in Nigerian historical and political circles as the military despot who operated with a settlement philosophy. It is, of course, through that process that the General is often said to have institutionalized corruption in the country. Thus, in the words of Habila (2002, p.227), "Whereas Babangida used bribery and corruption to rule, Abacha used plain, old-fashioned terror..." These attributes of the two Nigerian military rulers are amply represented in one way or the other in Adichie's first and third novels.

Eugene's refusal of the bribe might have prompted their "yanking at the hibiscus as they left" (p.9). His continuous vehement crusades against the military government show that he out-rightly rejects the bribe and refuses to be compromised like some others. Such refusal does not go down well with the military authorities who now start to target him and his various business interests, arresting and detaining the editor-in-chief of his *Standard* newspaper on trumped up charges until they finally nail him with a mail bomb. Thus, the price Papa ultimately pays for refusing to be silenced with a bribe from the military authorities is indeed enormous, but it is also a demonstration of exemplary patriotism and honesty which are virtues in opposition to the vices of bribery and corruption. And for a Federal Military Government under whose watch majority of the populace wallow in abject poverty to think of bribing a single prominent individual like Eugene with a pickup load of dollars in order to buy him over and silence his human rights and pro-democracy crusades speaks volume of the debauchery of the government, hence the justification for the protests for them to return to the barracks. Although the politicians they overthrow are equally said to be corrupt, Papa believes that there is no justification whatsoever for military rule, rather what the nation needs is what he refers to as "renewed democracy" (p.25) as Kambili states:

It was during family time the next day, a Saturday, that the coup happened. Papa had just checkmated Jaja when we heard the martial music on the radio, the solemn

strains making us stop to listen. A general with a strong Hausa accent came on and announced that there had been a coup and that we had a new government. Papa pushed the chessboard aside and excused himself to use the phone in his study... He looked sad; his rectangular lips seemed to sag. Coups beget coups, he said, telling us about the bloody coups in the sixties, which ended up in civil war just after he left Nigeria to study in England. A coup always began a vicious cycle. Military men would always overthrow one another, because they could, because they were all power drunk. Of course, Papa told us, the politicians were corrupt, and the *Standard* had written many stories about the cabinet ministers who stashed money in foreign bank accounts, money meant for paying teachers' salaries and building roads. But what we Nigerians needed was not soldiers ruling us, what we needed was a renewed democracy. Renewed democracy. It sounded important, the way he said it. (PH, P.24-25)

Papa's faith in "renewed democracy" as opposed to military dictatorship is predicated on his perception that a renewed democracy will have some regards for fundamental human rights, give voice to the voiceless and most importantly ensure accountability in governance as opposed to the endemic corruption which pervades the entire political landscape at the moment. Papa is not alone in his observation of the level of corruption and abuse of public office in the country; a man who writes an article in an opinion column of a newspaper identified as *Nigeria Today* also observes that "...the politicians had gone out of control and our economy was in a mess" (p.25). The politicians getting out of control and consequently messing up the national economy in this context also implies that the politicians have abused the respective public offices which they occupy in trust for the citizens.

When Ade Coker, the irrepressible editor-in-chief of Papa's *Standard* newspaper, through his laudable efforts in forensic and investigative journalism, decides to dig into issues relating to corruption and abuse of office by the Head of State himself; particularly with respect to the drug cartel he allegedly runs with his wife, he is promptly apprehended by the military authorities for daring to expose the corrupt and abusive proclivities of the military leader. Upon Ade's apprehension and the consequent lamentation of his wife Yewande, Kambili says:

His car was abandoned on the roadside, the front door left open. I imagined Ade Coker being pulled out of his car, being squashed into another car, perhaps a black station wagon filled with soldiers, their guns hanging out of the windows. I imagined his hands quivering with fear, a wet patch spreading on his trousers. I knew his arrest was because of the big cover story in the last *Standard*, a story about how the Head of State and his wife had paid people to transport heroin abroad, a story that questioned the recent execution of three men and who the real drug barons were. (PH, P.38)

This is an instance of corruption fighting back the few people who courageously fight it for the good of society. Thus, in an effort to expose and fight corruption as it is associated with the highest political office holder in the country, Ade is being arrested, tortured and detained. From the perspective of Nigeria's historical development, this is equally how several good-spirited citizens who at one period or the other opted to fight corruption and institute social justice have been maligned by the authorities, even intimidated, tortured, incarcerated, or exiled. And it is for the same reason that corruption and abuse of public office is thriving in several quarters in the country.

When Jaja and Kambili are being driven to Nsukka by their family driver Kevin to pay a visit to the family of Auntie Ifeoma, the narrator draws the attention of the

reader to the kind of corruption being perpetrated by law enforcement agents, particularly the police, while on duty on the roads. Kambili says:

I looked out of the window as we drove, counting the blackened hulks of cars on the roadside, ... About forty minutes into the drive, I saw a sign on the roadside that read UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA, and I asked Kevin if we were almost there. Near the town of Opi – the dust-covered church and school signs read Opi, we came to a police checkpoint. Old tires and nail-studded logs were strewn across most of the road, leaving only a narrow space. A policeman flagged us down as we approached. Kevin groaned. Then as we slowed, he reached into the glove compartment and pulled out a ten-naira note and flung it out of the window, towards the policeman. The policeman gave a mock salute, smiled, and waved us through. (PH, p.110-111)

The constitutional responsibility of the Nigerian Police Force is to maintain law and order and protect lives and properties of citizens as well as other law-abiding residents. Unfortunately, several police checkpoints on Nigerian roads have been brazenly converted to corruption and extortion points. One would have expected that their “flagging down” the car is to either search it for any unlawful exhibit or perhaps to caution him to maintain a moderate speed limit. But we are not told that Kevin is in any way driving recklessly and they are aware of it, just as Kevin is. The interest of the police at this point is rather on the money a law-abiding citizen would give them before being allowed to pass through their checkpoint, without which he can be delayed while they pretend to be checking for vehicle particulars for as long as they wish. Kevin does not want to be delayed and so decides to bribe them with ten naira note which attracts an instant “mock salute,” a smile and a “wave through” (p.111). This implies that even if Kevin is carrying any unlawful exhibit in that car, the police at this checkpoint are obviously not concerned about it so long as money changes hands. This is a portrayal of a glimpse of the corrupt and dirty transactions that take place at the numerous police checkpoints that dot Nigerian roads in almost every part of the country. The situation has degenerated to a point where commercial motorists and private car owners who object to such extortion are usually subjected to diverse forms of molestation, delay and denigration by the same police who are supposed to be protecting them. It is a development which has brought ridicule and disrepute to the nation and to the policing system. Adichie here uses the instrumentality of literature to expose it. The recent #ENDSARS nationwide protest is a reflection of the corruption, lawlessness and illegalities that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian Police Force.

When students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka riot due to lack of institutional infrastructure and social amenities as revealed by the “no light, no water” (p.131) situation on campus, Obiora states that the problem is not really orchestrated by the vice chancellor parse but by some corrupt superior powers operating from the nation’s capital, Abuja. He rather accuses such individuals who on upfront basis steal the money budgeted for such infrastructural development thereby making the nation’s tertiary institutions unattractive and uncomfortable for teaching, learning and research as they become mere glorified secondary schools. Obiora observes that, “If some Big Man in Abuja has stolen the money, is the V.C. supposed to vomit money for Nsukka?” (p.131).

It is quite ironic that due to observations and occurrences over the years, many citizens have come to perceive Abuja the nation’s Federal Capital and seat of power officially nicknamed Centre of Unity as a place where a myriad of conspiratorial political and administrative forces unite together in various forms to misappropriate and steal the resources that ought to be channelled for the

development of constituencies and institutions in the country. Although nicknamed Centre of Unity, many citizens actually believe that Abuja is a Centre of corruption. The character of Obiora in *Purple Hibiscus* although a teenager, fourteen years or so, strongly believes that some official and unofficial thieves operate in various appearances from the nation's seat of power and consistently steal what belongs to the generality of the citizens thereby retarding national development and progress. Thus, Abuja which ought to be a symbol of administrative excellence and service delivery in the eyes of the people turns out to be viewed as a metaphor for the looting of public treasury, a metaphor for official criminality and deprivation. The issue is to the extent that when people think of corruption in the country, they think of Abuja as its headquarters.

When Adichie's literary searchlight returns to Abuja as a setting later in the fiction, the reader observes a desperate attempt by the same corrupt elements in the nation's seat of power to bribe and to cover up the crime of murder of an opposition figure, a crime they earnestly desire to conceal. A human rights and pro-democracy crusader named Nwankiti Ogechi disappears into the thin air, and Ade Coker the quintessential editor-in-chief of *the Standard* is digging deep to unravel the issues surrounding his sudden disappearance. Ade is also said to be in possession of a privileged information, a secret leaked to him by people who seemed to know the how and why Nwankiti disappears from the public space. As editor-in-chief, he is determined to do a pungent cover story concerning the revelations and controversies surrounding the matter. The powers that be at Abuja are, however, aware that Ade is in possession of privileged information concerning the murder of the pro-democracy and human rights activist, a man the Canadian government refers to as "a man of honour" (p.198). So, all of a sudden, the Head of State who is the arrowhead of the tyrannical military government that has been hitherto arresting, torturing and detaining Ade each time he writes what the military authorities regard as an attack to the government, decides to grant Ade "an exclusive interview" (p.196). But Ade senses an attempt to cover up the truth; an attempt to bribe him with the Head of State's exclusive interview, and he says so in unmistakable terms, insisting that he must tell the truth which he knows. Upon the arrival of the editorial team at Eugene's residence to discuss issues concerning the cover story Ade intends to do in the next edition of *the Standard* about the disappearance of Nwankiti Ogechi, Kambili says:

They were talking in low tones, but it was easy to make out the name Nwankiti Ogechi, especially when Ade Coker spoke, because he did not lower his voice as much as Papa and the other man did. He was saying that Big Oga's assistant – Ade Coker referred to the Head of State as Big Oga even in his editorials – had called to say that Big Oga was willing to give him an exclusive interview. (*PH*, P.196)

Ade seems to know better and states the reason for the proposed exclusive interview: "But they want me to cancel the Nwankiti Ogechi story. Imagine the stupid man, he said they knew some useless people had told me stories that I planned to use in my piece and that the stories were lies..." (p.196). In response to this, Kambili says, "I heard Papa interrupt in a low voice, and the other man added something afterwards, something about the Big People in Abuja not wanting such a story out now that the Commonwealth Nations were meeting" (p.196).

The representation of the "Big People in Abuja" in this conversation, again, seems to justify what the federal capital has come to symbolise, even in contemporary times, in the eyes of many Nigerians. Here, Abuja symbolises the abode of several corrupt, murderous, and conspiratorial political forces who claim to have gone there to represent the people but really succeed in ganging up to

exploit the same people; those with the capacity to “steal” and murder, and cleverly cover up their crimes. Having sensed the efforts of “the Big People in Abuja” to cover up the assassination of Nwankiti Ogechi, Ade says, “No way! They don’t want Nwankiti Ogechi to become an issue now. Simple! And you know what it means, it means they have wasted him! Which one is for Big Oga to try and bribe me with an interview? I ask you, eh, which one is that?” (p.197)

True to Ade’s insinuation, the narrator finally states that “soldiers shot Nwankiti Ogechi in a bush in Minna. And then they poured acid on his body to melt his flesh off his bones, to kill him even when he was already dead” (p.198). Through the portrayals of the assassination of Nwankiti Ogechi, the character of the Head of State is proven to be corrupt, murderous and to have abused his exalted office since his government turns to destroy the life which he ought to protect and then tried to bribe a journalist with an exclusive interview in order to cover up the atrocity. For refusing to be bribed and avoid exposing the crime, the journalist himself is equally silenced with a mail bomb in the end. And to ensure that the publisher of *the Standard* newspaper is also brought down, he goes on to ensure the liquidation of all his business interests. This is another dimension of oppression and corruption being perpetrated by the military junta as revealed by Kambili when she states that “soldiers had gone to one of the factories, carrying dead rats in a carton, and then closed the factory down, saying the rats had been found there and could spread disease through the wafers and biscuits. Papa no longer went to the other factories as often as he used to” (p.204).

Eventually, Papa dies of poison (p.283). Mama says, “They called me from the factory, they found him lying dead on his desk” (p.280). It is at the instance of his death and Jaja’s incarceration for accepting responsibility for his death in order to save his mother who is the real culprit for the murder that other dimensions of corruption, bribery, and abuse of public in the country are chronicled. It is at the last chapter of the fiction captioned “A Different Silence,” at the instance of Jaja’s trial and imprisonment that Kambili highlights the rot in the nation’s judicial and correctional systems thus: “There is so much more that Mama and I do not talk about. We do not talk about the huge checks we have written, for bribes to judges and policemen and prison guards” (p.289). This is a monumental indictment, particularly to the country’s judicial system; a system widely expected to be fair and just. Their condescension to the point of collecting huge checks as bribes from Kambili’s family for whatever reason is quite lamentable and revealing. Even in the prison, Kambili notes that bribe really finds its way to the “right people” before an inmate like Jaja can be given a fair treatment. Concerning Jaja, she says:

He does not mind sleeping with mice and cockroaches, but he does mind having another man’s faeces in his face. He was in a better cell until last month, with books and a mattress all to himself, because our lawyers knew the right people to bribe. But the wardens moved him here after he spat in a guard’s face for no reason at all, after they stripped him and flogged him with koboko. He did not even show me the welts on his back, the ones the doctor we bribed in told me were puffy and swollen like long sausages. But I see other parts of Jaja, the parts I do not need to be shown, like his shoulders. (*PH*, p.291)

There is obviously an unenviable network of bribery and corruption in the entire system – from court judges to policemen and then to prison guards and wardens. It therefore implies that one might perish or suffer great injustices in the system if one does not have the means (the huge checks) to bribe or unwilling to bribe the aforementioned officials. Of course, in any nation, the judiciary which has been unfortunately implicated in this situation is supposedly the last hope of the

common man. Their being compromised in this context symbolizes a colossal loss of that hope, which portends great danger for the average citizen.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie continues to demonstrate the abuse of public office and corrupt tendencies of Nigerian officials. First, this is highlighted through the actions and utterances of Chief Okonji – a character identified as the finance minister of the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Balewa (*Half*, p.30). When Chief Okonji is invited to the residence of another politician and business magnate named Chief Ozobia for dinner, he suddenly develops an intense amorous desire for Chief Ozobia's pretty and educated first daughter, Olanna. Chief Okonji's desire to have Olanna as his mistress at all costs is revealed in his utterances: "I can't keep you out of my mind... I just can't keep you out of my mind ...I can appoint you to a board, any board you want, and I will furnish a flat wherever you want ... I love you, believe me, I really love you" (p.33). He goes further to demonstrate how he is willing to use his high office and connections as Finance Minister to inflate the price of landed property belonging to Olanna's father five or six times in their favour, provided Olanna agrees to his amorous advances. It is in that state of desperation that those words are released: "There's a cocktail party at Ikoyi Hotel. I want all of you to meet some expatriates. They are looking for land and I can arrange for them to buy from your father at five or six times the price," he said to Olanna. This is a typical case of a public official using the office he occupies on behalf of the people for undue personal advantage. The intended outcome of such a corrupt process is for Olanna to be bribed into acquiescence, to succumb to the minister's seemingly uncontrollable sexual appetite. This is nothing short of corruption and abuse of public office. Olanna's blunt refusal, "I am not interested, Chief" (p.33), and her preference for Odenigbo, an Nsukka University lecturer who she had earlier met and fallen in love with is like a deadly blow to the randy Finance Minister.

Again, it is from the voice of the revolutionary character of Major Nzeogwu that the death of Nigeria's First Republic is announced on account of corruption and other vices being perpetrated by the political class: The constitution is suspended, and the regional government and elected assemblies are hereby dissolved. My dear countrymen, the aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a nation free from corruption and internal strife. Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent. (*Half*, p.123)

This is a proof that bribery, corruption, and abuse of public office are some of the key factors that contributed to the downfall of the country's First Republic, which later results to the enthronement of military dictatorship. Nigerian military governments have become even more corrupt than that of civilians because ruling military elites usually operate outside constitutional frameworks and limits, and exercise powers that are often unrestrained by institutional checks and balances. At most, they operate with promulgated decrees that conveniently suit their whims and caprices. Onukaba (2007) observes that military coups are usually associated with a lot of confusions within the military itself and also among the civil populace. So those who seek to justify any military regime or attempt to characterise some military dictators as great leaders are making grievous mistakes. Adichie's fictions have demonstrated that military regimes are not immune to corruption. Also, while discussing coups in Africa, Madiebo (1980) maintains that military government is a major setback for any nation and should be avoided at all costs. Military men, he says, are not suitable for the task of governance because they either lean too heavily on advice which may not always be in the best interest of the people, or worse still, attempt to rule without it. Madiebo (1980), p.236 believes that "with the gun in his hand, it is difficult to remove the military leader, particularly when he begins to

enjoy full political power.” Instructively, Madiebo himself was a soldier and in fact the commander of the Biafran Army during the Nigerian Civil War.

When, at their palatial home in Lagos, Olanna hears her mother’s raised voice from their kitchen saying, “Good-for-nothing! Stupid man!” (p.219), she hurries to the scene, thinking that there is an altercation between her parents. On getting to the scene of the confrontation, however, she observes that “a man was kneeling in front of her mother with his hands raised high, palms upward in supplication” (p.219), and the man says, “Madam, please; madam, please.” Olanna’s mother’s comment reveals the man’s offence thus: “Does he think we employed him to steal us blind? So this is what you have been doing since you came here, you useless man? You came here to steal from me?” (p.219). The man’s relentless supplication, “Madam, please; madam, please. I am using God to beg you,” seems to be falling on deaf ears as Olanna’s mother continues with her verbal attacks in explanation of the issue to Olanna and their cook Maxwell who are at the scene of the altercation. “It’s this wild animal here. We employed him only last month, and he already wants to steal everything in my house” (p.220). Then she turned to the man to say, “This is how you repay people for giving you a job? Stupid man!” (p.220). At this point, Olanna is still confused about the specific item the man is alleged to have stolen. This prompts her question to her mother, “What did he do?” (p.220). In response, “her mother led her out to the backyard where a bicycle leaned against the mango tree. A woven bag had fallen from the backseat, spilling rice onto the ground” (p.220). Then she explains further: “He stole my rice and was about to go home. It was only by God’s grace that the bag fell. Who knows what else he has stolen from me in the past? No wonder I have been looking for some of my necklaces” (p.220). Olanna’s reaction reveals that she does not believe that the offence deserves the magnitude of harsh handling given by her mother. “Olanna stared at the rice grains on the ground and wondered how her mother could have worked herself up like this over them and if her mother really believed her own outrage” (p.220). Then to the man he says, “Get up.” The narrator observes that “Olanna looked away from the man’s lined face and yellowed eyes; he was older than she had first thought, certainly above sixty.” Olanna believes that rather than continuing to verbally abuse and humiliate the man, even when he is still on his knees pleading for forgiveness, for stealing a few cups of rice from their kitchen, her mother should relieve him of the job, hence she says, “Mum, if you’re going to sack him, then sack him and have him go right away” (p.220). That same day, the narrator states that:

She told Odenigbo about it on the phone, how it repulsed her to see that elderly man abase himself so, how she was certain her mother would have fired him but only after an hour of reveling in his groveling and in her own self-righteous outrage. ‘It could not have been more than four cups of rice,’ she said. (p.220-221)

When Odenigbo insists that “it was still stealing, *nkem*” (p.221) and therefore a punishable offence, Olanna uses the premise to intimate him on why she really feels nauseated about the man’s punishment. Her statement is a clear revelation of the magnitude of corruption and abuse of public office going on in the nation. She says, “My father and his politician friends steal money with their contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness. And they build houses with their stolen money and charge inflated rents that make it impossible to buy food” (p.221). By this assertion, Olanna clearly identifies her father, Chief Ozobia and his “politician friends” like Chief Okonji the finance minister as a part of the rot in the system.

At the outbreak of the civil war, Odenigbo and Olanna with Ugwu and baby relocate from Nsukka to Odenigbo’s ancestral home, Abba. When Abba is threatened by the Federal forces the family, again, relocates to Umuahia the new capital of the

young Republic of Biafra. While the war rages, the narrator observes that just as it is found in the Nigerian system, some Biafran public officials have started perpetrating certain acts of corruption and abuse of public office even when Biafra is yet to be firmly established. This demonstrates that such vices are actually human tendencies which can occur anywhere without strong institutions. Indeed, strong institutions as canvassed by former American president, Barack Obama, are the things really required to effectively checkmate the menace of corruption and abuse of public office anywhere on the globe. Aluko (2009), p.1 has observed that "corruption is a global phenomenon, intelligible only in its social context." So, in their new residence at Umuahia, several people are indoors as a result of what Olanna refers to as "nonstop bombing campaign" (p.278) by the Nigerian Federal forces. While at home, Olanna is visited by a female family friend – a character identified as Mrs Muokelu. It is from the conversation that ensued between Mrs Muokelu and Olanna that some acts of corruption and abuse of public office going on in Biafra are revealed. Thus, in reference to another family friend of the Odenigbos named Special Julius, Mrs Muokelu says:

That Special Julius, by the way – you know he sells forged passes? I am not saying he does not do small-small contracts with the army, but he sells forged passes. His brother is a director and they do it together. It is because of them that all sorts of crooks are running around with special passes. That his brother is a criminal. They say he gave army exemption passes to all his male relatives, everyone in his Umunna. And you need to hear what he does with those young-young girls that crawl around looking for sugar daddies. They say he takes up to five of them into his bedroom at the same time. *Tufia!* It is people like him who must be executed when the State of Biafra is fully established. (*Half*, p.278)

The allegations raised against Special Julius and his brother who is said to be a director under the Biafran government is an indication that corruption and abuse of public office have already crept into the young Republic. Mrs Muokelu's recommendation that "it is people like him who must be executed when the State of Biafra is fully established" is a demonstration of her condemnation for the act. Also, when the teenage Ugwu is first arrested in Umuahia by some Biafran soldiers in an effort to conscript him into the army, they only release him when they take some bribe. Olanna says, "I bribed that soldier with all the money I have" (p.352). It is only when they collect the bribe that they "slashed at the rope that bound Ugwu's hands," setting him free and moving on with the other teenagers whose relatives are either not around or have no money to bribe the soldiers for their release. Some of those child soldiers eventually perish in the battle fronts while fighting wars which they are grossly ill-equipped to fight. This is a great injustice to those children and their parents. If they had bribed their captors as Olanna did for Ugwu's sake, they would have been set free and not taken to the battle front to pay the supreme price.

Adichie also reveals a kind of corruption and abuse of a hallowed office involving a Roman Catholic priest named Father Marcel. Father Marcel and Father Jude are the two main characters saddled with the responsibility of running a refugee camp established at Orlu by Kainene, Olanna's twin sister. The camp is inhabited mostly by women, girls, and children; Kainene rallies round on a regular basis to provide food and water as well as medication to meet the needs of the people as much as she can. And she keeps the items under the care of the two Reverend Fathers – Marcel and Jude. On a certain day, the narrator observes that:

A young girl named Urenwa's belly began to grow and Kainene was not sure if it was kwashiokor or pregnancy until the girl's mother slapped her and asked, 'Who? Who did this to you? Where did you see the man that did this to you?' The doctor no

longer visited because there was no petrol and there were too many dying soldiers to treat. (*Half*, p.390)

The questions to Urenwa by her own mother about, 'Who did this to you? Where did you see the man that did this to you?' were, however, not answered until later. Perhaps the long time it takes before the answer is known is because of the caliber of person that unbelievably takes advantage of the girl. Describing the horrible situation of the refugee camp where this young girl is exploited, the narrator states:

The well dried up. Kainene went often to the Directorate at Ahiara to get a water tanker, but each time she came back with a vague promise from the director. The thick ugly odours of unwashed bodies and rotting flesh from the shallow graves behind the buildings grew stronger. Flies flew over the sores on children's bodies. Bed-bugs and *kwalikwata* crawled; women would untie their wrappers to reveal an ugly rash of reddened bites around their waists, like hives steeped in blood. Oranges were in season and Kainene asked them to eat oranges from the trees, although it gave them diarrhea, and then to squeeze the peels against their skin because the smell of the citrus masked the smell of dirt. (*Half*, p.390)

This is the kind of agony the people in the refugee camp are going through; the conditions under which Urenwa is impregnated by a man who occupies the highly respected office of a Catholic priest. Several days have passed after Urenwa's mother quizzed her concerning her "growing belly" and the answer is not given immediately. Adichie uses such a delayed response to create a kind of suspense which is a critical element of literature.

On a certain day, however, the narrator states that "Olanna was teaching some children to recite the multiplication table the morning that Kainene rushed to the flame tree" (p.398) with both a question and a revelation: "Can you believe who is responsible for that small girl Urenwa's pregnancy?" (p.398). Olanna is seemingly at a loss, waiting to hear more. Then with Kainene's face filled with tears and rage, she answered her own question with another question: "Can you believe it is Father Marcel?" Olanna stands up and screams in disbelief: "Gini? What are you saying?" Then Kainene responds with sadness: "Apparently, I've been blind; she is not the only one. He fucks most of them before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here!" (p.398). Her reaction to the incident is quite predictable in view of the stiff, determined, and sardonic traits she is imbued with as a character in the novel. The narrator states:

Later, Ugwu watched Kainene push at Father Marcel's chest with both hands, shouting into his face, shoving him so hard that Ugwu feared the man would fall. 'Amosu! You devil!' Then she turned to Father Jude. 'How could you stay here and let him spread the legs of starving girls? How will you account for this to your God? You both are leaving now, right now. I will take this to Ojukwu myself if I have to!' There were tears running down her face. (*Half*, p.398)

Adichie uses this scenario to demonstrate that abusiveness and corruption are not vices perpetrated only by soldiers and politicians in the time of war but also by people who occupy the hallowed, respected, and exalted office of priest. Corruption is therefore an unfortunate human phenomenon that can destroy society wherever it exists and should be checkmated with relevant strong institutional framework and processes. Thus, corruption does not know religion or respect ethnicity or race, but rather thrives wherever it is allowed to do so; wherever the enabling environment exists, hence the need for consistently strong institutional checks and balances. This is because human beings are by nature fallible.

In *Americanah*, Adichie continues to demonstrate various dimensions of corruption bedeviling the nation of her birth as well as America where she resides. In doing that, she suggests that such tendencies really constitute a clog in the wheel of Nigeria's progress and should be checkmated if the country must progress, and if it must take its due place among the comity of nations. It is through the character identified as Chief, a typical corrupt politician, dubious contractor, and businessman with connections in high places that the reader learns of the privatization programme of the government and the unwholesome manner it is already planned to be carried out. The entire process even by the design of its handlers lacks transparency and is enmeshed in corruption. It is on the occasion of Obinze's visit to Chief's house that the narrator observes that "Chief was his usual garrulous self" (p.26). Then in a conversation with Obinze, Chief says:

I was Babangida's friend. I was Abacha's friend. Now that the military has gone Obasanjo is my friend... They said the National Farm Support Corporation is bankrupt and they're going to privatize it. Do you know this? No. How do I know this? Because I have friends. By the time you know it, I would have taken a position and I would have benefited from the arbitrage. This is our free market! The corporation was set up in the sixties and it owns property everywhere. But they are selling them. I'm going to buy seven properties for five million each. You know what they are listed for in the books? One million. You know what the real worth is? Fifty million. I need somebody to front this deal. (*Americanah*, p.26)

Chief's statement reveals a number of issues when analysed. The government has decided to privatize the state-owned National Farm Corporation on account of bankruptcy, and he will use his high connections in government to secure seven properties for five million naira each. But each of those properties is officially listed to cost one million naira. The listing in the books, of course, is the responsibility of government officials or representatives in the arbitrage or privatization process. Chief is aware that the properties are officially listed to cost one million naira each, but he is prepared to buy each of them for five million naira. Five million naira multiplied by seven gives thirty-five million naira. Going by the official listing in the books, the cost of the seven properties is actually seven million naira. Then thirty-five million naira minus seven million naira gives twenty-eight million naira. The question now is, if seven million goes into government coffers by the reason of the official listing of the properties, who takes the balance of twenty-eight million which Chief is quite willing to pay additionally in order to secure as much as seven properties for himself alone? The government officials, of course. This implies that while they give seven million naira to the government for the seven properties, they themselves will pocket twenty-eight million naira. This is sabotage and fraud of the highest order by the same officials who are supposed to protect the interest of the government in this regard. And the real worth of each of the seven properties is said to be fifty million naira. The privatization process is indeed riddled with corruption. Later on, when Nneoma, Obinze's cousin who introduced him to Chief learns of these developments from Obinze, she says, "That is how Nigeria works" (p.27).

Again, speaking of a particular woman Obinze is said to have "forgotten" her name, the narrator says, Obinze "knew she had made a lot of money during General Abacha's government. She had been a pimp, as the story went, providing young girls for the army officers who, in turn, gave her inflated supply contracts" (p.28). No other word than corruption can be better used to describe a situation whereby army officers use their positions of trust to give a woman "inflated supply contracts" because the same woman is a pimp and "provides young girls for the army officers." The implication is that the army officers use their privileged positions to

shortchange the government that employs them by inflating supply contracts for a woman only in exchange for “young girls.”

Furthermore, due to her relationship with The General, as his mistress, even with her medical degree, Aunt Uju usually has some insightful information about the military men ruling the country and therefore makes some more startling revelations concerning them. In a conversation, she tells Ifemelu, “If I tell you what these people do, eh. Their real stories are not even in the magazines. Oga has the real gist” (p.79). Now, delving into “the real gist” which borders on various manifestations of corruption and moral decadence among the ruling military elites, the narrator states: “Then she would talk about the man who had sex with a top general to get an oil bloc, the military administrator whose children were fathered by somebody else, the foreign prostitutes flown in weekly for the Head of State” (p.79).

Aunt Uju’s statement suggests that a homosexual high-ranking military officer in an important position of authority gives out a whole oil bloc to the very man he commits the act with, as a way of rewarding and settling him. Such a homosexual involvement can be for ritual purposes hence the huge settlement with an oil bloc – a supposedly vital national asset just given out by one man to another for satisfying his homosexual propensities. And then for a Head of State of a country with majority of its citizens living far below the poverty line to have “foreign prostitutes flown in weekly” for him speaks volume of the magnitude of decadence and abuse of public office being perpetrated in the nation.

Adichie also demonstrates that corruption is not only a Nigerian phenomenon through Ifemelu’s experience when she emigrates to the United States of America. It is so shocking, almost unbelievable that Ifemelu says, “It was a strange moment for me, because until then I thought nobody in America cheated” (p.164). The strange experience occurs when Ifemelu tries to secure an American driver’s licence at Brooklyn. The man whose responsibility it is to train people and examine them thoroughly to ascertain whether they are qualified to be issued driver’s licence or not is portrayed in a shoddy, non-transparent and corrupt manner. Although Ifemelu uses the word “cheat” to describe the situation, it nonetheless connotes corruption and shoddiness; vices that are least expected of someone handling such a sensitive position and process in a supposedly civilized place. So, when Laura asks Ifemelu if she has an American driver’s licence, she responds in the affirmative and then explains how she gets it: ...and then she began to talk about the safe-driving course she had attended in Brooklyn, before she got her licence, and how the instructor, a thin white man with matted hair the colour of straw, had cheated. In the dark basement room full of foreigners, the entrance of which was an even darker flight of narrow stairs, the instructor had collected all the cash payments before he showed the safe-driving film on the wall projector. From time to time, he made jokes that nobody understood and chuckled to himself. Ifemelu was a little suspicious of the film: how could a car driving so slowly have caused that amount of damage in an accident, leaving the driver’s neck broken? Afterwards, he gave out the test questions... The instructor collected the papers, brought out a clay-coloured eraser and began to wipe out some of the answers and to shade in others. Everybody passed. Many of them shook his hand, said “Thank you, thank you” in a wide range of accents before they shuffled out. Now they could apply for American driver’s licences. (Americanah, p.164)

There is obviously no portrayal of integrity or a serious sense of responsibility by the instructor, a supposed agent of government saddled with such a sensitive responsibility of training people on safe driving. From the manner in which he

collects the payments to the way he conducts the lessons, administers the test and then “collected the papers, ...and began to wipe out some of the answers and to shade in others” thereby ensuring that everybody passes the test, corruption is implied. And to think that such a thing happens in America and perpetrated by a “white man” is what really bothers Ifemelu because while in Nigeria, she had thought that America was a place free from corruption and shoddy deals.

3. CONCLUSION

Corruption and abuse of public office are undoubtedly interrelated vices which erode the supposed grandeur and greatness of nations. The developing countries are the most affected due to the preponderance of weak and easily compromised institutions. Adichie's trilogy have glaringly demonstrated that Nigeria, Africa's acclaimed giant, have been a big victim of monumental corruption and abuse of public office right from birth, hence the giant still appears like a kwashiorkor kid with spindle legs, and consequently continues to wobble and stagger amidst stupendous natural endowments. The damages and retrogression these vices have brought to the entire polity over the years can only be rectified through the determined and concerted establishment and sustenance of potent institutions, not strong personalities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Farafina.
- Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Purple Hibiscus*. Farafina.
- Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. Farafina.
- Aluko, Y. (2009). Corruption in Nigeria : Concept and Dimensions. In D. U. Enweremadu and E. E. Okafor (Eds.), *Anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria Since 1999 : Issues, challenges, and the way forward* (pp.1-18). IFRA-Nigeria.
- Bergovic, B. (2005). Corruption : Concepts, Types, Causes and Consequences. *CADAL*, 3(26), 1-7.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance Self-Fashioning : From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press.
- Habila, H. (2002). *Waiting for an Angel*. Cassava Republic Press.
- Madiebo, A. (1980). *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Fourth Dimension.
- Onukaba, A. O. (2007). *Olusegun Obasanjo in the Eyes of Time*. Spectrum Books.