

Nigerian Arabic Plays and the Fight against Corruption: An Examination of Al-‘Amid Al-Mubajjal

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Abstract

Corruption has been identified by Nigerians as the major factor responsible for the sorry state in which the country presently finds herself. Several methods had been (and are still being) employed to wage war against the scourge of corruption; one of which is the literary approach; since literature is considered as a priceless treasure in which societal history, norms, values, occurrences etc are preserved. As members of the Nigerian society, Arabic scholars also rose to the challenge by tackling corruption in their writings in Arabic. Therefore, this paper attempts to examine an Arabic play titled “Al –‘Amid Al-Mubajjal” in relation to fighting corruption.

Introduction

Corruption has been defined in various ways by different people and organizations. According to Transparency International, corruption is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”.¹ Lipset and Lenz (2000) consider corruption as “efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means; private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit”.² In his own definition, Sen (1999) sees corruption as “the violation of established rules for personal gain or profit”.³ In the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, corruption is defined as “dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority”.⁴ From all these definitions it can be deduced that a person could be said to be corrupt when he or she uses any opportunity he or she has to get unwarranted favour.

It is obvious that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria as a nation. In his own account of corruption in Nigeria, Amodu (2010) explains:

Politicians of both the Islamic, Christian and Traditional faiths and inclinations have been found corrupt, at one time or the other. Church

*leaders, Islamic clerics and traditional chieftaincy title holders have at one time or the other been found wanting on corruption charges. Businessmen and women of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa extraction, like their Kinsmen on the political and religious landscape of Nigeria are known to have faced and are still facing corruption charges. Just as the old appear in courts and tribunals to face corruption charges, youths in Nigeria have had and are still having their share of the corruption charge.*⁵

It must be noted also that corruption is not limited to the economic sector only as many people erroneously believe; it is found in all other sectors too. Okoduwa (2005) confirms: “these is no gainsaying the fact that corruption in our country is a virus of epidemic proportions which has not spared any segment of the society in its attack”.⁶

Corruption, no doubt, has had grave negative effects on the Nigerian citizenry as a whole. David (2010) uncovers some of the effects thus:

*The emergence of various ethnic militia groups and clamour for resource control and self – government in Nigeria by various ethnic groups are rooted in the inequalities, injustices and marginalization created by corruption. Thus, corruption lays the foundation for political and economic instability that destroys the building blocks of peaceful and sustainable sovereign society.*⁷

In addition to that, Bidmos (2013) gives his own estimation saying: “the scenario before us is that of corruption which is responsible for underdevelopment and the youth’s frustration all of which induces insecurity”.⁸

However, it has become very clear to all and sundry that fighting corruption is not an exclusive responsibility of governments at all levels but a collective duty which must be performed by every man or woman; young or old. It was on the basis of this glaring fact that the Arabic literary writers slightly diverted their attention to writings that would correct the social ills perpetrated in the society. Adam (2012) submits:

The new Nigerian Arabic writings have contributed to the understanding of the contemporary Nigerian society. A number of them have focused on

*morality, ethics, norms and values ... The new Nigerian Arabic literary works have equally explored social ills and ways to solve them.*⁹

Since corruption did not spare any aspect of our national life, be it social, religious, economic, political or educational, Arabic scholars, especially the playwrights did not leave any aspect untreated.

Considering the position of the educational sector as the largest of all other public sectors in Nigeria and as the corner stone upon which other sectors rely, this paper examines the Nigerian Arabic play titled: "Al-'Amid' Al-Mubajjal" which deals with the corruption in the Nigeria's educational system.

The paper, therefore, encompasses the biography of the author, the gist of the play and explanation on the corrupt practices in the tertiary institutions of learning identified in the play. The paper ends with conclusion and recommendations.

About the Author

The book Al-Amid Al-Mubajjal was written by Professor Zakariyau Idrees – Oboh Oseni, a professor of Arabic in the University of Ilorin and the Chief Imam and Waziri of Auchi Kingdom who was born in Auchi, Edo State in 1950 into a family known for simplicity, piety, devotion to the worship of Allah and rendering of selfless services to humanity.

He completed his primary education in 1963 at the Moslem School, Auchi and had his secondary modern school certificate in 1966. He was enrolled at the El-Adabiyah school for Arabic Studies, Owo where he was awarded *Al-'Idadi* (Intermediate) certificate in Arabic and Islamic studies in 1969. In 1974, he was admitted into the University of Ibadan to study Arabic language and literature. As a brilliant and hardworking student, he was able to complete his first degree programme in 1977 with a first Class Honours. He bagged his Master's and Ph.D. Degrees in 1980 and 1984 respectively from the same university.

In 1978, he was appointed by the University of Ilorin as an Assistant Lecturer and gradually promoted to all academic ranks until he finally reached the academic peak and became a professor in 1995.

Professor Oseni is a seasoned lecturer, a reputable editor, a great curriculum planner, a fine orator, an efficient administrator and a prolific writer who has to his credit over one hundred works including articles published in reputable learned journals in different countries among which are Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Great Britain, India, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon and Greece.¹⁰

At present, Professor Oseni is the Director, Centre for Ilorin Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin. He has a family full of intellectuals.

About the play

‘Al-‘Amid ‘Al-Mubajjal which literally means “The Honourable Dean” is a three act play in Arabic. The hero is Professor Akhuli, a native of Abalolo village, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Kakadu University, Kakadu and a self – centered and arrogant man who oppresses his co – lecturers, maltreats his students and looks down on his kinsmen.

The first act (pp. 6 – 12) is situated in the lecture hall where students were patiently waiting for the arrival of Prof. Akhuli for lecture but shortly before his arrival, Hassan, one of the students, stood before the class to mimick their teacher, Prof. Akhuli and as a result, his colleagues burst into laughter which generated much noise.

On his arrival, the Professor reprimanded them sarcastically and accused them of laziness and unseriousness. He later threatened Shakir and Shakirat who were friends and who refused to buy his lecture note (hand –out) with failure. He wasted all the time for lecture on accusation and rebuke and never taught any lesson. He then went out of the hall angrily. After his departure, Shakir initiated a song on corruption which was sung by all students. That marks the end of the first act.

The second act (pp. 12 – 21) is situated at Abalolo Village, the home town of Professor Akhuli where some people were anxiously expecting the visit of the don who had earlier collected huge amounts of money from them in order to help them secure admission for their children into Kakadu University.

When the Professor eventually visited the village, he was confronted by Dada, Kyauta, Momodu and Nosa whose children were not admitted despite the amount they spent. He

deceived them by promising to help the situation. He took his supper and left his wife, Maria at home only to pass the night with another woman with whom he was having an affair.

The third act (pp. 22 – 35) has two scenes. The first scene is the meeting of the senior academics of the Faculty of Humanities. Among the crucial issues tabled for discussion was the immoral relationship of some lecturers with female students which the University management had directed them to curb. Dr. Kako, in his own submission, accused the dean of perpetrating sexual immorality and there was an outbreak of tussle which was later settled by some peace lovers like Dr. Fatimoh Tudu.

The second scene, like the first act is in the lecture hall where the students were expecting Akhuli for another lecture. This time around, students were in groups discussing about the evil characters of the Professor, the knowledge of the government about his social ills and his impending disastrous end.

Hassan, a student, even boasted that he would be sacked before the sunset and surprisingly, before the end of that lecture, a State Security Officer from Abuja came for his arrest. The theme of the play, therefore, is that nobody is above the law and that whatever one sows, one shall reap.

The Play and the Corrupt Practices in the Nigerian Educational System

‘Al – ‘Amid ‘Al – Mubajjal is an Arabic play which depicts some corrupt practices in our schools especially tertiary institutions of learning. It is not news to say that corruption has penetrated the educational sector as it has affected other sectors. Explaining some corrupt practices in education, Okoduwa (2005) says:

As in the other sectors of Nigeria’s public life, corruption in the educational sector includes but is not limited to; bribery, fraud, extortion, gratification, inflation of contract for kickback purposes, over invoicing of purchases, outright funds embezzlement, mismanagement of students’/staff welfare schemes, falsification of records and accounts, certificate racketeering, examination malpractices, abuse of admission/ employment procedures and sexual exploitation to mention a few.¹¹

To cap it all, President Muhammadu Buhari was quoted to have said in one of his speeches:

Government is uncomfortable that our citadels of learning which should be training grounds for probity, social justice and decorum have become havens for gross indiscipline, cultism, sexual harassment, immorality, indecency, violence, unnecessary demonstrations and all forms of anti – social behaviours.¹²

Therefore, the corrupt practices pointed out in the play include the following:

(i) Handling Teaching with Levity

The play exposes the I – don't-care attitude of Prof. Akhuli in his teaching profession. He attends and leaves lectures at will. He spends much of the lecture time telling irrelevant stories. This is evident in Hassan's statement to Akhuli:

(English Translation)

Hassan: "... We came to the University to learn, but, it is as if you do not intend to teach us as you ought to. We do not know what to do. You persecute us and waste our times ..."¹³

Sincerely speaking, many Nigerian teachers/lecturers are a replica of Prof. Akhuli. They care little about the students in their custody. What they are always after is prompt payment of salaries and other entitlements. No doubt, this bad attitude to work has greatly contributed to the emergence of half – baked graduates in our schools especially universities. It is a corrupt behaviour that must be curbed.

(ii) Making the Purchase of Hand-outs or Books Obligatory

Hand-out is a document that contains a summary of the lesson or talk and that is given to people who attend such lesson or talk. In the past, handouts were produced to guide students who might have consulted a number of materials on a particular course and they used to be optional for students. But, today, selling of handouts or books at exorbitant rate is the business into which many academics venture. Some even go beyond the limit by making the purchase of handout or book a prerequisite for passing of their course (s).

In fact, this is one of the major factors that pull down the educational edifice as some students rely solely on the purchase of handout or book and not reading to pass their courses. Let's hear Prof. Akhuli threatening his students on hand – outs:

(English Translation)

Dean: "...Let us talk on today's topic. Oh ...Oh Hafsah! How about the hand-outs I asked you to sell to your colleagues?"¹⁴

Hafsah: Some of us have bought and two copies are left (unsold)¹⁵

Dean: "Two copies? I have told you severally that whoever does not buy a copy will never pass the examination. If you buy a copy, surely you will have a "pass" mark. But if you work hard and read very well, you may get "good" or "very good" grade.

Hafsah: Thank God, I have told them this before.¹⁶

(iii) Admission Racketeering

Among the common corrupt practices in Nigerian tertiary institutions is trading in admission. People request for huge amount of money or pay to secure admission for their children or wards into the Universities. This corruption is pointed out in the play when Prof. Akhuli collected money from his kinsmen to help them get admission for their children. Out of twenty candidates he was seeking admission for, only seven were successful and that led to the protest of some parents whose children were not admitted to get back their money. It goes as follows:

(English Translation)

Momodu: (talking to other people of Abalolo village) says: "Listen to me. Don't you think about the issue of our children seeking admission into Kakadu University? We gathered money and sent it to Akhuli. Have you heard anything from him since then?"¹⁷

Nosa: "Only God knows what Akhuli has done with our money. Since a couple of months ago, he did not visit our village which he used to visit once every fortnight"¹⁸

Dada: "Based on what I was told yesterday, money is not paid for admission into Universities in Nigeria. The money collected from us by Akhuli has clearly shown that he is dubious, oppressive and ungrateful to this village that trained him..."¹⁹

Kyauta: “We shall ask Prof. Akhuli about the admission of our children into the University, and if he fails to give us a convincing explanation, we shall ask him to return the money he collected from us”.²⁰

When asked about the admission, Prof. Akhuli answers:

Dean: “Thanks, I tried my best. Out of the twenty candidates that I forwarded their names to the University, only seven of them were admitted... the rest were not admitted despite my frequent visit to the Registrar and the Vice Chancellor and my persuasion with both talk and money. I added to what you gave me to ensure they were admitted but the University authority refused (to admit them) after taking a huge sum of money from me”²¹

(iv) Sexual Harassment

It is known by all and sundry that, in the Nigerian Universities today, female students are sexually harassed by some lecturers. Marks are traded for sex. What is more painful is that any decent female student who refuses the sexual request of her lecturer would be threatened, maltreated and frustrated. This form of corruption has seriously caused educational setback for female folk. ‘Al-‘Amid ‘Al – Mubajjal deals with the issue of turning the female students to sex slaves in the following excerpt:

(English Translation)

Dean: “I welcome you all to this meeting. It is an important meeting because, it is the first committee meeting in this academic year. The meeting is also important for another reason; because it has to do with the female students especially of our Faculty. It is known that our Faculty is full of beautiful female students...”²²

Buba: “Thank you, Mr. Dean and Chairman, we have heard a lot about the satanic (devilish) relationship between many of the lecturers and female students of this University...”²³

Dean: “...The Vice Chancellor, in the letter before us, has advised us to be careful in our dealings with the female students of this University; and that we should not play with them except with their consent; and that we should not marry them except with their acceptance and the approval of their parents; and that (relationship) should be after their graduation from the University”.²⁴

(v) **Payment and Collection of Bribe for Promotion**

Bribery is the commonest form of corruption in Nigeria. It is practised in all sectors. People bribe to get what they are or are not entitled to. The Arabic play under examination frowns at this scourge. Let's hear Shakirah, one of the female students of Prof. Akhuli, commenting on the immoral behaviors of the dean.

(English Translation)

Shakirah: "I have heard many hidden things about the man. Do you know that he, according to the information that reached me, has started taking money and materials from some lecturers who seek promotion in this Faculty? Mr. Kashaka gave him four India hens last year as a bribe and thought people did not know that. It was Kashaka himself that informed people about that in the beer parlour. Praise be to God whose power has no limit and whose justice covers all the creation, Kashaka did not get promotion. If he had gotten it, he would have thought that bribery is a good and praise-worthy practice".²⁵

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined "Al-'Amid 'Al-Mubajjal", the Nigerian play in Arabic language written by Prof. Z.I. Oseni of the University of Ilorin, in relation to fighting corruption perpetrated in the Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning.

The corrupt practices identified in the play are; handing teaching with levity, making the purchase of hand-outs or books obligatory, admission racketeering, sexual harassment and payment and collection of bribe for promotion.

In order to put an end to corruption in the educational sector or to the identified corrupt practices in the tertiary institutions, the following are recommended:

- i. Every tertiary institution in Nigeria should have "quality assurance unit" which will monitor the activities of all lecturers vis-a-vis teaching and relationship with students.
- ii. Production of hand-outs should be discouraged in our institutions and lecturers should be encouraged or assisted financially to publish books of high standard.
- iii. Purchase of educational material should be made optional and not compulsory by the authorities of our tertiary institutions.

- iv. There should be “student complaints units” where students can report any act of victimization or frustration.
- v. There should be stiff penalty for any staff of our tertiary institutions who engages in admission racketeering, bribery for promotion or other forms of corruption.

Conclusively, if these recommendations are applied to the letter, the Nigerian educational institutions would be rid of corruption and have capacity to produce graduates that would be able to compete favourably with their counterparts all over the world.

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