

AN ABSURDIST READING OF CORRUPTION IN A PANDEMIC ERA IN NIGERIA: A CONSIDERATION OF OLA ROTIMI'S *HOLDING TALKS*

Isaiah ODE

Department of Creative Arts, Faculty of Arts,
University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria
Email: isaiahisaman@gmail.com

Abstract

The entire world was ravaged and devastated by a pandemic that came to be medically known as Covid-19 (corona virus) in 2020. Because of its contagious and deadly nature, stringent rules were put in place by various governments to help manage the situation while medical personnel worked tirelessly in search of a cure. It affected every aspect of human life; be it governance, economy, social and educational institutions. Although undesirable, it helped to expose the deep-seated level of corruption and absurdity in the Nigerian government because some government officials charged with the responsibility of protecting the citizens from the pandemic were also the ones that hoarded palliatives and siphoned other materials and provisions meant to save the same citizens from hunger and death. And some government officials that were supposed to encourage citizens to comply with the preventive rules were the ones that trivialized the seriousness of the matter. It is against this backdrop that this paper adopts the literary method as to do an absurdist reading of corruption in a pandemic era in Nigeria, using Ola Rotimi's *Holding Talks* as a textual reference. It concludes that if properly engaged, the theatre of the absurd can help to reposition a nation such as Nigeria by its redirection of its priorities.

Keywords: Theatre of the absurd, Corruption, Covid-19 pandemic, *Holding Talks* , Nigeria.

Introduction

It can be said that 2020 shook the world in a significant and dreadful way that most people decided to term it one of the worst years in human history. This was because the world was severely ravaged and devastated by a pandemic that came to be medically known as corona virus (or Covid-19). Corona virus is a "communicable disease" (Pramana et al. 1) and a "viral pneumonia with symptoms such as dry cough, fever, sore throat, dyspnea, body pain and diarrhoea" (Anyanwu et al. 2). It is a highly infectious and deadly disease that practically shutdown the world. For that reason, stringent rules were promulgated by various governments to help manage the precarious situation while medical practitioners worked tirelessly in search of

a cure. The pandemic was so unprecedented that it threw even the world's best medical scientists into confusion as its fatality rate rose astronomically within a few months after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a global pandemic on the 30 January 2020 (Amzat et al. 218), and it killed people indiscriminately. Even medical practitioners were not spared from its deadly sting because the "disease...claimed the lives of...healthcare workers and frontline staff all over the world, even in equipped and developed nations" (Mbachu et al. 944), as they strove to get a cure and save lives.

Schools, markets, offices, religious centres, clubhouses, parks and every form of activity that involved bringing people together were shut down when it became known that the virus spreads faster in crowds. Probably for the very first time in human history, adults, not just children, were encouraged to stay at home. People's businesses took a nosedive and hunger set in. Although medical scientists seem to be winning the fight against the pandemic starting from 2021 when the vaccines were released and the panic it initially generated has begun to subside, a different variants of the disease such as Omicron, Alpha, Delta and Beta have emerged. One can, therefore, argue that it will take the world a long period to fully recover from the negative effects of the pandemic.

The effect of the pandemic in Nigeria was not less devastating. Regrettably, the Nigerian government failed to care for its citizens like some other countries did while shielding their citizens from the pandemic. Instead, corruption, which is "the use of public office for private gain..." (Myint 35) took the reins. For instance, some government officials charged with the responsibility of protecting citizens from the pandemic were also the ones that hoarded palliatives and drained off other materials and provisions meant to save the same citizens from hunger and death. Similarly, some of the officials that were supposed to encourage citizens to comply with the preventive rules were the ones that trivialized the seriousness of the matter. Salaries of public servants were not paid and prices of commodities skyrocketed in the market. That included even the facemasks citizens were supposed to wear and hand sanitisers they needed to sanitise their hands to protect them from contracting the virus. The situation was absurd, a term Martin Esslin used to sum up the situation where "suddenly man sees himself faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical... [Where] all assurances of hope, all explanations of ultimate meaning have suddenly been unmasked illusions, empty chatter, whistling in the dark" (qtd. in Siuli 559).

Nevertheless, human beings will always strive to proffer solutions to societal problems to prevent their recurrence. One of the ways humans do this is through the theatre that reflects the society to correct its ills (Boal 9). Theatre, by its very social and utilitarian nature, has always responded to humans and

society's challenges. This it does by adopting a specific form that would be suitable for a particular situation. Hence, adopting the literary method as a tool of research, this article examines how the concept of 'theatre of the absurd' mirrors Nigeria and its government's corrupt practices in a pandemic era, using Ola Rotimi's *Holding Talks* as a pivot of analysis and discussion. This play is chosen because the preoccupation of the characters where they engaged in a robust conversation that holds no relevance to saving the life of a dying man perfectly mirrors the actions of the Nigerian government during the pandemic.

Corruption: A Malignant Term

Corruption is an rife malignant socioeconomic crime responsible for most calamities befalling humans on a global scale because its occurrence appears frequently in varying degrees and proportions in all the countries of the world. Corruption is as old as humanity. It is the dishonest, fraudulent, manipulative and deceitful conduct by anyone for personal gains or self-aggrandizements. Corruption is motivated by greed and selfishness that often make the corrupt individual blind and insensitive to the plight of others. Consequently, one can become corrupt if one allows oneself to be driven by hubristic or excessive interest for self and greed. Accordingly, corruption is a form of dishonesty or a criminal offence which is undertaken by a person or an organization which is entrusted with a position of authority, in order to acquire illicit benefits or abuse power for private gain ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki)). Ekibor sees it as "the unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or further his course and/or any other person at the expense of the public, in contravention of his oath of office and/or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in force" (qtd. in David Iyanda 38). One common factor that resonates in the definitions is that the criminal act is perpetrated to profit oneself or someone close. It should be noted that while an individual can be corrupt, it is not uncommon for an organization to be guilty of corruption in its operations.

Corruption is not restricted to public offices alone. It permeates every aspect of human transaction and endeavours – be it the public execution of assignments or private engagements. Vito Tanzi defined it in a more encompassing way as "the intentional non-compliance with the arm's-length principle aimed at deriving some advantage for oneself or related individuals from this behaviour" (qtd. in Begovic 2). This view embraces every activity in which corruption is likely to manifest, such as business transactions, games and official duties. A critical examination of this definition reveals two more significant factors that qualify an act as corruption. The first is that the action is intentional. This means that it is well planned, properly calculated and

willfully executed. It does not happen as a result of incompetence or oversight. Second, the act violates the prized arm's-length principle which represents fairness in every type of human's business transaction and engagement.

Corruption may involve many harmful socioeconomic activities, which include bribery, 'lobbying,' grafting, inordinate patronage, nepotism, parochialism, 'kickback,' money laundering, defalcation, extortion, cronyism, influence peddling and embezzlement. Corruption is a huge bane to growth and development. It, therefore, becomes illogical and unreasonable for any government to think it can be successful in any of its engagements when its officials are deliberately engaging in corrupt practices. Whereas corruption transcends the illegalities and dishonest activities in public offices, this paper, however, focuses on the absurdism of the corrupt practices in government and public offices during the Covid-19 pandemic era, using Ola Rotimi's *Holding Talks*. And as a way of clarification, political corruption occurs when an officeholder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for personal gain.

When Theatre is said to be Absurdist

Meaninglessness, senselessness, hopelessness, foolishness and illogicality are terms associated with absurdism. Absurdism connotes the opposition between the human search for meaning in life and the inability to find any and/or the condition in which human beings exist in an irrational universe and their lives have no meaning outside their existence. According to Al-Gburi, "the absurd refers to something that doesn't make sense. [But] in literature, the absurd school of thought (also called absurdism) is a human tendency to seek meaning and purpose in life and the inability to do so" (9). To Holman and Harmon, absurd stands for "the kind of drama that presents a view of the absurdity of the human condition by the abandoning of usual or rational devices and by the use of nonrealistic form" (qtd. in Siuli 560). Theatre of the absurd or absurdist theatre was the term critics in the mid-20th century labelled the type of drama that presented the impossibility of making rational and meaningful choices in an irrational universe. The group of French playwrights that started this form of theatre around 1950 believed that "truth consisted of chaos and lack of order, logic, or certainty, and their plays embodied this vision in a structure that abandoned cause-and-effect relationships for associational patterns reflecting illogic and chance" (Brockett and Ball 191).

This means that it usually abandons the realistic and traditional approach and deploys other unique elements such as emphasis on minimalism, use of flat characters, incongruity and incoherency in speech, plot-less plot, use of symbols, and illogicality in action. Theatre of the absurd

was first coined by the Hungarian-born critic, Martin Esslin, in his 1962 book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*. It refers to the type of play that first became popular in France after World War II, during the 1950s and 1960s, and that presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher, Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Siuli 560), in which he defines the humans' condition and struggle to make meaning in an irrational universe as basically meaningless (Brockett and Hildy 455). Camus "concluded that our situation is absurd because the human longing for clarity and certainty is met with, and forever thwarted by, the irrationality of the universe into which we have been thrown; [that] it is absurd also because we can neither rid ourselves of the desire for order nor overcome the irrationality that stands in the way of order" (Brockett and Ball 190-191).

The Nigerian government decided to shut down the country and adopted all the preventive measures developed countries like America, England, Australia, Canada, China, etc., deployed to protect their citizens from the Covid-19 pandemic so that Nigerians too will be protected from the virus. Sadly, when their corrupt practices are juxtaposed with their seemingly good speech about how to tackle the virus, the absurdity or illogicality between their speech and action is exposed. Similarly, in *Holding Talks*, Man enthusiastically engages Apprentice in a robust conversation about his kindheartedness, willingness to help and advancement in life. Yet he does nothing to save the life of a dying man lying in front of him. It is against this background that this paper is using Ola Rotimi's *Holding Talks* as a case study to do an absurdist reading of corruption in the Covid-19 pandemic era in Nigeria.

Ola Rotimi's *Holding Talks*: The Synopsis

Holding Talks is an absurdist play that creatively captures the sad reality of how humans engage in futile and endless talks where action is needed. The urge and ability to talk and communicate are part of the factors that make life enjoyable. In *Holding Talks*, however, talking is stretched to the extreme, so much so that it runs against action. While a man lies dying, gasping for breath, the other characters are engrossed in an absurd conversation that holds no relevance to saving the life of the dying man. Structured in just one scene, the play is an absurdist commentary on the tendency to talk, sermonize and debate associated with humans in general and Nigerians in particular, with the archetypal penchant to constitute committees and hold conferences without resolving an issue through a consensus action plan or taking the needed action. It resonates both institutionally and in private life, and punctures the insecurities of the poor when challenged by the grandeur of the rich as expressed by the Barber's and Apprentice's relations with Man. Written by one of Nigeria's most respected playwrights, the play is pregnant with symbols

and meanings, most of which are woven around the curse of inaction. Ola Rotimi states on the play's back cover that "in this play, nothing really gets done...because there is always some justifiable rationalization for that which really needs to be done not to be done."

Absurdist Aesthetics and Corruption in *Holding Talks* as Reflected in Nigeria in Covid-19 Pandemic Era

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic birthed a very bleak era of corruption in Nigeria. Although there have always been issues of embezzlement and diversion of public resources by public officials in Nigeria, it has never been as heartless as the ones that happened at the heart of the pandemic where people's lives were at stake. Massive resources mobilized to respond to the economic and hunger crises caused by the pandemic created opportunities for insensitive and corrupt officials to carry out their corrupt practices such as converting the resources into their properties. Many corruption prevention and law enforcement agencies were rendered handicapped to fight against this because, in addition to being confounded by the unprecedented health emergencies and economic crisis, the perpetrators of the corrupt practices were mostly those in power. This was absurd because diverting the mobilized resources did not guarantee them immunity from the pandemic. Additionally, most of these officials were among the authorities that encouraged people to stay at home to be safe from the disease. Yet, they diverted what was mobilized to keep them safe from "hunger-virus." Below are some of the absurdist aesthetics and corruption in *Holding Talks* as reflected in Nigeria during Covid-19 pandemic era.

Unnecessary Delay in the Execution of Needed Action: This is the major absurdist aesthetic that characterizes *Holding Talks* . As the play opens, we see a man walking into a Barber's shop to have a haircut. The Barber's handshakes as he is about to start doing the job but his refusal to admit this fact leads to an argument and betting between him and his customer, Man. The Barber slums in the process and lies unconscious. One would naturally expect Man to be worried about the Barber's condition and to take action that could resuscitate him. Instead, he feels triumphant as if vindicated by the Barber's predicament. The Apprentice is worried about his master and begs Man to help rush him (Barber) to the hospital because he believes that the doctor can still do something. Man engages him in a fruitless talk instead, providing justifiable rationalizations for that which is supposed to be done or not to be done. Even when the press and a policewoman are eventually invited, Man engages them in a debate that prevents them from doing their job. Barber is never attended

to. He probably would have been resuscitated but the unnecessary delay in taking the needed action contributes to the reason he dies in the play.

This unnecessary delay is reflected in the way the authority approached tackling the Covid-19 pandemic at the early stage. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the corona virus that arguably began in Wuhan, China, in December 2021, a public health emergency of international concern on the 30th of January 2020. As a reaction to this declaration, the covid-19 preparedness group was established in Nigeria on 31st January 2020 (Amzat et al. 219). Meanwhile, WHO warned Nigeria at that early stage as one of the high-risk African countries concerning the spread of covid-19 (Anyanwu et al. 2). What this projection meant was that “Africa could bear the final burden of the Covid-19 if the countries do not institute effective measures to combat the pandemic” (Amzat et al. 218). Despite this forewarning, adequate preparations were not put in place and actual actions were not taken to prevent the impending danger. For instance, “although the government had strengthened the surveillance at the airport since January 2020, Nigeria recorded its Covid-19 index case that was imported from Italy, on February 27. This raised concerns about the effectiveness of airport surveillance and, by extension, the country’s general preparedness...The pre-Covid-19 preparedness was grossly inadequate” (Amzat et al. 219).

Upon the detection of the index case, Presidential Task Force (PTF) for Covid-19 control was instituted on 9th of March 2020 and they announced that travellers from 13 covid-19 high-risk countries had been restricted from coming into the country, and Port Health Services (PHS) and Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) were to monitor the self-isolation of returnees from the affected countries from then onward (Anyanwu et al, 4; Amzat et al. 219). But it seemed it was merely a speech because “the concern from several quarters was that the ban on high-risk countries would have taken immediate effect. By the time the ban took effect, the nation had recorded more imported cases. Unfortunately, most of those who arrived in the country did not comply with the 14 days of self-isolation recommended by the NCDC” (Amzat et al. 219). As a result, it was not surprising when the NCDC disclosed that all confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country in the early stage were imported by returning travellers. The distribution of the virus during its first 30 days in Nigeria was elitist. This is in line with Amzat et al.’s submission that the majority of those that tested positive were returnees from abroad.

Air travel is predominantly elitist in Nigeria because of the high rate of poverty. The political elite also bore the early brunt of covid-19 with three state governors and some political appointees testing positive for covid-19. Due to the (initial) trend, the initial perception was that covid-

19 was a disease of the elite, who returned from international travels or had contact with the political bourgeoisie. (220)

The absurdity was that we knew how the pandemic would enter the country and measures were put in place to prevent it from coming. Yet, the measures were manipulated and suspended for the elites to come into the country. It was not as if there was any evidence that the virus would not follow them in because of their social status or was their presence in the country going to help fight the disease. It was obvious that opening the airport for them spelt doom for other citizens at that time. Yet, they were allowed to come in because of their affluence or influence. But the case would have been different if it were the poor that wanted to enter the country during that dangerous period. A time honoured dictum is that a stone that one sees coming does not blind one. But in this case, Nigeria saw Covid-19 coming but still decided to delay taking the needed action because that action was going to affect some influential citizens of the country. The consequences of this delay included economic degradation, social dislocation and breakdown and the death of hundreds of citizens.

Self-Deceit, Denial of Reality and Misplaced Religiosity: In this play, Barber's predicament is caused by self-deceit, denial of reality and foolishness. Man notices that his hand shakes. This could have been a result of severe hunger or sickness. Help could have come if he had told the truth and the situation would have been probably arrested before he slums. But he acts otherwise. He probably thinks that admitting it would make him lose his only customer for the day. Sadly, he loses his life while trying to keep a client. We see this also in the manner some authorities and organizations responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas the pandemic would have been managed to the least bearable level had every influential people responded to it with the urgency and seriousness that it deserved, they ruined that opportunity with self-deception and overzealous faith that was devoid of reasoning. For example, "many of the states underrated the pandemic potential of Covid-19, with some governors believing that God would not allow Covid-19 to be reported in their states" (Amzat et al. 222), and "many people and faith-based organizations...continued to defy the directives on social distancing and public gatherings by organizing social events, while some worship centres also conducted congregational services" (222).

This is because "Nigeria is a deeply religious country and politicians often use religion as a tool to govern" (Anyanwu et al. 9). Commenting on how the myopic view of some religious organisations and personalities contributed to the spread of the disease, Anyanwa et al. noted that "Akwa Ibom, Rivers

and Kastina states in Nigeria approved mass gatherings for religious activities on easter weekend and did not consider the transmissibility of Covid-19 when a large crowd gathered for one church service” (9). Sadly, the God these individuals hoped to protect them from contracting the virus, the reason why they were bold enough to blatantly refuse to recognize the current health challenges worldwide, and also failed to observe simple preventive measures that did not violate God’s commandments, which the government established to protect them from the pandemic, was the same God that first introduced quarantining as an effective means of preventing the spread of contagious diseases (Leviticus 13). This self-deception and baseless faith that lacked logical reasoning was partly responsible for the exponential spread of the virus.

Disappointedly, again, when the vaccines came out, Mr Yahaya Bello, the executive governor of Kogi State, made a discouraging and baseless statement that “they want to use the Covid-19 vaccines to introduce the disease that will kill you and us” (Onyeji “Nigerian Governor” par.2). The absurdity of all of this is saddening because the disease was not a spiritual attack that they needed a spiritual being to intervene on their behalf. It was arguably said that the virus came as a result of scientific experimentation in Wuhan, China (Omoera and Ogoke 147). They were supposed to reason that since it was caused by science, it would be solved with science too. And the governor that said the vaccine was not a disease did not have any alternative for us. He did not make the virus disappear either because people were dying from the pandemic. Assume we all embraced the fact and acted accordingly without blindly refusing to obey simple instructions, the virus would not have gained as much ground as it did in Nigeria. Simply put, their so-called faith in God and knowledge of him caused us many deaths.

Stealing from the Poor: This is another aspect of absurdist aesthetics and corruption that manifests in this play. Although it is subtly presented in the play, it, however, has a significant and powerful implication. The stage direction on page 14 reveals that a blind beggar and his boy-guide enter while Man and Apprentice are still having an animated discussion about the Barber’s condition. Man offers them a penny after preventing Apprentice from driving them away. Apprentice is impressed by Man’s kind gesture that he confesses that Man is a good man. However, the stage directions on page 16 offers us an insight to understand the kind of person Man truly is. As a result, readers/audiences are not fooled easily like the gullible Apprentice.

As Beggars begin to leave, passing in front of the swivel chair where Man is seated, Man extends an arm, and pulls Boy-Beggar back closer towards him...Casually Man dips his hand into Beggar’s bag,

rummaging in it in search of something...Man finds what he has been searching for. Pulls it out of the bag: a bunch of three bananas. He yanks two bananas off the stalk, tosses the remaining one back into the beggar's bag, and shoves Boy off – all done with the casualness of normal activity.

This provides a clear picture that Man's gesture towards the beggars is not free or genuine as it earlier appears. His heartlessness manifests in two more areas. The first is when the Barber slums and lies unconscious on the floor. He does not show concern for the Barber's condition of health. He tells the apprentice to do the job so that he will pay him the money. Secondly, the stage direction from 31–33 states that he collects the money and groundnut he finds in the Barber's pockets. Whereas he excuses himself by saying that Barber would no longer be needing them, it can be recollected vividly that Barber tells him on page 6 that he would not bet with all his money because he has a wife and children to care for. Because Barber lies unconscious and has no power to demand what rightfully belongs to him, Man stylishly steals from him without thinking about the welfare of the family he is leaving behind. Many of countries provided palliatives for their citizens during the first wave of Covid-19 to help them fight hunger during the lockdown. The experience was different in Nigeria. Anyanwu et al. claimed that hunger contributed to the factors that made the lockdown unbearable in Nigeria.

The lockdown...policy...impact[ed] negatively on the majority of people in Nigeria who feed and survive only by what they earn daily... [And the situation was worse] owing to little or no social welfare packages or palliative assistance provided by the government for the most vulnerable people in society. Moreover, lack of payment of salaries by state governments, increase in the price of commodities/foods and tariffs on inadequately supplied utilities like electricity [were] some factors that [made] the lockdown unbearable. (6)

And when palliatives were eventually provided they were secretly kept from the citizens until the information about their looting came out. Many videos on social media in late 2020 captured how warehouses were raided by hungry citizens. The videos also captured the horrible sight of the stampedes that led to the injury and death of some looting citizens. The raiding started in one state and other states followed. Shamelessly, some officials later came out to say that they were planning to distribute the palliatives during their birthday celebration. Disgustingly, some had printed their portrait pictures on the bags of some of the items before they were raided, while others have already sold the items to traders. The absurdism in this is immense because

the same government officials that locked their citizens indoors not to die by corona virus were the same people willing to kill them with “hunger-virus” by diverting and hoarding palliatives. It was sad to learn that our so-called political leaders were more concerned about money while the people they claimed to represent were facing imminent death from hunger. Closely related to this was the hike in commodities the poor needed to survive. For instance, the facemask that was sold for N50 before the pandemic when people were going about their daily businesses and having money to buy whatever they wanted, suddenly went up to N500 immediately after it became known that facemask was needed to fight against the virus. Yet, the government did nothing about regulating the price until the citizens saved themselves from that situation by resorting to self-made facemasks.

Wasteful Invitation and Fruitless Dependence: This is yet another absurdist aesthetic in the play. After so much debate, Man finally allows Apprentice to invite the police. It would have been better if he had supported him to carry Barber to the hospital or if he had told him to call a doctor. Even when the press and a policewoman came, no significant action is taken about Barber’s state of health. The press and the policewoman rather indulge Man in his talk and leave empty-handed afterwards. Time, energy and resources were wasted in the process. In a sense, this is reflected in the 15-man Chinese Covid-19 experts that were invited by the Nigerian government in the heat of the pandemic. It should be recalled that the disease arguably started in Wuhan, China. The battle against the pandemic was still fierce in China at the time the so-called 15-man experts were invited to Nigeria. The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) rejected the federal government's decision about the plan and “the NMA president, Francis Faduyile, in a statement said the move is a misplaced priority. He described it as “a thing of embarrassment to the membership of the association and other health workers who are giving their best in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic under deplorable working conditions” (Onyeji “Corona virus: Nigerian Doctors” par. 3). Also, “the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) advised the federal government against the plan, saying it was unnecessary to invite Chinese doctors as Nigeria was already handling the crisis effectively” (Onyeji “Corona virus: Nigerian Doctors” par. 4). But they did not listen. The Director-General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Garba Abari, said in defence of the federal government that “the Chinese medical team were only coming to share experiences with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and not to directly take charge of the fight against covid-19 pandemic in the country” (Onyeji “Corona virus: Nigerian Doctors” par. 4).

So on April 8 2020, the 15-man medical team from China arrived at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, Nigeria, in a chartered Air Peace aircraft, and the minister of health, Dr. Osagie Ehare, was at the airport to welcome them. We saw the medical team on the news and all over social media when they arrived in Nigeria. But it was rather saddening to later hear from the minister of health that they did not know the whereabouts of the Chinese experts that FG spent millions of naira to invite. This raised a lot of questions and suspicions. The invitation was both wasteful and absurd in the sense that the millions of naira that could have been used to equip and revamp our healthcare system and facilities, encourage medical research during that critical period and alleviate the citizens' economic and hunger crises were wrongly used. It was a execrable absurdity because the Chinese themselves were still suffering from the pandemic.

Pursuit of Self-Interest over the Interest of Others: This trait is noticed in the character of Man throughout the play. For instance, Man allows the press photographer to snap Barber as long as they were the parts he wants them to snap. But immediately they decide to snap the back while Man is offering them the anus, he stops them from continuing their job. A similar thing happens to the policewoman. Man wants her to ask him questions in the "internationally prescribed and recognized order." But when she could not ask the questions to follow the sequence he believes is the right process, he immediately stops cooperating with her. This implies that for things to work they must go in the direction of his interest irrespective of what is at stake. It was common knowledge that the Covid-19 pandemic was air borne and spread faster crowded environments. At least, that was what the government told us and we believed. As a result, schools, markets, clubhouses and worship centres were shut down without resistance. Celebrities that hosted people in celebration of their birthdays, like Funke Akindele, were greatly penalized for disobeying the law of social distance.

It was, therefore, disappointing to see that because of elections the same social distance parameter was disregarded and caution was thrown to the wind by the same authorities that told us the disease spread crowded situations. The country was supposed to be in a state of health emergency and a sane person would have expected that political campaigns and elections would be put on hold until the threat of the pandemic was completely obviated. But this was not the case. Those in the 'corridors of power' were more interested in the elections than protecting the citizens from the pandemic because they wanted to be sure of their second tenure. Their oppositions did not behave any different because they were also more interested in pursuing their self-interest than the concern about Covid-19. Consequently, the citizens

were exposed to the disease just because their so-called political leaders were blinded by their selfish interests. This action later became part of the reasons many citizens started disbelieving the existence of the disease and claiming that the government was lying to them.

Conclusion

Corruption is a cancerous socioeconomic crime that can ruin a nation faster than a deadly pandemic, if not checked. Although it is as old as man on the surface of the earth, people must not allow it to become their culture because it is impossible to enjoy peace, growth and development in a place where dishonest, fraudulent, manipulative and deceitful conducts are given room to flourish. Sadly, this is gradually becoming a way of life among Nigerian politicians or political class as reflected during the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. But as a tool for correcting social ills, theatre could be employed for this purpose. Interestingly, the theatre has learned to adapt to new challenges to rise to societal defence whenever the need arises. Consequently, its absurdist form is best suited for the situation where elected leaders may greedily decide to exploit an unfavourable socioeconomic condition such as a pandemic outbreak as an opportunity to steal and embezzle public funds while the death of their citizens is imminent. This is because the absurdist theatre can make a mockery of corrupt practices and hold perpetrators in derision to bring about positive change in society. Theatre professionals should make it their duty to perform absurdist theatre to always mock corruption and its perpetrators. Such an engagement could serve as a check of corrupt practices that can lead to a gradual positive change and development. And since absurdist theatre emphasizes minimalism in every aspect of its performance, it is the best theatre practice to embrace in a pandemic era where a large gathering is discouraged.

Works Cited

- Al-Gburi, Alhasan A. A. "Absurdism in Modern Age." *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 8.1 (2019): 9-14. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346656610>
- Amzat, Jimoh et al. "Corona virus Outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and Socio-Medical Response during the First 100 Days." *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 98 (2020):218-224. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc>
- Anyanwu, Madubuike U. et al. "A Perspective on Nigeria's Preparedness, Response and Challenges to Mitigating the Spread of Covid-19." 12 Nov. 2021. <<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/challenges/pdf>>.
- Begovic, Boris. "Corruption: Concepts, Types, Causes and Consequences." 8 Oct. 2021. <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265364211>>.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Urizen Book, 1979.

- Brockett, Oscar G. and Ball, Robert J. *The Essential Theatre*. New York: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011.
- Brockett, Oscar G. and Hildy, Franklin J. *History of the Theatre*. New York: Pearson Education, 2010.
- Iyanda, David O. "Corruption: Definitions, Theories and Concepts." *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter)* 2.4 (2012). <https://www.arabianjbm.com/pdfs/4>
- Mbachu, Chioma et al. "Covid-19 Infection: Knowledge, Attitude, Practices, and Impact among Healthcare Workers in a South-Eastern Nigerian State." *The Journal of Infection in Developing Countries* 14.9 (2020): 943-952. <https://jdc.org/journal/article/download>
- Myint, U. "Corruption: Causes, Consequences and Cures." *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* 7.2 (2000): 33-58. <https://www.unescap.org/sites/apdj-7-2-2-Myint>
- Omoera, Osakue S. and Ogoke, Chinedu. "An Examination of Denials and Conspiracy Theories on Covid-19 in the Nigerian Media Ecosystem." *Journal of Development Communication* 32.1(2021):145-151. <http://jdc.journals.unisel.edu.my/ojs/index.php/jdc/article/view/196>
- Onyeji, Ebuka. "Nigerian Governor Who Lied About Covid-19 Discourages Vaccine Use." 13 Dec. 2021 <www.premiumtimesng.com>.
- Onyeji, Ebuka. "Corona virus: Nigerian Doctors Reject Country's Plan to Invite Chinese Medical Team." 1 Jan. 2022 <<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/health/health-news/>>.
- Pramana, Cipta et al. "Health Workers and Doctors Death during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia." *International Journal of Medical Reviews and Case Reports* 5.8 (2021): 1-7. <https://www.researchgate.net/.../Medicien/Pandemics>
- Rotimi, Ola. *Holdings Talks*. Ibadan: University Press, 1979.
- Siuli, Shantanu. "The Theatre of the Absurd Shows the Failure of Man Without Recommending a Solution." *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies (IJELR)* 4. 3 (2017): 558 - 565. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322340927>
- Wikipedia. "Corruption." 5 Oct. 2021 <<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/>>