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Corruption and Injustice in Uche Nnyagu's *At the Centre of No Man's Land*

Onunkwo, Benedette Ngozi
Department of English
Federal College of Education (T) Umunze
beneonunkwor@gmail.com

&

Ijeoma Ehimen
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
ehimenijeoma@gmail.com

Abstract
Corruption permeates all facets of Nigeria and constitutes a means of perpetrating injustice. This paper examines the phenomenon of corruption and injustice in Nigeria, its various causes as well as some of the negative effects. Using Uche Nnyagu's *At the Centre of No-Man's Lan*d, this work will explore the various corrupt practices in different dimensions from the so-called police force which is supposed to fight corruption and injustice. In effect, corruption slows growth, leads to inefficient investment in public projects, and slows down foreign investment. This paper explores various forms of injustice in Nigeria, causes and its effect on social needs of the citizens. It also considers some suggestions as regards the way out of injustice in Nigeria.
Keywords: Injustice, Corruption, Oppression, Contemporary Nigeria, Police brutality.

Introduction
Corruption is one of the greatest challenges of the contemporary world. It undermines good government, fundamentally distorts public policy, leads to the misallocation of resources, harms the

private sectors and particularly hurts the poor. Many aspects of bribery and corruption include giving or accepting gratification through agent, fraudulent acquisition of property, fraudulent receipt of property, offences committed through postal system, deliberate frustration of investigation, making false statements, false or misleading statements to the commission and other similar offences.

Injustice is a profound threat to human dignity and well-being, perpetuating suffering and oppression. As legendary civil right leader, Martin Luther King Jr., eloquently stated, "injustices anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" (King, 1963). Injustice also undermines social cohesion and destabilizes societies. This is why John Raiols, argued that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought (Rawls, 1971). Injustice thus, has profound economic and political consequences. According to Noble Laureate, Amartya Sen, injustice is not only a moral failing, but also an economic and political impediment to development (Sen, 1999).

In the ravaged landscape of post-conflict Nigeria, Uche Nnyagu's poignant novel *At the Centre of No man's Land* lays bare the festering wounds of corruption and injustice. Through a cast of characters navigating the treacherous terrain of a society in disarray, Nnyagu's masterfully exposes the out-wined evils of corruption and injustice, revealing how they suffocate hopes, perpetuate suffering, and entrench a culture of impunity. As this paper will demonstrate, Nnyagu's work offers a powerful indictment of the corrosive forces that undermine human dignity, equality, and justice, inviting readers to confront the dark realities that imperil the very fabric of society.

Corruption erodes trust in institutions and undermines democratic governance, as political scientist, Larry Diamond, observes that corruption is a cancer that eats away at the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic institution (Diamond, 2007).

Injustice comes in various forms, wherever the norms of distributive justice, procedural justice, or human rights are violated. Some actions such as theft and murder are commonly recognized as unjust by governments and prohibited by domestic law. However, there are also systematic forms of injustice that may persist in a society. Political injustice involves the violation of individual liberties, including the denial of voting rights or due process, infringements on rights to freedom of speech or religion and inadequate protection from cruel and unusual punishment.

Economic injustice involves the state's failure to provide individuals with basic, necessities of life, such as access to adequate food and housing and its maintenance of huge discrepancies in wealth. In the most extreme cases of mal-distribution, some individuals suffer from poverty while the elite of that society live in relative luxury. Such injustice can stem from unfair hiring procedures, lack of available jobs and education, and insufficient health care. All of these conditions may lead individuals to believe that they have not received a "fair sharing" of the benefits and resources available in that society.

Theoretical Framework

This research work employs two theoretical frameworks to analyze corruption and injustice in Uche Nnyagu's *At the Centre of No-Man's Land*. One is social justice theory and the other is critical theory. Social Justice Theory, according to Rawls (1971) and Sen (1999) illuminates the novel's portrayal of unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges. This framework, Social Justice, enables an examination of how corruption and injustice perpetuate inequality, discrimination, and human rights violation.

Rawls' concept of the "original position" and Sen's capability approach will be used to evaluate the fairness of social arrangements and the characters' freedom to achieve their full potential. In the novel, characters are exploited, humiliated because of their social class hence the reason for the choice of social criticism.

Critical Theory on the other hand, reveals how power relations, ideology, and social institutions perpetuate corruption and injustice. This framework allows for an analysis of how the novel, *At the Centre of No Man's Land* exposes the ways in which corruption and injustice are embedded in social norms and values. This framework was popularized by Habermas. Accordingly, the concept of the "public sphere" will be used to evaluate the novels' portrayal of public discourse and democratic participation. By aptly interpreting these frameworks, this study will provide a comprehensive understanding of corruption and injustice in the novel, highlighting the complex interplay between power dynamics, social inequalities, and ideological underpinning that perpetuates human suffering.

Different Instances of Corruption and Injustice in Uche Nnyagu's *At the center of No Man's Land.*

Uche Nnyagu's *At the Centre of N-Man's Land* provides a scathing critique of the corrupt and unjust systems that pervade society. Through his characters and their experiences, Nnyagu masterfully exposes the various guises of corruption and injustice, including brazen embezzlement, nepotistic networks, bureaucratic red tape, and systemic injustices that silence the voices of the oppressed (Nnyagu 12, 45, 102). by shedding light on these injustices, Nnyagu's work confronts readers with harsh realities of the world where power is abused and the vulnerable are exposed. This examination of corruption and injustice serves as a catalyst for a deeper exploration of the ways in which Nnyagu's *At the Centre of No-Man's Land* challenges readers to dismantle these unjust

systems and create a more equitable society. The novel so vividly illustrates the different kinds of corruption and injustices meted on different individuals in the society and at different situations.

At the beginning of the book, we encounter a young industrious man Engineer Ofo who worked hard to maintained his name and endeavored to deliver his service both efficiently and dedicatedly. Engineer Ofo was recommended by people and referred to others because of his outstanding performance. His bitter ordeal commenced when he was arrested by the police on his way home after work.

Initially, he thought it was kidnappers until he was handcuffed and taken away. He was searched and his money taken from him. So, the police who are supposed to guide citizens are seen here taking money from an arrested suspect, this is corruption. Another thing that made him scared was the fact that one of the men had dreadlocks. So, the question "is an officer in the police force, supposed to have dreadlocks?

However, when they got to Asaba Police Station, the policemen gave Ofo his phone to make calls and inform anybody that will bring money to bail him. He was told that they came all the way from Lagos state to track him. Ofo was confused because he is unaware of his crime and he was not even informed what he committed. They asked him if he was Ebuka and he said no. Ebuka is his neighbor in the compound where he lives. He later took them to his compound where Ebuka was arrested. Ebuka was shocked and asked Ofo what he has done to deserve this treatment. As the police took them away, they told them to co-operate by calling anyone who can bring money so they will bail. The police claimed Ebuka and Ofo committed an offence in Lagos and ran to Asaba. The police threatened to take them to Lagos, a land of no return. They demanded for a sum of two hundred and fifty thousand naira.

"We are policemen from Lagos state.

Una run commot from Ekoo with the hope say you don

escape?
The world no dey like that again because the world don open eyes well.
Na the people wey una rob sponsored our trip to the east.
" (Nnyagu, 25)

Ekene a bus driver and Ofo's elder brother could only afford Ten thousand naira. The police displayed their injustice when they collected money from Ekene and Ebuka's uncle without releasing them as promised. They claimed the money would be used to feed them on their way to Lagos. When they got to Panty Police Station where they are told of how innocent people are killed and buried silently. A place where the police will maltreat, extort and silence anyone who refuses to cooperate with them. Ofo was afraid because it might take Dr. Emeka his brother (and a lecturer) a long time to facilitate his bail. Ofo is mostly afraid that he might be killed like other innocent inmates whose stories he has heard. Another striking example of corruption and injustice from the novel is an incident and experience Ofo had one day he was travelling from Onitsha going to Awka. He encountered a number of check points amounting to ten for a short distance between Onitsha to Awka. At every check point the driver was expected to "Roja" the policemen. What surprised Ofo is the fact that the policemen were not bothered about checking the car or even passengers for any contraband or if any passenger had weapons.

To Ofo's surprise when the driver had exhausted the money he had and refused to give a policeman money, he then requested to see his car license. The driver brought it out and gave it to the policemen who shamelessly read the particulars upside down. This simply entails that the Nigerian Police Force also employed uneducated staff. Ofo was astonished because it is impossible to read something in this position.

The driver opened the pigeonhole, fished out the papers and gave them to the police officer. I was sitting by the

> window directly behind the driver, so I saw everything. When the police officer began to scrutinize the papers, I discovered to my chagrin that he was holding the papers upside down. (Nnyagu, 45).

Injustice in the Cell

In the confined spaces of the prison cell, Nnyagu's characters face a stark reality of systemic injustice, where the supposed rehabilitation of the criminal justice system is revealed to be a mere facade. Behind the cold steel bars, the vulnerable are subjected to further exploitation, and the innocent are punished alongside the guilty. In most cases, the guilty are exonerated because hands had crossed and the innocent are made to suffer for offences they did not commit. Through Nnyagu's masterful story telling, the cell becomes a powerful symbol of the systemic failures that perpetuate inequality, racism, and oppression, laying bare the dark underbelly of a society that purports to value justice and rehabilitation. As we delve into the world of Nnyagu's creation, we are forced to confront the harsh realities of a system that prioritizes punishment over redemption, and to question the true meaning of justice in a world where the cell becomes a microcosm of society's failures.

Upon getting to the cell, Ofo was made to salute Mr. Kodo, initially he didn't know what to do and he wasn't told how to do it. He made several mistakes which landed him several slaps before another inmate beckoned on him to salute an image on the wall which actually represented Mr. Kodo.

> I looked at the direction and discovered for the first time that there was a drawing of an ugly and terrifying skull with two big eye sockets on the wall. Beneath the horrifying skull was an inscription " I am Mr. Kodo, salute me as you enter here."
> (Nnyagu, 57).

Ofo was also ordered to greet "De governor" another inmate who was actually the leader of the group. He was asked what offence he had committed and when he said nothing, another slap landed on his face. They also asked him if he had money with him and he told them that the police had collected all his money. Furthermore, Ofo met Jude who beckoned on him and gave him a piece of paper to sit. Jude was from Abia State and he encouraged Ofo not to be sad, that for six days he has been in the cell, that Police has killed not less than six inmates, because they do not have money or people to save them. Innocent people easily become culprits because corruption is the order of the day. It was Jude that told Ofo about playing cards in the cell in order to forget your pains and not to have hypertension.

Jude narrated what brought him into the cell. Before his father's death, he vowed that Jude must finish his education even as a bus driver. After his father's death, Jude did menial jobs to see himself through in the university. His wicked uncle and kinsmen conspired and took the proceedings from the burial and also the only land that his father left behind. It was when Jude went to stop the men working on his father's land that three men came from nowhere to abduct him and he saw himself inside the cell. Jude made Ofo to understand that most people in the cell were innocent. Just then as they were talking, Paul was called by the policemen, Jude told Ofo that he may have contacted a lawyer. That is the only way you can stay alive, if not you might be killed and thrown into the lagoon.

Another terrible incidence of injustice in the cell is the story of a man in the cell, who was invisibly depressed, he never joined in any conversation or played whot with them. He was always engulfed in sorrowful looks, gazing into thin air. He was a keke rider who was hit by a politician car and his keke fell into the ditch. In anger, he got out and threw a pebble at the car, at that instance, the car stopped and two policemen came out, even as he pleaded, he was bundled into the car and thrown inside the cell.

That night when the policemen came to call him, Jude told Ofo that they will definitely kill him.

This is a terrible situation in Nigeria, a recurring decimal where the rich oppress and suppress the poor. Nnyagu vividly and realistically captures the contemporary Nigerian society in the text. Through the vivid conversation of the fictional characters, the truth about the high rate of corruption and injustice in both high and low places is made bare.

Another inmate a former local government chairmanship aspirant narrated what landed him to the cell. His offence was that he wanted to amend or re-write the wrongs of the former politicians by doing the right things and refusing to bribe or steal from the government funds. He claimed that the bigwigs in politics will not let you do the right thing. He said that the party All Progressive Party has no good agenda for the country. The opponent party succeeded in throwing him out because he had genuine plans for the people. He was generally liked by the people because he had promised to alleviate their plights. His opponent conspired and put him into the cell, so he won't be available for the forth coming elections.

This is a realistic fact about the contemporary Nigerian situation. Our politicians are corrupt and from all the stretch of imagination, they do not go into politics because they aim good for the masses but for their own selfish interest. This is why they go to any extreme to buy "win". Most of them, like exemplified in the novel, orchestrate the incarceration of their political opponents.

Injustice and Corruption by People Supposed to be Protecting the Interests of the Masses.

In the shadow of power, corruption and injustice thrive, as those entrusted with the sacred duty of protecting the masses perpetrate the very evil they swore to vanquish. Uche Nnyagu's work exposes

the rotten underbelly of a system where the guardians of justice become the exploiters, preying on the vulnerable and perpetuating a circle of oppression, with unflinching candor, Nnyagu reveals the sinister machinations of those who abuse their authority, manipulating the very institutions meant to safeguard the public trust. Through his characters and their struggles, we witness the devastating consequences of corruption and injustice, as the powerful prioritize their own interest over the well-being of the people they are sworn to serve. In Nigeria's world, the facade of integrity is stripped away, revealing the stark reality of a system gone awry, where the very people meant to protect us become the perpetrators of our suffering.

Dr. Emeka, Ofo's brother later contacted a lawyer in Lagos with the help from his good friend Nzube. Nzube and the lawyer visited the police station often. Ofo was informed that a lawyer had come for his case, he was relieved that at least he won't be killed. Ofo thought that he will be bailed the first day, but the policemen refused saying that Ofo was still their suspect. Although, the lawyer insisted that since Bright an incarcerated culprit has confirmed that Ofo was not in their gang that he should be granted bail. The police claimed that Ofo's phone showed that Ofo was constantly communicating with Bright.

Obviously, the police knew that Ofo was innocent but because they had not exploited them, they would not allow the innocent to go. At a point Ofo got pissed because he felt the lawyer was also dragging the matter for the fact that she was given N10,000 (Ten thousand naira) each time she visited the police station. Ofo thought is a true situation in Nigeria where lawyers charge their clients exorbitant prices for any minor case, hence the reason many people could not get justice in Nigeria. Cases that could be judged in a court sitting, they keep adjourning thus creating an avenue for the lawyers to keep extorting their clients who pay very handsomely to their lawyers as their transportation on each day of

the court sitting. In some cases, the police also delay justice so that they keep siphoning the inmates people/relative.

A Way Forward

1. The task of reducing injustice in the country is in the hand of religious authorities to ensure that their member imbibe the true virtues of justice, fear of God, love and tolerate, which should enable them to overcome the primitive tendencies of narrow mindedness and unhealthy rivalry.

2. The Federal Ministry of Education with National University Commission (NUC) to make religious/moral instruction a general institution of learning. The curriculum of the course should include among others moral values, justice and tolerance and brotherhood of all people.

3. The constitution reviewed committee should remove the law on multi-party system in the country's constitution and recommend for the two-party systems, because multi-party system creates rooms for ethnic parties to spring up. Thus, creating injustice in government operation.

4. Removal of electoral irregularities in the electoral process. For any country to move to a true democracy and true justice, it must allow the Independent National Electoral Commission to be truly independent. This will do away with all forms of injustice in the electoral process that always brings into politics, the practice of god-fatherism in Nigerian administration.

5. The introduction of good governance system. Good governance system is exercising power in the best interest of the citizens. That is the economic and social resources of the country are managed for the benefit and common good

of all. In such a situation the resources are allocated to benefit the people not a selected few as it is the case in Nigeria today.

Conclusion

In this paper, we considered the issues of injustices and corruption. Nigeria as a country is confronted with various forms of corruption and injustice. The poor masses are at the receiving end. The politicians make promises that they never keep and end up enriching themselves and their family members. This behavior goes down to other government parastatals and establishments. Everyone is looking for any opportunity to extort money from someone else and enrich themselves. Corruption does not help the economy but kills it. Injustice is the order of the day. The civil servants who are the masses are poorly paid, the capitalist exploits the lower class in every possible way and enrich themselves the more. A conscious effort is to be made to sanitize the mentality of all. People should collect only what is due for them and stop this mentality of acquiring wealth meant to be distributed to all (in terms of building amenities, hospitals, schools etc). if people endeavor to do the right thing and shun corruption and injustice the country will be a better place for all.

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