

**A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF SOYINKA’S
“METAMORPHOSISATION” OF CORRUPTION IN
*INTERVENTIONS I, II AND IV***

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Abstract

Critics use several avenues to describe and decry the deplorable socio-political situations in the twenty-first century Nigerian nation. Amongst these critics, Wole Soyinka plays a prominent role. In the past, several researchers had analysed Soyinka’s literary and non-literary works using different theoretical perspectives such as pragmatics, stylistics and critical discourse analysis. However, Soyinka’s pictorial depiction of the “metamorphosis” of corruption in the Nigerian nation, hence its Nigerianness, using the *Interventions* has not received much critical attention. This study, therefore, adopts Critical Metaphor Analysis and Cognitive Semantics as the theoretical framework in identifying, interpreting and explaining how corruption has “metamorphosed” in a manner that is uniquely Nigerian in *Interventions I, II and IV* with a view to showing how metaphors are domesticated to suit different societies. Soyinka’s *Interventions I, II and IV* constitute the source of data, and are purposively chosen for their content on the “metamorphism” of the societal canker – corruption. Metaphor exploration of Soyinka’s language use helps us assess the world in a way which may vary from the way we typically perceive it, and consequently, offers various new interpretations.

Keywords: Wole Soyinka *Interventions I, II and IV*, Corruption, Metaphor, “Metamorphosis”, Nigerianness

Introduction

The twenty-first century Nigerian nation has had the misfortune of being riddled with leaders who have neither sympathy nor empathy for the nation they govern nor for her people. This infestation has gravely affected national growth in every sector, which is amply displayed by the deplorable state of infrastructure. Nigerian leadership has kept the people in chains (Nathaniel and Iwuchukwu, 2023: p.494) Nigerian leaders dishonest

exploitation of power for personal gain and the decadence that pervades the society can hardly be ignored since this has impacted gravely as seen in the infrastructural decay in almost all public sectors of the Nigerian milieu, hence the Nigerianness of corruption.

Scholars have carried out various researches on Soyinka's literary and non-literary works. However, apart from Hunjo (2010) and Thomas (2015), these researchers, have not explored his *Interventions* metaphorically. Hunjo (2010) investigates Soyinka's auto-biographical texts and *Interventions I* within postcolonial political discourse using Critical Discourse Analysis as his theoretical frame. He gives illuminating insights into the connection between language and social reality and unlocks our minds to Soyinka's political struggle against colonial political residues which repetitively impede the Nigerian leaders' duty to evolve strategies that would offer a lasting solution to the agony of the common man. To him, Soyinka's works portray him as a politician since his works are sites for social interaction where participants engage in activities that are related at several social levels and cultural activities where the writer is a member of the communications he constructs through his texts. Hunjo (2010) focuses on critical discourse analysis and political discourse, unlike the present research which focuses on critical metaphor analysis and describes how corrupt practice has mutated in a manner which is uniquely Nigerian.

Thomas (2015: 35, 40), on the other hand, examines Soyinka's use of language in *Interventions III* by paying attention to the "expressive" value of metaphor in the language and discourse of social change in Nigeria'. She explores Soyinka's presentation of morality and national issues, and discusses his use of language "to decry the social ills caused by the upsurge brought about by extreme religious fanaticism and the seeming inactions of Nigerians and its leaders to nip these theocratic tendencies at the bud". Nigerian leaders' penchant to devalue their youths is also captured and they are cautioned against the demerits of belittling the very group who ought to be encouraged to take centre stage in national affairs in order to safeguard the nation's future, amongst other things. This paper just like Thomas (2015) uses Charteris-Black's (2004, 2011) critical metaphor analysis and cognitive semantics as its theoretical frame and also views Soyinka as a public commentator. However, the focus of this paper which is Nigerianness and corruption is significantly different from Thomas (2015) as well as its source of data which are Soyinka's *Interventions I, II* and *IV*.

Theoretical framework

Metaphor is ubiquitous in both written and spoken discourse, and often is easily understood and produced in appropriate social and linguistic contexts (Gibbs 2006: 601). Consequently, it is a creative tool in both literature and everyday communications used for explaining word choice beyond its usual usage (Fadaee 2011: 26). Its main purpose is to describe an entity, event or quality more comprehensively and concisely and in a more complex manner which depicts its “metamorphosis” than is possible by using literal language. Traditionally, it is viewed as a distortion of both thought and language, since it involves the transfer of a name to some object to which that name does not “properly” belong; it is also viewed as “a fundamental part of the ways people speak and think” (Gibbs 2006: 607). Dirven and Porings (2003: 9) opine that metaphor: sees one thing in terms of some other thing; it is a rhetorical device or a meaning-extending device; may operate at the sentence level or beyond; allows multiple mappings from the source domain to the target domain, and allows themes or chains of figurative expressions. Metaphor according to Steen (2007: 608) draws “attention to similarities or correspondences between entities or domains that are fundamentally distinct”.

There are several approaches to the study of metaphor, such as: a) *comparison view and tensive theory of metaphor* which is associated with Aristotle and states that a metaphor is an implicit simile; b) *perspectival theory of metaphor* which views metaphor as going beyond exploiting existing similarities to creating new similarities or perspectives on the world (Arseneault 2006: 599 – 600); c) *conceptual metaphor theory* also known as *cognitive metaphor theory* or *cognitive linguistic* views metaphor as not merely a matter of language, but just as much a matter of thought and conceptual metaphor as somewhat universal since human bodily experience is basically the same all over the world (Malkjaer 2002: 76 - 78).

However, the approach adopted in this study is Charteris-Black’s (2004, 2011) critical metaphor analysis and cognitive semantics. This approach subsumes everything discussed in Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory and goes a step further by incorporating a critical part which looks at the underlying ideologies informing the writer’s choice of metaphor; how all these portray existing social power abuse, dominance and inequality, and how they are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text

and talk in the social and political context using Soyinka's *Interventions I, II and IV* as the source for its data. To guide the analysis of ideologies, Bloor and Bloor's (2014: 192) stance which states that "the critical objective is not only to identify and analyse the roots of social problems, but also to discern ways of alleviating or resolving them" is adopted. In other words, Soyinka's beliefs, values and opinions of the world as reflected in the texts are what constitute his ideologies in this study.

Charteris-Black (2011: 31 – 32) defines metaphor as "a word or phrase that is used with a sense that differs from another more common or more basic sense that (the) word or phrase has" and is a "shift in the use of a word or phrase by giving it a new sense". It is this "shift in meaning that enables metaphors to evoke emotional responses" and makes metaphors to be thought of as "bearers of affective meaning". Metaphor arises from how language is used since "any word can be a metaphor if the way it is used makes it so". Metaphor is viewed as a feature of language use that comes into being when there is a change in how a word is used and "arises from our expectations about meaning that are based on our knowledge of how words have previously been used". He goes ahead to note that "people vary in how many instances of metaphor they find in a particular text because at any one instance in time a word may be *more* or *less* metaphoric for an individual speaker because judgement of what is normal, or conventional, depends on language users' unique experiences of discourse". He adds as a word of caution that "not all individuals – because of their different experience of language – will agree on which words are metaphors, however they will hopefully be tolerant of what are metaphors for others"

Schema for critical metaphor analysis and cognitive semantic

Identify Metaphor Used	Interpret Metaphor as used	Explain Metaphor Used
Metaphors are identified using the criteria of whether a word or phrase is used with a sense that differs from another more common or	CS is used to assist in the interpretation of metaphor since the mind is viewed as mostly unconscious and metaphorical concepts as largely abstract. Here,	Metaphors are explained based on their context of use, to show how they help to instigate, influence, induce, control and express socio-political

basic sense. In other words, do the words used keep unexpected company?	metaphorically expressions are interpreted in relation to their source and target domain.	change.
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Data analysis and discussion

Corruption refers to the dishonest exploitation of power for personal gain; extreme immorality or depravity; or a state of being rotten or putrid. According to Nathaniel et al (2016), “Literature is an embodiment of ideas” (75) and this explains why Soyinka uses metaphors to examine corruption. Metaphors from the domain of animal, mathematics, disease, person and disease; and animal and disease are used respectively in the excerpts below to discuss corruption. Metamorphosis is a complete or marked change or transformation of physical form, condition, structure, amongst others. In the discussion below, the words in capital letters are the conceptual metaphors, their source domains are given, and these are used to elaborate on the target domains while the words in bold font are the words used metaphorically to aptly portray how specific phenomenon, concepts, etcetera, have metamorphosed in the Nigerian nation. The literal definitions of most words in this study are taken from *Microsoft Encarta* (2009).

A. Animal metaphor

An animal is a living organism that is distinguished from plants by independent body movement and responsive sense organs. It also refers to the instinctive inner self, as opposed to the one subject to self-restraint.

Excerpt 1

We love to excel in our nation, to go one better than anyone else, so ours is a very special breed for which neither the Hydra nor the octopus is adequate. I think I shall name our native **beast** of corruption, a monster of truly mythical proportions, the **Hydropus**, an amphibian mammal that thrives on land and sea, in the desert and mangrove swamps, feeds just as readily on iron and steel as it does on crude petroleum. It is as much at

home under military dictatorship as it is under civilian democracy and can derive moisture and nourishment from bitumen just as readily as from virtual reality. Its especial genius however is its ability to turn every bit of terrain into marshland or quicksands, so as to leave its opponents no ground to stand upon. Indeed the appearance of solidity is its secret weapon. One moment you believe you're standing, literally, on terra firma, ready to do battle, the next moment the ground disintegrates into quicksands, under which the monster has disappeared. A huge tentacle thrusts upwards from the pulsing earth and then you realise that the quicksand is its natural home. (Soyinka 2010b: 107 - 108, Soyinka 2013: 137 - 138)

Excerpt 2

In an alarming proportion of the African continent however, it is the opposite that reigns. A government is inaugurated, a parastatal or ministry holds its first meeting and – shall we say the project is agriculture? – the first question is not: how do we breed a cow with a higher yield of milk but, how do we find a high-yield cow to milk? That is priority Number One. The officials mull this question over and then, they invent, I repeat, invent a project...Therein lies the fundamental difference in degree and methodologies in the mutation from Corruption to **Hydropus**. (Soyinka 2013: 149 - 154)

Excerpt 3

Hydropus is thus not merely an embodiment of material corruption. It is a **beast** that mangles the innocent physically, politically and morally. It runs contrary to democratic mandates and prostitutes itself to raw, naked

power. It is an agency of blackmail, murder and impunity. It is also an unconscionable tool of power consolidation and social repression. (Soyinka 2013: 167)

The conceptual metaphor in excerpts 1 – 3 is CORRUPTION IS AN ANIMAL. An animal can be perceived using the five senses: sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. It is tangible, and occupies a physical space while corruption does not occupy any physical space because it is conceptual – one cannot point at corruption and say ‘there it goes’. The word **beast** used in excerpts 1 and 3 describes an animal, especially a large four-footed mammal, or the instinctive, irrational or aggressive part of one’s personality, or both. In other words, the corrupt more often than not acts instinctively, irrationally and aggressively in a manner which lacks any form of self-restraint. The animal used in the excerpts to reflect the workings of corruption and the corrupt is metaphorically conceptualised using a blend of a real life animal: the octopus and a mythical animal: the hydra, to arrive at what Soyinka calls the **Hydropus** because their physical characteristics and workings best exemplify the Nigerian brand of corruption; this is because corruption has metamorphosed in the Nigerian society in a more deadly manner than it operates elsewhere.

In excerpt 2, Soyinka reveals the fact that corruption is not limited to any segment, region, parastatal or arm of governance in the country and as such most people are dragged into its net and when some try to resist, they are severely harmed. He further exemplifies how the operation of corruption “in an alarming section of the African continent” is vividly different from its operation elsewhere by giving specific instances of how corruption operates in other parts of the world, like the United States of America and how it operates in Nigeria. He shows that in other places, corruption is perpetuated when there are things already working while in Nigeria corruption has metamorphosed into the project itself. Thus, the project does not exist except in virtual reality since corruption starts and ends most undertakings. As a result, the ideology that you cannot have your cake and eat it is discarded because people believe in having and eating the national cake though they never bother about baking it. In other words, most politicians and bureaucrats thrive on corruption and they are only bothered about sharing things not in creating things. In excerpt 3, the workings of corruption are summed up. This is not to say that corruption should be allowed to flourish, but rather by expressing its nature, potential and

character, Soyinka believes that this societal cankerworm can be subdued if collectively the citizenry wrestle it from their respective corners, rather than encourage its survival while it drains them.

B. Mathematics metaphor

Mathematics is the study of relationships using numbers, shapes and quantities. It is also the calculations involved in a process, estimate or plan.

Excerpt4

In my experience, that ‘shortest line’ between two Nigerians at an airport is guaranteed to be – crooked! One of those two is already working up a scheme in his or her head how to rip off the other with some fabulous tale or proposition...Our maths teacher were not conversant with the Nigerian factor...They would have taught us that the shortest distance between two points, where one is a Nigerian, is beyond limits of knowledge. And finally, to round up with that arithmetical proposition of ‘one plus one makes two’, throw it out of the window. Where one of those two integers is a Nigerian, the correct answer is – **419!** (Soyinka 2010a: 181 - 182)

In the excerpt, Soyinka focuses on corruption at the individual level and humorously uses mathematical calculations to portray the dubious nature of most Nigerians, where adding one plus one metamorphosis into four-one-nine (Advance Fee Fraud) and not two. Advance fee fraud also called 419 fraud is a kind of rip-off in which the victim is convinced to advance money to a stranger. In almost all such swindles, the victims are led to expect that a larger sum of money will be returned to them; though they never receive any of the money. This scam is also referred to as a ‘Nigerian letter’ because extensive use of the 419 fraud first originated in Nigeria; also article 419 of the Nigerian criminal code deals with obtaining property by false promises, which is precisely what advance fee fraud is all about.

C. Disease metaphor

Disease is a pathological state of body parts, organs, or systems resulting from numerous reasons, such as infection, genetic defect, or ecological stress, and characterised by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.

Excerpt 5

A close friend of yours is assassinated in this nation and, barely twelve hours later, you receive an email, allegedly from his yet disconsolate widow, informing you that her husband has salted away several million dollars while in office as Attorney General of the nation, and that she would now like to go into partnership for the purpose of laundering such loot abroad. When matters have reached such a level, you know that you are dealing with a national affliction of **endemic** proportions that stigmatises all Nigerians no matter their individual reputation. (Soyinka 2010a: 183 – 184)

Excerpt 6

There comes a moment however when nations must learn to bite the bullet and even ask for help in redressing a situation that has gone rampant, a **condition** that appears to have defied **cure**, much less control. The timing is also appropriate – in recent times, we have been able to testify to genuine efforts being made to at least curb the spread of this **cancer**. (Soyinka 2010b: 103)

Excerpt 7

But let us now spare a few moments to anatomising the peculiar nature of this malaise, its contrasting operations between one environment and another since – and this must be emphasised – corruption is a universal **affliction**, and those who are first to point the fore finger should also be reminded that, true to that familiar adage, the remaining

fingers are indeed pointing at the chest of the
accuser. (Soyinka 2010b: 106)

The conceptual metaphor that runs through the excerpts is CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE. **Affliction** is a condition of great physical or mental distress or something that causes great physical or mental distress. In medicine **endemic** means restricted to one place, it describes a disease occurring within a particular area. In excerpt 5, corruption is portrayed as a disease that causes boundless physical or psychological anguish to the Nigerian nation and is **endemic** because the way corruption is practiced within the Nigerian nation is quite peculiar. By describing corruption and its effects in this manner, Soyinka portrays in a glaring manner the ills of corruption and its attendant effects on the lives of Nigerians – home and abroad. He uses disease metaphor – **affliction** and **endemic** – to decry internet crime and the absurd reason of reparation given by most for engaging in the crime as senseless and he points to the fact that one's identity as a Nigerian is tarnished by these fraudsters and their deluded sense of making amends.

Condition refers to a state of physical fitness or general health or a physical disorder; **cure** means restoring a sick person to health, bringing an end to an illness, disorder or injury by medical treatment, or to resolve a problem. **Cancer** refers to a malignant tumour or growth caused when cells multiply uncontrollably, destroying healthy tissue, or a fast-spreading bad phenomenon, usually something negative that develops or spreads quickly and usually destructively. In excerpt 6, Soyinka uses terms associated with disease to describe corruption, as a physical disorder that has defied remedy and is fast-spreading and destroying both the incorruptible and the corrupt in its wake. Corruption is now a sarcoma that has caught everyone off guard, and can only be contained by quickly amputating the affected area with help from others, and this help is what Soyinka is praising the nation for seeking.

Excerpt 7 emphasises the fact that corruption is an ailment that plagues all but has different stages that manifest different symptoms, depending on how it is treated and cautions against finger-pointing. The conceptual metaphor that runs through the excerpts is CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE, and like all diseases, the timely treatment given determines how well the disease would be contained and what havoc it would wreak on the immune system.

D. Person and disease metaphor

Person and disease metaphor are used in the excerpt below to represent corruption.

Excerpt 8

For long, our nation has sought to hide her **pregnancy** behind the proverbial hand, but the water has burst and its putrid fluids have spattered the **face** of the globe even in the most unexpected, far-flung places. Now the nation is forced to confront what other nations have long **diagnosed** and have trumpeted loudly among themselves, and indeed directed bluntly at Nigerian governments, and at Nigerians aboard, loudly and even stridently, both in bilateral contacts and on international fora. Matters have reached such a stage that the beleaguered nation – at least a few courageous citizens of that nation – have taken the bull by the horn and launched an initiative to bring the long denied labour pains to the point of release. They have elected to make it, rather like an **open-heart surgery**, an **open-air delivery**, conducted under the searchlights of the powerful media of the world. (Soyinka 2010b: 101 - 102)

The conceptual metaphor in excerpt 8 is CORRUPTION IS A DISEASED PERSON. Person metaphor **pregnancy** and **face** which refer to the physical condition of a woman or female carrying a foetus inside her body and the front of the human head, where the eyes, nose, chin, cheeks and forehead are found respectively, are used to describe the cause and effect of corruption. In other words, the dividends of corruption in Nigeria have been felt by so many all over the world, even in countries where one would hardly have expected such impacts. Medical terms used are diagnosed, open-heart surgery and open-air delivery. **Diagnosed** is the identification of disorders or illnesses in patients through interviews, physical examinations, medical tests and other procedures; it also refers to the identification of the

cause of something, especially a problem or fault. **Open** refers to something conducted in a public manner, an unconcealed state where things are no longer hidden or held back. **Surgery** is a medical procedure involving operations and **delivery** is the process of giving birth to a baby.

In summary, Soyinka uses person and disease metaphors to portray the “metamorphosis” of corruption as a pregnant woman who has unsuccessfully tried to hide her pregnant state and the fact that she has been in labour for a long time, even when others had long noticed it. Since her water has burst in public, she has to deliver in the open air as a result. That is to say, Nigerians can no longer deny nor hide the dividends of corruption from themselves or others. In view of that, Soyinka praises the decision by well-meaning Nigerians abroad to organise an initiative aimed at addressing the issue of how corrupt practices in Nigeria affects Nigerians and the world at large and commends their ability to solicit and accept outside help in order to curb the spread of this cancer (disease metaphor), once and for all.

E. Animal and disease metaphor

Animal and disease metaphor are used in the excerpts below to portray the effects and actions of corruption on a nation.

Excerpt 9

So intertwined is material with political corruption that one can only propose that a totally new set of laws has become mandatory to deal with the political, since it feeds on the material. At the head of both presides our mythical monster, **Hydropus**, in whose coils a nation of brilliant and enterprising minds is caught, and all vitality is slowly squeezed out of them...Yes, corruption does lead to the much decried phenomenon of the **brain drain**. And when a nation suffers from a prolonged **affliction** of the **braindrain**, it turns, clinically, **brain dead**. (Soyinka 2010b: 122)

Excerpt 10

the mission of taming that universally **debilitating affliction** that we call Corruption...Corruption **fighters** back! It **fighters** back without scruple, without rules of engagement, with a life-and-death tenacity...after all, it has nothing more to lose...Even my family has not been spared, such is the desperate, **unforgiving** nature of the enemy that it is most dangerous when it is exposed or even merely thwarted, and robbed of its harvest of expectation...The **beast** from under not merely survives; it thrives, and the would-be monster slayers are left battered and bruised for daring the Hydropoid kingdom.(Soyinka 2013: 129 - 140)

In excerpt 9, the key terms used to describe the effects of corruption (**Hydropus**) on a nation are: **brain drain** which is the movement of highly skilled people, especially scientists and technical workers, to countries offering better opportunities; **affliction**, a condition of great physical or mental distress or something that causes great physical or mental distress, and **brain dead** or death which describes the state of a non-functioning brain that lacks functions of the brain and central nervous system as measured by brain wave activity on an electroencephalogram over a specific period of time or one with an extremely low intellectual ability. Corruption, therefore, is an animal and a disease that would gradually lead to the loss, withdrawal or diminishing of a nation's important resources or the demise of a nation if not properly, effectively and efficiently handled in time.

The conceptual metaphor in excerpt 10 is CORRUPTION IS A DISEASED ANIMAL and the following terms: **debilitating** which describes anything that reduces one's strength or energy; **fight** or fight back which means to resist or retaliate when attacked or to make a determined effort to recover after initial defeat or difficulty; **unforgiving** which is the act of being unwilling or unable to forgive and **beast** are used to describe the nature and acts carried out by corruption. In other words, corruption is an unforgiving, dangerous and desperate animal that mercilessly attacks anyone who has fought it or tries to fight it.

Conclusion

In excerpts 1 – 10, Soyinka uses four conceptual metaphors: CORRUPTION IS AN ANIMAL, CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE, CORRUPTION IS A DISEASED PERSON and CORRUPTION IS A DISEASED ANIMAL to decry the ills of corruption. He uses animal, mathematics, disease and person metaphor to exemplify, portray, epitomise and represent the “metamorphosis” of corruption in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large, in order to create and broaden one’s horizon on the characteristics of corruption and the corrupt, with the hope that by being well informed on the demerits of corruption, all stakeholders, whether young or old, would do what it takes to eradicate or slow down the pace of this canker. The overriding ideology therefore is that corruption is a malady that affects everybody and should be avoided at all cost.

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