

Exploring the Theme of Corruption in Soyinka's *The Road*

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Abstract: *Wole Soyinka's pioneering effort and creative talents have been a major influence on the development of Nigerian Drama and African Literature in general. Soyinka has been internationally acclaimed for his politically provocative play which undoubtedly is a criticism of the day to day problems of Nigeria and the wider African world of selfish leaders. Corruption has taken center stage in African politics today. It permeates all facets of life, right from politics, to economics, through moral corruption all the way to religious lives. This article examines Soyinka's satirizing of political, social and religious corruption through dramatization in The Road.*

Keywords: *Soyinka, corruption, the road*

1. INTRODUCTION

Soyinka's pioneering efforts and creative talents have been major influence on the development of Nigerian drama. In the 1960s he founded two Nigerian theatre groups – The 1060 Masks and the Orisun theatre. With the help of the former, he produced a play ostensibly celebrating Nigerian independence. The play was titled A Dance of the Forest this turned out to be more of a soul searching enquiry into the meaning of our past than a romantic celebration. Soyinka himself played the lead role in the Calpenny film version of his first major political play, "Kongi's Harvest".

This play is a comic depiction of megalomania in a post-independence African state that was once exclusively seen as closely resembling Nkurmah's Ghana but which today can fit into the confused situation in many other African states. The play was written in 1965, and Soyinka himself said the play, Kongi's Harvest was inspired entirely by a sentence which he once heard an African leader pronounce "I want him back alive, if possible".

It must be reiterated that Soyinka Strongly opposes the view that Kongi's Harvest is about Kongi, it is about "Kongism" he says. After all, he says "Kongism" has never been dethroned in Black Africa.

The focus of this paper is on the theme of corruption in the political, social and religious sectors of The Road. It is important to note that adept commentators on Soyinka have had their say on The Road. While some people have focused on the narrative point of view, others have dwelt much on the historical context of the play. In as much as all these useful criticisms constitute remarkable scholarly works in their own right, this paper rather chooses to spend its energy and attention on the belief that Soyinka satirizes political, social and religious corruption in The Road, for the simple reason that corruption is a dangerous canker plaguing many underdeveloped countries.

Unlike Soyinka's Childe Internationale, The Road has not seen much performance. It was considered as an obscure play and so had a rather long gestation. The author in explaining what spurred him on to write The Road, claims the motivation was "based on ...a personal intimacy

with a certain aspect of the road". He goes on to say that the play concerns "... a search into the essence of death". Realizing the deplorable state in which roads in Nigeria were and the frequent loss of human lives on these roads, Soyinka decided to use a play to lampoon the then government for being so foolishly recalcitrant in its refusal to provide good motorable roads, even when many people were dying by road accidents. He satirizes those in authority, Politicians and the religious alike for using their positions to perpetuate corruption, instead of developing the country. The plot of the play develops from the inordinate desire of professor to find meaning in death. In this bid, he sees Murano as a "Human vessel which is trapped in transition" ... as a critical medium of understanding ... the final door to the heart of phenomenon". The professor therefore works assiduously towards the improvement of this goal until his death in the play. It is this discovery that costs him his life, for in the words of Soyinka "The community which he, in effecting, appropriates and opposes to the one which costs him out proves, in the end, just – as controlled and restricted by orthodox acceptances as the former". This means that most likely, his search leads professor to alienate first the church and then the devotees of Ogun.

At the time the play was first produced, it sent out waves of mixed feelings to many critics and so diverse criticisms were made. While for instance, some recognized its vitality, others appreciated the way in which it really worked through atmosphere, and, to quote Gibbs,

"How as a mystical – satirical drama, it had one foot in the limbo of dissolving flesh that is called, agemo and the other firmly up the rump of modern Nigeria" .

Since then, its critics tended to focus their attention on the socio-economic analysis in the play, what Biodun Jeyifo refers to as "the hidden class struggle" or what Gibbs describes as the metaphysical element, the meaning of "the word". Most of the later commentaries have rather been based on literary analyses rather than theatrical experience, and that has led to confusion and distortion.

The crux of this paper is intended to critically examine the theme of corruption as one of the predominant themes. Corruption in politics, economic corruption and religious corruption are areas this paper focuses, since very little has been said about its moral aspect. Soyinka presents his play in a typically satiric style, with the aid of devices like flash back, symbolism, themes and comedy.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. Material Corruption

According to Professor Chukwuma, "Soyinka was among men of distinction and integrity, men whose achievements are a reassurance we are not all like robbers and beggars whose shameless and crude dance in the corridors of power have remained a cause of the constant embarrassment to us"

It is therefore not surprising that Soyinka never spared "robbers and beggars who shameless and crude dance in the corridor of power have remained a constant embarrassment to us". Professor Wole Soyinka elected himself the veritable conscience of a country of his birth.

Corruption has permeated all aspects of the moral fiber of Nigerians to the extent that before one can get someone to do an official job, there will be the need to bribe the person, or else the work will not be done. These acts are perpetrated by even the very high in society, and the guiltiest are the politicians of the day. Soyinka therefore used his work as a medium to lambast and lash out at these human ticks. In The Road, Soyinka handles the theme of corruption as a major theme of the book. Corruption in this book borders on; material exploitation, political corruption and religious corruption.

The theme of economic or material corruption is made manifest through the main character (protagonist) of the book, Professor. He is a very knowledgeable man in the affairs of this world. He therefore decides to find out about the very essence of death. To borrow the words of Wole Soyinka in an interview he granted the Chicago production in 1984, he described Professor as:

"Wishing to penetrate the very heart of phenomenon."

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Soyinka then went on to describe how the Professor sought absolute certainty or knowledge which is very alien to Yoruba world view, a world view, "rooted in the very indeterminacy of truth". Professor was once a crusader who waged holy wars against palm wine bars in his youthful days. Samson, a driver's tout says this about the professor.

"Ah when Professor was professor, he would go up after the service and correct the organist where he went wrong".

Samson again says,

"B.D. Bachelor of Divinity Stupid. But B. D. or no B. D. the man just could not knock oratory like Professor. In fact everybody always said that Professor ought to preach the sermons but a joke is a joke, I mean, the man is not ordained".

This is Samson's comparison of Bishop and Professor, Professor later becomes a prominent lay reader with an inordinate desire for controversy and a tendency of self-advertising behavior. After his disgraceful act of stealing church's money, he is made to leave the church.

Professor's dishonest life style continues even when he leaves the church. He earns his living through forging licenses and by selling the pickings from motor accidents. Some of the accidents are deliberately caused by him when he uproots sign posts on the road. According to Gibbs (1986),

"Professor is scavenger and a wrecker; he is corrupt and wicked, confused and bewildered, part wise and part fool".

Also, the professor uses his ingenuity to flout laws by forging driving licenses for people and collecting fees. These were mostly touts to drivers who had learnt how to drive but then wanted to obtain licenses without passing the driving test. Thus, the professor earned his living by forging such licenses for these desperate touts. It is therefore not surprising that the toll of accidents rose with a lot of deaths on the road, because of such dangerous and untested drivers. In a conversation between Samson and Kotonu, both characters in ***The Road***, Samson reprimands the latter for his recent slothful behavior, mention is again made of professor's ingenuous deeds. To quote Samson;

"Oh he won't say a thing you can count on that. But he keeps hanging around so he can buy it cheap off you. Then professor will perform his artistry on it".

The coterie of thugs that surround Professor is not exempted from the machinations of this expert crook. He uses his knowledge to exact money from his followers just for rendering a few services to them. For instance, when Samson asks for the opinion of professor on what he describes as a very "delicate" issue, to quote Samson,

"Please sir, ...sir ...professor ...sir ...I ...we ...my friend and I, we wonder if you would favour us with your opinion on a very delicate matter".

Professor immediately retorts "this is a consultation". He then adds that,

"If you let anyone know I will give you full bill. My kindness would be plagued by beggars if I gave them a chance".

Similarly, Professor is the brain behind the establishment of an accident store house. This is an illegal store house where the one who runs the store, gets constant supply of second-hand car and vehicle parts from accident vehicle. What is more, the clothes of these victims are taken from them and sold out to innocent buyers. This was the specialty of Sergeant Burma. However, Kotonu, does not live up to the expectations of the people. Three customers express their disappointment at his lackadaisical attitude to work when they visit the accident store only to realize it has not been opened.

Second man says:

"This Kotonu man na failure. We tin 'e think' e be!"

Third man:

"Oh! But this is nonsense – Burma never let us down".

After, all three men chorus in approval that Burma never let them down, they then take turns to list items the late store-keeper used to have in store for them.

First man:

“Spare plugs, fuses, petrol cover”.

Second man:

“Wind screen, wiper, twin carburetor”.

Third man:

“Tyre chasis, hub or tie-rod”

In their conversation, these three discontented buyers give a hint that Professor is responsible for the appointment of Kotonu as the successor to the late Sergeant Burma.

First man:

“Professor chose you, we’re not complaining”

For some time the third man suggests “his days are numbered. Let’s get Professor”. Thus it becomes clear, the leading role Professor, plays in this organized syndicate, the specialization in trade of the wares of accident victims and also in the parts of accident vehicles.

Another instance of the corrupt nature of Professor is when he is approached by Salubi. While Samson is still struggling to grapple with professor’s unintelligible speeches, Salubi confronts Professor for help.

Apart from the corrupt machinations of Professor, Particulars Joe is another character who exhibits corruption. As a law enforcement agent, one would have expected that he ensures that criminals are brought to book.

Surprisingly however, he is seen displaying intimacy with the likes of Tokyo Kid, a leader of the thugs. The extent of intimacy is such that they call each other by nick names such as “Say Tokyo Kid”, to which Tokyo responds “I am alright boy”. In the light of such moral laxitude, one begins to wonder whether Particulars Joe can enforce the law with the level of intimacy that exists between him and the thugs. As if this were not enough, Particulars Joe joins these thugs in breaking the law. Say Tokyo it is said,

“Reaches out a stick of weed which he accepts behind his back. Darts back to the door and sits apart sniffing the weed. He gives a quick nod of appreciation to Say Tokyo who graciously waves it aside.”

Later on,

“Particulars Joe gets groggier and groggier as the scene progresses, swaying more and more until by the end of the dance he is clutching his stomach and slithers to the ground.”

It is unacceptable that someone like Particulars Joe, who should ensure that the right thing is done, allows himself to be bought with only a stick of weed by a syndicate of thugs. Indeed an unscrupulous man will stoop low to do anything ignoble for a pittance.

Mention must be made of the fact that even though Professor is accused of corruption, in most cases he is involved; he needs accomplices to get the act committed. In view of this, characters like Salube are also guilty of this same crime. Salubi for instance is a station lay about, who realizes that the only solution to his joblessness is to succumb himself to the human ingenuity and inventive resourcefulness of the Professor. Therefore when the professor is about to end his consultation with Samson, Salubi rushes in to seek the help of Professor. Salubi: “Professor, I need a licence”. To which Professor retorts “it is past my hour of consultation”. Immediately, Professor pretends that he is not interested in helping Salubi, the latter takes it to mean that the former wants a tip before he accepts the job so he accedes “oh, an oversight. Forgive me sir”. He then places a shilling on the desk. The Professor’s interest is immediately whipped up and so he begins his diagnosis of Sulubi’s problem “at a glance, I would say that you need some sort of official document”. After Salubi acknowledges what Professor say, the professor adds “I would

deduce that your need is somewhat urgent". It is out of this same desperation that Salubi approaches Professor for help and nearly ends up incurring the displeasure of Professor. Probably, in an attempt to let Professor know how desperate he is, Salubi issues some threats "this job is first class. If I do not get it, I will commit suicide". Unfortunately however, he incurs the wrath of Professor and it takes a combined effort of both Salubi and Samson to convince Professor to forgive Salubi and agree to do the job. This is not without bribe;

"Samson receiving no response, he turns his back, takes some money from a deep pocket and returns to Professor. Half way, he stops, goes to Salubi and rifles his pocket for money, all of which he places apologetically on table"²⁹

Without even casting a look at the two, Professor simply says "and double the usual consultation fee" to which Salubi retorts out of sheer desperation "yes sir, anything sir".

Similarly, Kotonu is also affected by this same canker of corruption. "He is the son of a truck pusher and is a driver by profession". According to his effervescent 'tout' or conductor, Samson,

"He used to be an excellent driver but he was slightly unusual. For instance, he would not for example deliberately run over dogs, as other drivers would do with the belief that Ogun would accept the dogs as sacrifices and protect his own".

This experienced driver who in the words of Samson,

"He knows no other life but driving, he can use his hands for no other purpose than to turn the heavy wheel, and to throw that wretched gear which I never mastered".

In spite of this skill in driving, he decides to quit from his chosen profession where he had earned an honest living, to become the successor of Sergeant Burman, dealer in stolen accident items. This change of profession became possible when Professor gave Kotonu his blessings. This is reiterated by one of the three men who come to buy items for the accident store.

First man:

"Professor chose you, we are not complaining. But man you have got to give us service."

That a professional driver who could have earned a decent living through driving, decides to opt for a rather bizarre, shameful and bloody job of amassing the belongings of accident victims and spare parts of accident vehicles to retail to people, speaks volumes of how corruption has eaten deep into the moral fibre of the society. This type of man does not only pray for the occurrences of accidents but immediately they occur, he rushes to such spots to pilfer things at such scenes. One then begins to wonder whether such a person has lost all human feelings in the quest for money. Samson attacks Kotonu for choosing to spend his life in such a manner "you know, you remind me of the spider". Samson again attacks Kotonu in the following words,

"Any way, when you get tired of being a trader in dead lorries Chief ...in ...Town can take you up as a thug".

Earlier on, Kotonu had intentions of hiding his involvement in his new trade from Samson probably to avoid reprimands. Immediately Kotonu returns to base after having gone out with Professor, Samson launches his attack, "did not you bring anything from the wreck?" Kotonu makes a feeble denial "who told you?" and Samson says no,

"Don't think I do not know. You have been taking over Sergeant Burma's business. Never mind. But I never thought it was like you somehow. After all, what excuse have you, you have not been to war. You cannot pretend to be an out-and-out cannibal like Sergeant Bunnma".

Indeed, one really needs to be a cannibal, to be able to indulge in such a cannibalistic trade. This situation, together with Samson's condemnation of the behavior of the latter should not mislead anyone into feeling or believing that Samson is not equally guilty. Samson just like his fellow touts is guilty of this canker and cancerous corruption. In his desperation to convince his childhood friend, colleague and former master, Samson falls on the Professor for expert advice. When Professor bluffingly pretends to be disinterested in whatever the former is seeking to know,

he immediately asks “you are consulting me?” to which Samson replies “yes sir, we would value your opinion on a very delicate matter”. Samson then fishes out three pence and places it on the table. After professor pretends to ignore what has been placed on the table, Samson nervously adds an additional penny, then another. It is therefore surprising that Samson who earlier on attacks Kotonu for indulging in a dishonest trade should later attempt to bribe Professor so as to get his wishes granted.

All that this section has attempted doing is to draw the attention to Wole Soyinka’s frustration at the sinking moral decadence permeating the continent of Africa. His choice of a title like The Road is no mere coincidence but rather very thoughtful, for the simple reason that it exemplifies a sector where corruption be-devils people. The road which was originally constructed to help facilitate movement of human beings and thereby make life more bearable has now become a lee way for corruption. Soyinka cunningly satirizes this deplorable situation through a comic depiction of characters who the author manipulates like a pawn in chess game. The main protagonist of the play who Soyinka names Professor is described by Gibbs (1986) as “a scavenger and wrecker; he is corrupt, wicked, confused and bewildered, part wise, and part fool”. Indeed, after an abortive attempt at gaining cheap popularity in Christendom, Professor leaves to found his own group whose composition is mainly thugs and the underdogs of the society. In this ‘domain’ of his, Professor exercises his authority by bullying, cheating and threatening his followers. Realizing how dejected any of his men are in life, he poses as a savior who has solutions to every problem confronting them. The irony of the situation is that Professor has no solution to his own problem of,

“Wishing to penetrate the very heart of phenomenon, a rather strange derange dreamiest adventure. That the professor, a Yourba sought absolute certainty or knowledge which is very alien to a Yoruba world view, rooted in the very indeterminacy of truth.”

This speaks volumes about Professor. Professor’s seeming benevolence to Murano after the latter loses his power of speech because of an accident, is just because the former feels Murano knows secrets he must not reveal. Thus he uses Murano to search into the meaning of death in the hope of cheating fear by fore knowledge”. On the other characters, Soyinka presents them to act out their folly; he also adroitly delineates some characters in a manner that their erroneous perceptions mirror the perceptions of the wider world. The next focus of this paper will be on the theme of political corruption.

2.2. Political Corruption

The previous section sought to analyze economic exploitation in the play, The Road, by looking at the role of certain characters in the play. Mention must be made here that Soyinka’s worry is not only about economic exploitation but also, political corruption. It is necessary to make a clarification which this paper considers very important, that political corruption should not be narrowed down to only corruption in the political circles or among politicians alone. This paper will consider political corruption under the broad umbrella of corruption or impropriety by leaders or all who find themselves in leadership position.

The reason for considering this theme as stated above is because just like politics, government is not the sole preserve of only those in government and the vice versa. Abraham Lincoln therefore describes democracy as a system of government for the people, of the people and by the people. If this is the true picture of democracy, then it means the governed form part of government. If politicians therefore become corrupted, the implication is that most people if not all have played a role, consciously or unconsciously in corrupting the system.

The Bishop, a religious character in The Road, for instance is a leader of the church and Christ’s representative among his congregation hence many people look up to him for inspiration and spiritual guidance. The Bishop should have thus realized how sensitive his position was and so be very cautious whatever he did. He should have known that a character like Professor, likes exhibiting ostentatious life that will attract unnecessary attention to himself. According to what we gather from the gossip of Samson,

“...of course ...when Professor entered church, everybody turned round and the eyes of the congregation followed him to his pew-and he had his own private pew let me tell you, and if a stranger went and sat in it, the church warden wasted no time driving him out.”

And again through this same Samson, we are told that,

“Even during the singing if he heard a wrong note he would shake his head and look round the church making tch-tch-tch. Every time the organist saw he knew he was in trouble.”

One can therefore imagine just how a mere lay reader arrogates so much power to himself to the extent that he sits in front of the other congregants and supposedly takes notes of whatever mistakes go on in church. This is the picture we get of Professor from the conversation that transpires between, Salubi and Samson.

Again, Professor happens to feature as someone who wields power over a group of people and so, it is compelling to discuss him in that light. After Professor's departure from the church, apparently in total frustration, he being someone who does things to the extremes, he immediately organises a following. His followers are the riff-raffs, thugs, drivers' touts and hangers on, who see him as a man full of illustrious ideas and solutions to their numerous problems. When Salubi for instance, asks Samson whether Professor never slapped Bishop, the latter retorts,

“I do not think you understand anything I've been telling you. You think Professor could ever descend to such bushman taxi – driver stuff? My friend, they did have a fight but it was a duel of gentlemen”.

In fact, their fear and respect for him succeeds in creating a personality cult around him. From time to time, Professor gathers his flock in mock imitation of the church's Eucharistic celebration. Murano the palm-wine tapper supplies the wine while Professor presides over the celebration and his hangers-on participate as congregants. Professor himself refers to this ritual he performs evening communion. Immediately Murano arrives with a gourd of palm wine, Professor looks at his watch and comments “on time as usual my boy. Welcome”. Through stage directions, we see the pre-communion preparations, as Murano sets down the gourd beside him, prostrates goes inside to fetch a variety of bowls and calabash cups.

“There is a very elegant glass for Professor which he polishes carefully. Professor examines the finished job through his monocle, Murano spills a libation to earth. Then they sit with their eyes on Professor awaiting a signal. A few moments, and lights appear through the stained glass windows.”

The appearance of light through the stained glass windows of the church, an indication that Church's activities were about to commence, was also a signal for Professor and his followers to begin with their communion celebration. This indicates the level of rivalry between the two groups, all because of the machinations of Professor. Professor then begins his communion celebration with a speech,

“Hearken! Observe the saintly progress of the evening communicates! Note, I hold nothing against the rainbow, considering it to be good. I hold nothing against colour, finding in its mist and fragments of the imminent grace on earth. But I said ... I mean, I only sought to make my meaning clear, and I could not escape the source of my own sense of wonder -- God! He called it blasphemy”.

Murano then begins to fill everybody's calabash with palm-wine and as this is being done, Professor continues with his rhetoric.

“What if they were children? Is the truth ever to be hidden from children? Yes, what though there was the spirit of wine upon me. It was Sunday, Palm Sunday and each child bore a cross of the tender fount, yellow and green against their innocence. What I said, I did not deny”.

Through Professor's reminiscence or what seems to be a flashback, we are made to witness an encounter between him and the Bishop.

“You should have seen his face, oh you should have seen his glory face! He was such a busy body that Bishop, and it was his just reward for sneaking up on me during Sunday school ... what are you doing teacher, he said? I turned, and there behind me stood the figure of

judgment. Why, explaining the lesson of the rainbow to my pupils. And how he asked, did I hear you explain it just now? So I told him, very gently – child, I said, my dear child, God painted the rainbow sign, a promise that the world shall not perish from floods. Just as he also carved the symbol of the palm, a covenant that the world shall not perish from thirst”.

Another guilty character is the politician in the play – “Chief in Town”. As an aspirant to an office in the government of his country, one expects that he should be more disciplined by living an exemplary life for other to emulate. Surprisingly, he not only associates himself with people of questionable character, he goes further to rally them as his personal body-guards even when he has to attend a party meeting. What is more, he provides them with dope (Indian hemp) so as to stimulate them into executing his diabolic intentions. The surprising aspect of Chief in Town’s behavior is that he is going for a party meeting, so that if he can go this far in terms of security arrangement for a meeting among his own people, one can only imagine to what extent he would have gone if he were going for a meeting with political opponents or people of a different political divide. The number of thugs he requests for, to be present at the party meeting is so unusual that even the captain of the thugs cannot hide his surprise.

Chief: I need ten men.

Say T: Today?

Chief: This moment.

Sat T: Well what’s cooking chief? Campaign.

Chief: No Trust a party meeting.

It is difficult to fancy how just one person could be so security conscious to the extent of demanding ten thugs, as he himself puts it, just for a part meeting. A number of questions begin to come up; is it that he is the person who intends to foment trouble? Is it that he suspects others may foment trouble? Or is it an accepted norm for every politician to always attend party meeting with body guards? Naturally, the impression one gathers about such a politician is that most likely, he intends to use these men to intimidate potential party rivals so as to bulldoze his way through, to lead his party. Should that be the case, then one can describe him as self-centered, aggressive, war-like, barbaric and corrupt politician who will do everything under his power to instill the fear of God in anyone who stands between him and his political ambition, so as to get power and to satisfy his personal interest. It is sad to say that such a man does not in any way have the welfare of his people at heart.

After the thugs allow themselves to be led to the part meeting, they sustain serious injuries and have to escape back to their base. Infuriated, Professor calls them,

“Vermin, Judases you sell your bodies and you have just done again have you not? You think you are reckless and brave but how can a stupid ox runaway train talk of courage. I offer you a purpose but you take unnecessary risks which means I, must wait and hope that you return alive to fulfill the course I have drawn for you, so you sell again and again for the love of money”.

For some time now, the attitude of most politicians in Africa has been a matter of very great concern. African politicians have been accused for the current stagnation facing Africa. Thus, some writers have attacked them through their work. In Achebe’s *A man of the people*, Characters like the Prime Minister, Suleiman Wagada and Chief of M.A. Nanga are satirized by the writer in no uncertain terms. This paper shall limit itself to the Prime Minister and Suleiman Wagada.

Achebe for instance pokes fun at the ruthlessness with which the prime Minister handles his political rivals. In the face of the 1960 economic crisis that led to a slump in the international coffee market, resulting in a glut in coffee, just when the exchequer presents to cabinet, a plan to possibly deal with the financial crisis facing government, the Prime Minister sacrifices him together with his cohorts on the altar of popularity. As if this humiliation is not enough, he goes on to label them as traitors and enemies of the nation who have jointly decided with foreigners to bring the nation down on its knees.

The Prime Minister then orders the release of fifteen million pounds from the National Bank into circulation, a move which was economically suicidal because it would lead to a sky-rocketing inflationary trend. A solution of this nature to such a serious national problem was not only ephemeral but rather sadistic and diabolic. It was only a feeble attempt at covering his political ineptitude.

Also, on the list of guilty people is the Honourable Alhaji Chief Senator Suleiman Wagada. As the minister in charge of foreign trade, he announces that as from the New Year day, there was going to be a twenty percent increment in import duties of certain textile goods. The opposition party, the progressive Alliance party however hits the news stand with a sensational revelation that classified information had been leaked to British Amalgamated, a foreign firm as far back as October of the previous year, to the effect that the company imported three shiploads of the particular textiles by mid-December thus evading the new import duties. Even though Achebe does not state in plain language that it is Suleiman Wagada who is responsible for the leakage, through reports presented by the "Daily Matchet". A private newspaper, we gather that Suleiman Wagada was emulating what Nanga had earlier on done. The action of these two ministers speaks volumes of the depth to which corruption has destroyed politics in Africa. For a continent whose illustrious sons can willingly condone and connive with foreigners to dupe her, of her resources, one can only imagine how bleak the future will be.

After digressing a while for the purpose of showing clearly, how the theme of corruption by politicians in Africa has been a social canker, drawing examples from Achebe's A Man of the People, mention must be made of the role the thugs play, in relation to this theme of political corruption. As earlier on indicated, since the politicians the world over do not live in isolation from the community or society, it means the society has a hand in whatever these politicians do. This is because if society fails to act as a watch dog to these politicians or worse still, through societies own participation in the general corruption such political crooks get emboldened. In the light of this, the thugs must equally be blamed. The unemployed and self-riffs, and lazy people come together to form a syndicate for committing crimes. They have Tokyo kid as their captain. He is feared and respected among these thugs. This is because in a lawless society, it is only the strong that can survive. We are able to picture what sort of person Say Tokyo is, through Soyinka's authorial commentary.

"Say-Tokyo, his eye shinning madly, leaps up. Lights up a cigarette. Say-Tokyo flexes up his arm muscles, looking from one arm to the other, luxuriating in the feel of his strength."

Say-Tokyo and his men have no definite master they work for, or specific jobs they execute. They avail themselves to whoever can provide some thing for them. Thus, the hang on professor because as say Tokyo himself admits,

"So long as his guy keeps bringing that swell froth on every gourd, I'm gonna come to pay ma respects".

It is clear from the above statements that Say-Tokyo is a slave to his stomach and will only obey anyone who can provide for him. It is therefore not surprising that unscrupulous men like the politician, decide to capitalize on this cheap labour to bulldoze through with their nefarious intentions. Once the gang leader is bought, the others will automatically obey him. This is exemplified when the politician provides a matches box of Indian hemp and his will is executed. One can liken Say-Tokyo and his men to chief Nanga's youth wing, Say-Tokyo and his men return to base with broken heads and other injuries possibly after engaging in a fight. It is even clear that they each return home on their own. This is brought to light when Samson question Tokyo to know the outcome of his trip to the party grounds with chief in-town. Samson what happened Tokyo? They all looked as if you were ... well, outnumbered". Funny enough, Tokyo refuses to answer the question. It is another thug who replies,

"We never got to the fight. The road played us foul. A tree had fallen across the road and our driver did not see it in time."

It is at this stage that Say-Tokyo kid adds his voice, yeah sure. And none of you care to find out what become of your cap'n".

After having considered the theme of political corruption, the next task will be to look at the theme of religious corruption. This theme is deemed quite important because religion is a vital part of a people's life. Religion most often serves as opium of the mind and a heart for the heartless. So, if there is any one institution which should be devoid of corruption, then it should be the religious institution because the corrupting of such an institution signifies danger.

2.3. Religious Corruption

As it has mentioned in the preceding discussion, the issue of religious corruption stands out as a major theme in The Road. The activities of three religious bodies are highlighted in the play. They are; Christian religion, traditional religion and professor's cult.

Soyinka interpolates elements of Yoruba tradition with western style of writing plays. In the preface poem to The Road the poem, Alagemo, Alagemo'', a Yoruba poem speaks of the transition from the land of the ancestors (past, death) to then real m of living (present, life). The Alagemo deity is the most revered deity of the Ijebu of Western Nigeria. Ijebus are an ethnic among the Yoruba who consider it as the God almighty and not Oludumare. Alagemo sometimes has the semblance of Ogun, another Yoruba god,

- (1) He is extremely vindictive when he is offended, but is forgiving as soon as he is placated with rites and offerings.
- (2) His votaries are essentially men of proven "masculinity", and during his annual festival, he is god of the "road" like Soyinka Ogun.obi Maduakor in his book entitled Wole Soyinka, An Introduction to His Writing says the following about the preface poem,

"The spirit speaking in the preface poem is a messenger or an incarnation of the god, who is uttering strange mythopoeia poetic strains as he passed from the land of the ancestors to the world of the living."

This is Maduakor's interpretation of the preface poem. To Maduakor these words are pregnant with deep meaning that, to an ordinary person who hear them uttered, they will sound meaningless,

"... my roots have come out in the other world makes away. Agemo's hoops are pathways of the sun. Rain-reeds, unbend to me, Quench the burn of cartwheels at my waist! Pennant in the stream of time-now, gone, and here the future make way. Let the rivers woo the thinning here and vanished leap that was the Night and the spilt that snatched the heavy-lick the-twin into Dawn."

This poem unravels the belief upheld by traditional religion about life after death. The belief that there is a link between the living and the dead and one precedes the other-for instance in the following line, things come out explicitly "my roots have come out in other world make away". The persona here has one foot in either world. The traditional religion is championed by the drivers and their touts. Ogun, the god of the road is the most revered god among drivers in the play. The most favourite meat of this god is dog and so during sacrifices, the flesh of a dog must be offered to it. This god was isolated outside the city of Ile-Ife at a place believed to have been where the goods first set foot on earth to be reunited with human beings. Its shrine is decorated with three granite stumps, obvious phallic symbols, standing characteristically in the open amidst nature, embody his daring boldness. His shrine is in itself an expression of Ogun's nature, is out doors, unconfined, in remarkable contrast to the temple of the gentle and quietly suffering god Obatala. With such a daring boldness, it is not surprising for such a god to play foul on its worshippers. Rather than being appeased by its favourite sacrifice, it claims the lives of its followers to the extent that Professor indicates his dissatisfaction at the attitude of this god "breathe like the road. Be the road". -Professor continues his rhetorics,

"Coil yourself in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit, and at the moment of a trusting step, rear, your head and strike the traveler in his confidence, swallow him whole or break him on the earth".

Indeed, Professor was referring directly to Ogun because he was the god of the road and it was to him that sacrifices of his favourite meat were made, hence if he failed to control the atrocities on

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the road, he was being wicked to his worshippers. In a conversation between Kotonu and Samson, we get a lengthy list of victims of the road.

Kotonu:

Where is Zorro who never returned from the North without a basket of guinea-fowl eggs? Where is Akkanni the Lizard? I have not seen any other tout who would stand on the lorry's roof and play the Samsba at sixty miles an hour. Where is Sigidi Ope? Where is Sapele Joe who took on six policemen at the crossing and knocked them all into the river?

Samson:

Over shot the pontoon, went down with his lorry.

Kotonu:

And Siadu – say? Indian Charlie who taught us driving? Well tried to teach you anyway and wore out his soul in the attempt. Where is Humphrey Bogart? Cimarron Kid? Have you known any other driver take an oil-tanker from Port Harcourt to Kaduna non-stop since Muftau died? Where is Sergeant Burma who treated his tanker like a child's toy?

Realizing how unreliable Ogun is and for that matter, the manner in which road users die, and having personally escaped narrowly from the claws of death, Kotonu decides to call it quits with driving and all attempts at persuading him to change his mind is in vain. To a neutral observer, it will clearly seem that the callousness of Ogun's because of his unfair treatment to his worshippers is a very strong element of religious corruption. Maduakor nicely sums this up in the following words.

“Ogun as King of Ire proved to be a blessing and a disaster for his people, for when he led them in battle in a fit of intoxication, Ogun's destructive nature came to the surface and he decimated not only the enemy but his own men as well”.

Also, the dishonesty of Kotonu during the festival of drivers is yet still another element of religious corruption. As is customary, this festival was celebrated by drivers and their touts. Murano was on this occasion the one wearing the mask and danced to the music that was provided by the procession of road users. Kotonu who was then driving a vehicle with the inscription “NO DANGER NO DELAY”, runs into Murano and nearly kills him. To avoid being discovered and probably beaten to death, Kotonu hides Murano and dons the latter's masquerade and his costume to mislead the celebrants. According to Gibbs (1986),

“Blinded and maddened by the blood which covered the inside of the mask he danced wildly to the delight of the drivers. When the festival was over, he made his escape, tossed the costume into his truck, and drove to Professor's Accident store”.

But for the timely intervention of Professor, Murano would have lost his life. It is therefore not surprising that Murano loses his power of speech. One expects Kotonu to have escaped with the accident victim to a safer place where he will attend to him rather than the display of cowardice by fleeing. It is not a good enough excuse to justify Kotonu's escape simply because he might have come under attack. In this light such behaviour is tantamount to religious dishonesty and therefore corruption.

Similarly, Professor's cunning manipulation of Murano, in his quest to find out about death is again an aspect of religious corruption, after restoring Murano's health, Professor decides to keep him because to him “Murano's is the one person in this world in whom the word reposes”. Professor in his accustomed style goes on to say of Morano,

“Deep, silent but deep. Oh my friend, beware the pity of those that have no tongue for they have been proclaimed sole guardians of the word. They have slept beyond the portals of secrets. They have pierced the guard of eternity and unearthed the word, a golden nugget on the tongue. And their tongue hangs heavy and they are forever silenced. Do you mean you do not see that Murano has one leg longer than the other?”

Professor's selfish motive again stands out clearly. Unfortunately, this over ambitious desire of professor to use this vessel of transition to “penetrate the very heart of phenomenon”, finally leads

him to his death. Gibbs (1986) wonders how a Yoruba of Professor's caliber seeks to penetrate the very heart of phenomenon which is alien to Yoruba world view.

Furthermore, religious corruption can also be found in Christian religion. Professor, originally an active member of this church and a teacher of the youth at Sunday school is later suspected to deliberately misinterpret the Holy writ, thus misinforming these children who study under him. Professor rather than inculcating moral precepts into these children, teaches them to rethink conventional morality. For example, this how he interprets the sign of the Rainbow and palm branches,

“Child, I said, my dear child, God painted the rainbow sign, a promise that the world shall not perish from floods. Just as he also carved the symbol of the palm, a covenant that the world shall not perish from thirst”.

This behavior of Professor, coupled with his disrespect for church authority (confrontation with the Bishop) and his embezzlement of Church funds leads to his being sacked from the church.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the final showdown between Professor and the Bishop. Even though professor is reputed to be so condescending towards church authorities, one expects that the Bishop should have exercised maximum restraint so as to avoid any scandal. He should have realized how sensitive his position in the church was and so learn to tolerate the likes of professor or find a better way of talking him out of his ostentatious behavior in public. Unfortunately, however, the Bishop allows his emotions to control his sense of judgment and this finally results in the shameful showdown that attracts so many way side people and riff-raffs to the premises of the church. This information about the quarrel between the Bishop and Professor is told by Samson as he gossips with Salubi.

“...of course ...when Professor entered church, everybody turned round and the eyes of the congregation followed him to his pew-and he had his own private pew let me tell you, and if a stranger went and sat in it, the church warden wasted no time driving him out”.

Again through this same Samson we are told that:

“Even during the singing if he heard a wrong note he would shake his head and look round the church making tch-tch-tch. Every time the organist saw that, he knew he was in trouble”.

While the Bishop preaches, Professor will sit listening attentively for grammatical errors and whenever the Bishop makes such slips he “Whips out his note book and stabs it with furious notes”. Salubi, the more objective of the two conversing, immediately retorts that “if na you be Bishop and somebody dey do dat kin’ting you no go vex? Samson’s description reaches its climax as we are given a picturesque account of what really transpired between Professor and the bishop in church.

“We wanted to see which of them would win, whether Professor would get cramp for in neck or the Bishop would run out of grammar. The congregation was very silent, they knew what was happening and they knew this was the final duel between the Bishop and their lay reader That was how Professor solved it. He made one more bow and he stuck there. The Bishop sermonized his head off the Church shock with reverberation from passionate grammar but na so Professor bend in head –‘e no move one inch”.

The collapsing of the church wall symbolizes the final break in the church. This is because shortly after this nasty scene, Professor leaves the church. With his departure, he begins to criticize bitterly, whatever transpires in his mother church. Maduakor therefore describes Professor's language as,

“Virulent and abrasive when he speaks of the church, and he sees its congregation from a critical perspective”.

For example, he criticizes the organist, pastor and congregation in the following words.

“The organist is rinsing his dirty face in cold water. The pastor is fixing his borrowed collar stud. And the communicants are beating their husbands”.

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“This disdainful attitude of Professor towards the church emboldens his followers to say worse things. Salubi for instance says “Dat one no to church, na high society”. As if this is not enough, he goes on to mock the Lord’s Prayer, “give us this day our daily bribe”.

Encouraged by this game, Samson also adds his voice to the fun poking, “I go chop life so tey God go jealous me. And if he take jealousy kill me I will go start bus service between heaven and hell”.

In conclusion, Soyinka's hate for crooked ways of politicians is manifested in his scathing attacks on Nigerian politicians. Soyinka carries this brazen attack through the play titled “The Road”. In this play, he portrays the negative side of corruption with the use of satire; he outlines political, material/economic and religious corruption. One cannot deny the fact that Soyinka's choice of using satire to bring out the theme of corruption has not only been appropriate but has been well executed. This theme has been critically assessed from the view points of the following characters, Professor's deliberate distortion of the Holy writ, his embezzlement of church funds, Kotonu's dishonesty during the drivers festival, a religious festival in honor of Ogun, Ogun's betrayal of his worshippers trust, Professor's manipulation of Murano in the former's attempt at unraveling the mystery of the ‘word’, the nasty scene between Professor and the bishop which results in Professor's departure from the church and his attempt at ridiculing the organist, pastor and congregation.

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