

Doublespeak in the Politics of Nigeria's Anti-Graft Campaign

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Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain and pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.

(Jeremy Bentham, 2000: 88)

Abstract

The Nigerian anti-graft crusade (1999-2007) amplifies the mental picture that has cut rendered the line between truth and falsity nebulous, with the leadership suddenly becoming a frenetic stickler for transparency and accountability. Against the backdrop of that sudden reality, this critical undertaking attempts a semantic and political evaluation of some discourse and concrete instances of the 'struggle', as they influenced knowledge perspectives and development initiatives. In pursuance of this objective, the context of situation, lexical, cum, lexemic and syntactic paradigms of semantic analysis are found desirable as research methods. Enabled by semantic critical stratagems, the narratological device in particular, this critique saw the anti-graft crusade as a bundle of contradictions whose positive values only glittered through superficialities that were manifest in the wide chasm between appearance and reality, between speech and action.

Keywords: Semantics, Corruption, Selectivity

Discussion of some Relevant Quotes

1. “We are resolutely committed to fairness and justice as the basis for dealing with all issues affecting the lives of Nigerians. We will punish and reward without fear or favour. Again, I say there will be no sacred cow [...] For those who are tempted to believe, for instance, that our struggle against corruption is utopian, I say to them that we have no choice in the matter. Corruption is not only illegal; it is bad because it corrupts the very soul of our community. In practical terms, it makes nonsense of all planning and budgeting. It wastefully depletes our inadequate resources. It breeds cynicism. It promotes inequality. It renders it almost impossible for us to address the objectives of equity and justice in our society with seriousness. And in the end, it destroys the social fabric of our society, leaving each individual on his own; to do only whatever is best for himself. Corruption corrupts, destroys and kills”. -- President Olusegun Obasanjo, during a National broadcast on October 1, 1999. (**The Punch, November 10, 2006: 2**).

This is part of Obasanjo’s message to Nigerians few months after assuming office as a democratically elected President. It turns out to be a rhetorical demonstration of his resolve to be at the head of a transparent government and not a forthright intention to be above board in managing state coffers. This paper will show the semantic vacuity in his submission that corruption is ‘illegal’, ‘corrupts’, ‘kills’, ‘destroys’ and ‘promotes inequality’.

2. “The PDP (People’s Democratic Party) is effectively a *loose patronage network* designed for contesting elections rather than a formal political party based on ideology, so loyalties are not strong [...] On the political front, the institute said, “In any event, the battle for the PDP candidacy will dominate the political scene for most of the year. A divisive contest is anticipated that could split the ruling party”. --The Institute of International Finance Incorporated (**The Punch, April 6, 2005:8**) (Emphasis mine).

The Institute of International Finance Incorporated is a club of the world’s leading bankers. The umbilical cord relationship between party politics and a nation’s economy could have prompted the body to beam its searchlight on Nigeria, knowing full well the floundering foundations of the ruling party, whose members glorify selfish interests to the detriment of people’s needs. One of such egoist concerns is Obasanjo’s third term ambition, which the report alluded to.

3. “Notwithstanding imperfections of the present crusade, operations of the system have shown they are determined to win credibility by at least punishing those who run foul of the law” – Paul Odili. (**Odili, August 17, 2007: 43**)

In the wake of some former governors (Uzor Kalu, Saminu Turaki and Chimaroke Nnamani) being arraigned in court for corruption, Mr. Paul Odili is encouraged to express hope that at least there is a glimmer of hope in the fight against graft. The conviction and sentencing of Dipriye Alamieyeseigha to a prison term is cheering

news to him. The commentator, is, however, not incautious of the political twists and turns that may bedevil the crusade, bearing in mind his view that Alamiyeseigha received what he himself described as “rap on the wrist” (a 2-year jail term) punitive sentence for an offence that was very grave. Odili is glad that though the sentence is a “rap on the wrist”, “Governor Alamiyeseigha would never come close to public office again”. However, Odili’s euphoria on Alamiyeseigha not holding public office again, one may depose, is premature as is revealed in the relationship between politics and favouritism in the recent pardon granted the convict by sitting President Goodluck Jonathan.

4. “This election is a do-or-die affair for me and PDP. This coming election is a matter of life and death for the PDP and Nigeria. – President Obasanjo on the 2007 elections”. (**The Punch, February 11, 2007:13**)

The then President came up with this emotive outburst when he was campaigning for his party’s candidate in the 2007 presidential election. The question that this statement arouses is, why should an election be a do-or-die affair? This paper reveals the dread-of-the-future sentiment that underscores the statement, especially if Obasanjo is called upon to account for his stewardship if a rival party wins the election. This paper would reveal Obasanjo’s Machiavellian trajectory to the statement. His “do-or-die” sensibility matches the description of the 2007 elections as the worst in the history of Nigeria.

5. “The political power of Nigeria is so immense that there is so much the country can do to change the socio-economic barometer of Africa. Nigeria is the only Black Country that will be able to stand up to all other developed nations in defence of Africa. Nigerians have enough potential; at least the country can control about 35 percent of political power in Africa. *But Nigeria is too corrupt*” – Jerry John Rawlings (**Nigerian Tribune Editorial, 12 July, 2007: 8**) (Emphasis mine).

This Rawlings’ assertion is used to argue the trite truth that Nigeria is deeply enmeshed in sleaze. In the newspaper editorial, titled “Rawlings’ Challenge to Nigeria”, three issues were raised from Rawlings’ speech at the Nightshift Coliseum in Lagos. They are leadership as the causal factor of corruption, a bloody revolution as a salve and therapy to the corruption sore and malady, and the big-for-nothingness image of Nigeria, one created by successive corrupt leaderships. The editorial added that unlike Ghana where the ruling party (Rawlings’ party) lost an election, political corruption in Nigeria will not allow it to happen. In fact, Rawlings’ party has since claimed back the presidency, again from the grip of a ruling party, showing that Ghanaian politics, unlike Nigeria’s, has transcended atavistic norms of holding tightly corruptly to the reins of power. All these converge to convey an exhortation to Nigeria: righteousness of incorruptible minds, embodied fundamentally in leadership, exalts a nation.

6. “The failure of the PDP at this point will be calamitous for Nigeria” – President Obasanjo. (**The Punch, November 22, 2006:1**)

Like Obasanjo's statement above, this contention accentuates the self-glorifying and self-adulatory posture of the party and the Obasanjo personality, a posture that only sinews of governmental power that are got at any corruption-induced cost can launder. This declaration is part of Obasanjo's belligerent behavioural foreword to the 2007 elections. No wonder the particular election which he midwived left blood, tears and corruption in its wake, the vicious course of the party's gargantuan electoral fraud-filled victory.

7. "Our report contains two clear messages. First, that the 2007 election process was not credible, and in view of the lack of transparency and evidence of fraud, there can be no confidence in these results. Second, that an urgent and comprehensive reform is required to improve the framework and conduct of future elections. The elections were marred by very poor organisation; lack of transparency; widespread and procedural irregularities; substantial evidence of fraud; widespread voter disenfranchisement; lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates; and numerous incidents of violence" – European Union Election Observation Mission. **(The Punch, August 24, 2007:8)**

Obasanjo's statements 4 and 6 above clearly come under scrutiny in the light of this EU report about the 2007 elections. The report is openly censorious of the political corruption that was pervasive during the polls; and political corruption is the source of all shades of corruption, political power being the source of the authority to manage and mismanage governmental funds. "EU writes off April poll", as the title of the newspaper news item reads, deplores in its totality the conduct of the polls, countenancing interpretatively the resolve of the President to achieve victory for his PDP party through any possible method, governmental power being in his grip.

Introduction

Taken one after the other, the sentiments reeled out above are expressive of the jaundiced and frank affections that permeate the anti-graft leaning of Nigeria's democratic order between 1999 and 2007. From the express disavowal of bias in the first, through the open condemnation of the 2007 elections in the last, the impassioned longing for a sleaze-free society manifests in a cross between structuralist poetics and Machiavellian end-prospecting stylistics, projecting itself through a polymorphous trajectory, filled paradoxically with enlightenment and deviousness, simply due to the myriad of sophistries that are deployed to secure argumentative approvals, reflecting what Kiekagaard explains as "man in revolt".(Quoted in Pattison, 1997: 17). Beneath the revolutionary anti-corruption outburst lies a personal struggle towards self-gratification as "the bourgeois social order" (17) which it represents is itself "revolutionary" but only "in a surreptitious and cowardly manner" (17), which enables it to let "everything remain standing but cunningly steals away its meaning" (17). The Nigerian experience magnifies, in its distasteful extreme, the view that the "whole bourgeois social order is directed to man's material comfort" (17), that "bourgeois religion, philosophy and morality are all similarly characterized by the same quality of worldliness". (17). The upshot is a study in elitist power configuration where "there is an unceasing movement of individuals and elites from higher to lower levels and from lower to higher levels" (Varma, 2005: 145),

resulting tragically and ironically in a “considerable increase of the degenerate elements in the classes which still hold power [...]” (145). Power and authority effectively become indistinct, making a fact of Bertrand Russell’s ire against the concentration of either political or economic power in an individual. Russell, against that background, claims that authority is “the chief anti-thesis of liberty” (Varma, 174). Viewing the Nigerian context through id-psychological criticism of D.H. Lawrence, the elitist grip of the anti-corruption swagger-stick is ostensibly not a search for liberty but a psychopathological scrutiny of power levels, as “they [the elite] seemed to seek, not liberty, but a gloomy and tyrannical sense of power [...]. They wanted to have power over all immediate life” (Wright, 1998:43) and turn the state into their personal and filial estate through an efflux of ambiguously deceptive statements as the fourth seems to reveal.

Essaying a research on Nigeria’s anti-graft crusade requires a grand exercise in book-publication. However, to serve the purpose of this exercise, the engagement with the issue will be restrictive---though not reductive – but illuminating. It is an explication of how *match politic* or power politics makes an interesting in-road into the art of rhetoric, providing a coign-of-vantage for literacy perspectives to flower and flourish, especially when disingenuousness, the infamous twin of the negative consummation of power game, is very much twinned with the nation’s political leadership. The semantic and semiotic field being extensive in scope, this analysis explores a definably few of its various elements in various degrees, the context of situation, lexical-lexemic and syntactic paradigms however attracting luminosity due to the political and rhetorical outpouring of the actors involved. Another veritable critique instrument in this study is a sense of structural psychoanalysis; of explaining the mental division of the subject(s) in their rhetorical pursuit of an unblemished polity.

An insight into the contextual analysis that predominates in this respect is derivable from the scandal in the House of Representatives – ‘Etteagate’ (The *Punch*, August 24, 2007: 9). Two of Mrs. Etteh’s supporters, arguing against the grain of overwhelming disapprobation of the Speaker’s conduct, opines thus: “The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) which is supposed to streamline the modalities for implementing the due process mechanism is yet to be set up by the presidency. The BPP when set up by the Presidency will clearly enunciate the processes for the award of contracts by Government and its departments and agencies” (<http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=91174>). This is at best legerdemain steeped in red herring, for modalities had always ‘clearly’ existed for contract approvals, and infractions against them had always been punished. The Bureau of Public Procurement Bill is just to strengthen the arms of the law in the fight against graft.

This notwithstanding, disambiguating the pro-Etteh BPP statement seems easy. This is an overstretching of the ‘emotive’ or ‘evaluative’ meaning argument to the semantics of ‘renovation’ and ‘upgrading’ that was initially intended to stave off the controversy that then rumbled in the House. Typifying this shade of semantics also is the conclusion by the Idoko Panel that investigated the scandal that “due process was not *completely* followed” (<http://www.thisdayonline.com/nview.php?id=91174>) despite having found the Speaker culpable on about nine of the ten points of reference. One of the two Etteh people believed he had found argumentative support in Idoko’s word ‘completely’ to posit that “[...] there was substantial compliance with due process”, very much incognizant of the premise of Idoko’s conclusion that Etteh had been found culpable on nine of the ten points of reference. The Etteh supporter ignored the premise and concentrated on the conclusion, thereby euphorically matching the phrase ‘substantial compliance’ with Idoko’s ‘was not completely followed’. In

the main, both Idoko and the supporter were blinded by politics on the way to committing the straw man's fallacy, that of appealing to ignorance (*argumentum ad ignorantiam*). Even if Etteh substantially complied or did not completely comply with the rules of procurement, her culpability was already assured with the fact that she flouted some rules. Having flouted some rules has made her guilty. Rules guiding contract approval do not stipulate obeying some rules and committing infraction against others. The lexeme '*completely*' is a stylistic ploy to mitigate the guilt of the Speaker, which smacks of nothing but semantic subterfuge.

Again, a consideration of the quotations at the beginning reveals the inanity in the first as it is rendered nugatory by the second, fifth and seventh excerpts. The fourth and sixth quotes are simply an egocentric reduction of the Nigerian state to individualist misconceptions, thus presaging the analytical course of this critical engagement.

Institutional Consciousness about Corruption

The coming into being of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act in December 2002 reappraises thoughts on the retrograde structures of the Nigerian state. Corruption, all seem to acquiesce, is the bane of the nation. The Obasanjo civil regime, cognizant of the "context of culture" (Leckie-Tarry and Birch, 20) reality that serves as sinew for the decadence – the institutional and ideological backgrounds – announces a combative campaign against the malaise. Outside this 'pathematic role' (Martin&Ringham, 2000: 99) display lies a confluence of "cognitive and pragmatic" dimensions to the President's concern. Instructively, the 'conative' function of his appeal is quite understood within the construct of these three 'metafunctions' of contextual categorization; 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' (Leckie-Tarry and Birch, 23) knowledge acquisition "schemata". Having initiated the whole anti-graft process as the enunciator, the lapsed President's pronouncement will engage this author's 'hypotactic' (Martin&Ringham, 72) criticism as the gap between the enunciator and the enunciatee (EFCC, Nigerians, the Senate of the National Assembly, etc.) is loaded with a flux of 'embrayage' and 'debrayage' elements, putting the actors in the anti-graft crusade in a concentric circle of euphoria, aphoria and dysphoria. A critical sub-headed critique involving the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on one hand and the Petroleum Technology and Development Fund (PTDF) scandal conflated with the former President's personality – since he, at most stages of his presidency, personalized and personified the crusade — on the other hand — is developed to explain the signifying course of the anti-corruption cause.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission: A Semantic Overview

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) despite having in the statute books regulatory and punitive clauses against all sorts of financial crimes has proven to be the most effective institution in the zest to stop the rape of the nation's treasury. It is widely agreed that "after a critical assessment of the operation of the agency today, many are wont to believe that it is to the credit of the Obasanjo government that the EFCC succeeded, to a large extent in curbing the pervasive malaise of corruption and creating a climate of fear among corrupt public office holders and their collaborators in the private sector" (Ebonugwo, 2007: 42). The phrase '*climate of fear*' (42) aptly recognizes the hydra-headed reach of the

body. This commentator also opines that “the success of the EFCC” during Obasanjo’s time “was attributable to the wide latitude” it enjoyed then; he concludes: “the EFCC operated with little or no government interferences” (42). Later developments disprove this. The statement of the Attorney general of the Federation that “the Federal Government would soon adopt measures to curb the perceived *excesses* of the EFC” (42), to get it ‘*redefined*’ and ‘*repositioned*’ (42) to reflect the *pro-constitutional* thinking of the Yar’Adua government, which borders on the rule of law and not the ‘*rule of malice*’ (42) speaks volumes of the awe-inspiring nature – in both positive and negative evaluations – of the organisation. Many of EFCC’s critics had earlier seen it as Obasanjo’s passion to *settle scores* (42) with his political enemies. The italicized words and phrases provide a gripping picture of the passions that attend the “operational efficiency” (42) and deficiency of the body. Its ‘climate of fear’ collocational affinities explain its dread not just to culpable minds but also to imagined enemies of Obasanjo’s lapsed regime. Due to this minatory climate, some governors are reported, after losing their constitutional immunity, to be essaying changing climate. The “climate of fear”, ‘excesses’ (42), ‘rule of malice’ (42) and ‘settle scores’(42) constitute a ‘hyponymous’ (Saeed, 2003: 68) challenge to the semantic universality that the body is purposed for, entrenching it in a cultural reality that is peopled with emotive value presuppositions. Take a look at the particular instance: for spurning Obasanjo’s overtures to dump his elective intention, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko was assailed and harassed by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo with an EFCC threat (Idowu, 2007: 9), even when no petition had gotten to the body concerning any financial indecorum, lending credence to the score-settling concern about the EFCC. It was an ill-conceived allegation cloaked in Obasanjo’s thymic (dysphoric) anticipation of a Mimiko victory in the Ondo State gubernatorial race.

The Chairman of the EFCC, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, an ‘actant’ (Martin&Ringham, 18) in this regard seems not capable of lightening the burden of guilt on the body, as he too embarked on a journey of mischievous ambiguity and double-speak, atimes triple-speak, evidencing an amnesiac disjunction with temporal sensibilities. Ribadu issued three contradictory statements concerning his boss then, Chief Obasanjo. In the first, he said the body was, in transitive fashion, still investigating some alleged financial misconduct against the President (<https://lists.mayfirst.org/pipermail/friends/2007-January/001512.html>); sometime afterward, his story was that he was not being investigated; in yet another forum, he concluded surprisingly that the EFCC found no substance in the allegations against Obasanjo, (<http://www.punchontheweb.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200709260283853>). Another instance of Ribadu’s ungainly articulation of “context as a dynamic entity” (Leckie-Tarry, 18) is who the chairman of the EFCC is answerable to. In the heat of the PTFD debacle, during a public hearing at the Senate, undermining the Act that engenders it (EFCC), Ribadu posed this riposte: “how can you say that we don’t have the right to submit the Report to the President, if anything goes wrong in the PTFD, who will you report to? Is it not the President? We must report to the person who is in charge of government, the President, and that is the way it should be “(The *Punch*, Thursday December 14, 2006: 2). A mutation could have taken place in the cerebral space of Ribadu between December 14, 2006 and September 19, 2007, when he, at the inauguration of the Senate Committee on Narcotics and Hard Drugs, said “he was answerable to the National Assembly and that he would go whichever way the National Assembly directed him” (The *Sun*, September 24, 2007: 2). A bitter Nigerian seizes on this. Hear him:

This is the exact opposite of Ribadu's position under former President Olusegun Obasanjo. When Ribadu appeared before the Senate, in the session in which he said 31 Governors were under investigation, some Senators suggested that the EFCC deserved to be independent of the Presidency and that they would amend the EFCC Act to ensure that. Ribadu, however, roundly rejected the offer, saying he was comfortable with the arrangement that placed him under President Obasanjo, who, he said, did not interfere in any way with his job. We also recall that when Justice Inumidun Akande of the Lagos High Court gave her landmark judgment in the case between Otunba Oyewole Fasawe and the EFCC, that it was illegal for EFCC to have submitted its report on the investigation of Fasawe to President Obasanjo, Ribadu arrogantly retorted that EFCC, was legally bound to report to the President

(<http://nm.onlinenigeria.com/templates/default.aspx?a=10729&template=print-article.htm>).). (Emphasis mine)

It is also on record that Ribadu also denounced the amendment of the EFCC Act by the Senate, which makes the agency more answerable to the National Assembly. The critic goes on:

So, what has changed between then and now that Ribadu is shopping for a new institution to control EFCC. The answer is obvious. Obasanjo, who encouraged and indeed promoted the disregard for the rule of law, is no longer in the saddle. Ribadu is apparently not comfortable working within the bounds of the rule of law and will rather go shopping for a new master than submitting to the rule of law instinct of the Yar'Adua administration. The question remains: why can't EFCC work within the rule of law to discharge its duties? This man, Ribadu, is an outlaw [...] (*Daily Sun*, September 24, 2007: 2)

The man concludes that the war against corruption is being privatized by individual egos: "It was the attempt to do this that compromised the integrity of the war against corruption when it became a tool of political persecution by Obasanjo and Ribadu" (*Daily Sun*, September 24, 2007: 2).

These phraseologies: 'political persecution', (*Daily Sun*, September 24, 2007: 2), 'rule of law' (Ebonugwo, 2007: 42) and 'integrity' (*Daily Sun*, September 24, 2007: 2), are part of the lexical and phrasal paraphernalia in which the EFCC is clad, the supposed contributors to its credibility attrition. Another commentator, referring to Obasanjo's willful comments, especially his groundless allegation of corruption against Dr. Mimiko, agrees that man's conclusion: "when you put these unpresidential comments together, you begin to see some sense in the allegation that [the] EFCC may after all, be a horse whip in Aso Rock to be used against perceived opponents of government" (Onwukwe, February 11, 2007:14).

Again, Ribadu, speaking at ThisDay Global Conference at Astoria Hotel, New York, ignorant of the semantic contradictions that would play out after all his statements are analysed, said "Obasanjo, ought to be given credit for initiating the anti-corruption war" when he was responding to why he had not arrested former President Obasanjo and former Minister for Works, Chief Tony Anenih. Defending them, he said the "EFCC found out that it (Works Ministry) got less than N50 billion instead of N300 billion vote"-

<http://www.punchontheweb.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200709260283853>). Yet he saw nothing wrong in how nothing concrete happened with the N50billion. Agreeing, though unconsciously and not cognizant of the semantic fullness of his statement, that the two were culpable, he said: “there are worse criminals than Obasanjo and Anenih” (<http://www.punchontheweb.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200709260283853>). Interpretation: Obasanjo and Anenih are criminals but some are more criminal than them. In the same forum, a seemingly confused Ribadu even “challenged anyone with proof that Obasanjo and Anenih had a case to answer to come to the EFCC office” (<http://www.punchontheweb.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200709260283853>) after he had, by interpretative conclusion, called them criminals. Responding to a question from the *Punch* correspondent, he clarified that he was not giving Obasanjo and Anenih a clean bill of health because he said the EFCC was not in the business of issuing clearance to anybody. Another contradiction! He had cleared the duo in one of the statements in that forum, and had already cleared Obasanjo in many fora prior to this. That he even affirmed in a Wikileaks disclosure that Obasanjo “was cleverly covering up his tracks”

<http://saharareporters.com/article/obasanjo%E2%80%99s-hypocrisy-eyes-ribadu>) after adjudging him guiltless on many occasions makes nonsense of his candour about fighting corruption. If “Nigeria is going through a moral crisis of an incredible proportion” (Ribadu, 2007: 42) as Ribadu once averred, it may not be out of place to place him (Ribadu) at the epicentre of the emergency.

The *integrity* and *credibility* (*Vanguard*, [Guardian Library, August 17, 2007]) lexemic inference in the EFCC crusade seems to be its albatross, and “the war [...] cannot be said to have started until the EFCC is able to convince Nigerians that there are indeed no sacred cows” (The *Guardian*, August 3, 2007: 27). While the Federal Government may have succeeded in fighting graft to some extent, “its indifference to alleged cases of fraud and corruption by some individuals gives credence to the accusation that there are some *untouchables* in the crusade” (Epia, 2006: 57) (Emphasis mine). That the three italicized words exist in a world of relational opposition in the semantic totality of the EFCC forces into reality the dread and threat of the lexeme ‘selectivity’ (Ishiekwe, September 26, 2006: 32), the clog in the body’s drive to win hearts and minds. A sort of collocational political consciousness driven by ‘lineal’ (‘colineal’ and ‘ablinal’) (Palmer, 1996: 109) relational convictions seems to have ensnared the organization’s operational mindset. Like an “alsatian dog” (Abdulah, W. and Anaba, I, 2007: 43), the EFCC bares its fangs towards a pre-charted human course, desirably creating syntagmatic (Palmer, 68) relations between *selectivity* and *untouchables* on one hand, and *integrity* and *credibility* on the other. Few cases will suffice to buttress this uneasy connection. The “ablinal and colineal relationships” (Palmer, 109) between President Obasanjo and Dr Julius Mankanjuola, the latter being a nephew of the former, may have allowed the latter to flee the country after being put on trial for allegedly helping himself, among others, to N421 million belonging to the Ministry of Defense. The then Attorney General of the Federation instituted, albeit laughably and corruptively, a *noule prosequi* arrangement, and advised impliedly by his masters, the fish, let off the hook, swam into deep waters, vantaged by filial affiliations (Epia, 2006: 57). The EFCC remained unusually muted about it. The hyponymic immanence of Chief Bode George in the Peoples Democratic Party’s family, he being the then Deputy National Chairman (South), could also have influenced visceral commitments of the EFCC towards his alleged financial misfeasance at the Nigeria Ports Authority while he was the Chairman. Quoting from the Report of a

Presidential panel chaired by Ribadu, a concerned individual expresses his exasperation at the EFCC's reluctance to prosecute George:

most of the appraisal officers of NPA contributed to gross overpricing of the contracts as they willingly connived with the appropriate approving authorities to achieve this aim. This observation was based on the confessional statements made by some of the appraisal officers to the EFCC. Contracts were deliberately split to fall within the approval limits of the various approving authorities of the NPA [...] It was therefore expected that as consistent with the fashion of the EFCC, George would have been arrested and at least made to assist nailing those who perpetrated the alleged fraud. But unfortunately, that has not been the case as the PDP top notcher is one of the arrowheads of the alleged third term agenda of President Obasanjo (Epia, 2006: 57).

An opposition party release “rightly observed that the prosecution of the PDP Chieftain was the “only way the present administration’s fight against corruption could discharge itself of the selective approach the crusade has assumed of late” (Epia, 57). It should however be noted that this paper was written before Bode George was convicted and jailed, not during the Obasanjo regime but the Yar’Adua-Goodluck administration. While the ex-governor of Plateau State was being hounded by the EFCC over his alleged misappropriation of a N1 billion ecological fund, ex-Deputy Senate President, the compass of the ill-fated third term at the Senate, Ibrahim Mantu, to whom he allegedly gave N10 million from the booty, is a free man, EFCC saying nothing about it. All these point to the ‘sacred cow’ (Epia, 57) grouse of critics. Ribadu can, therefore not be taken seriously when he issues sincere statements taking into account the litany of his paradoxical pronouncements, most of which border on self-righteousness and self-glorification.

This paper will be offensively incomplete without adverting to the semantic fiendishness in the words “doctored” and “manipulation”, a ‘polysemic’ (Palmer, 86), hyponymous and synonymous extension of the selectivity semantic brand, that reared their discriminatory hideousness in the Olusegun Obasanjo EFCC-inspired corruption list, which, he pounced on to stop his opponents from contesting the 2007 general elections. These and many more unstated countenance the conviction that “Obasanjo has not been able to convince all Nigerians that elements of the Orwellian state, where some animals are more equal than others are not at play in the anti-corruption crusade” (Epia: 57). The charges of double standards and doublespeak continue to resonate and with the story of how ex-Attorney-General, Mr. Micheal Kaase Andoakaa, allegedly aided ex-governor of Delta Ibori’s acquittal, though temporarily, in an English Court, words relating to preferential semiotics will continue to dominate the lexical pages of the anti-corruption process and permanently constitute iconic challenges to its conceptual frame despite the laudable achievements, many they are, of the anti-corruption bodies. It was, therefore, very coincidental that immediately Andoakaa was dismissed, Ibori, knowing that he no more had his (Andoakaa’s) jaundiced legal cover, fled to Dubai. The EFCC, with the aid of International Police (INTERPOL), ensured that the United Arab Emirate authorities placed him under house arrest, during which he fought against being extradited to Britain to face money-laundering charges. He lost that

battle. Although this Andoakaa-Ibori issue did not happen during the period under review, it is an execrable extension of its manipulative corruption wars.

Probably the most notorious of words that are made popular in the anti-graft war is “plea bargaining”. The term became popular with the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission due to the high number of cases of corruption. It then became necessary for the cases to be quickly dispensed with so as to save adjudicatory time and cost;

hence plea bargaining. Plea bargain is a process whereby the prosecutor and the accused reach a mutually accepted agreement to speedily conclude a case with the accused pleading guilty and then ‘compensated’ with a lighter sentence. However, the legal instrument is now being subjected to political abuse because since it has not been codified and a legal framework erected for its use, both the judge and the prosecutor, *sans* any statutory punitive measure, now decide how long the accused will spend in jail, the judge having been influenced by the executive. Through this, the ruling party exploits the lithe nature of legality to give its corrupt governors soft landing, and it finds in judges willing accomplices in the subversion of the resolve to curb or rid the Nigerian society of official kleptomania, making plea bargain “an unfortunate foray into the Nigerian legal system” (*Nigerian Tribune*, April 27, 2009: 42). With plea bargain, corrupt officials only suffer indignity and a partial loss of what has been stolen. The indignity may even be wiped off by state pardon as in the case of the former governor of Balyesa State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha. Other beneficiaries of the legal Nigerianised contraption are former Inspector-General of Police, Tafa Balogun, former Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Oceanic Bank (now a part of ECO Bank), Cecilia Ibru, former governor of Edo State, Lucky Igbinedion, former governor of Delta State, James Ibori, and Mr. JohnYakubu Yusuf, a former director in the Police Pension Office.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC) has had no mention because it has maintained an aggressive but low profile stance, a situation engineered by Chief Obasanjo since the subtlety of his political interests are wrought through the EFCC. The ICPC has apart from this also complained of being underfunded at a point in time (*Saturday Punch*, June 2, 2007: 13 and Abdulah, W. and Anaba, I, August 17, 2007: 43). Those notes of semantic prejudice that were extracted from the EFCC operations notwithstanding, the fact that it has secured 200 convictions as enunciated by Mr Osita Nwajah, the commission’s ex-Head of Media, presupposes a sort of “realization” (Martin&Ringham,108) in the semantic ‘quest’ (107) perception, and gives cause for hope, a sense of aphoric disposition.

The Semio-semantic Conceptualisation of the PTDF Scandal *vis-a-vis* Obasanjo's Anti-Corruption Posturing

If corruption is defined as “abuse of public office for private gains” (Ribadu, 2007: 42), or “the misuse of private or public funds/office, power/position for private benefit”, the Petroleum Technological Development Fund scandal, which former President Olusegun Obasanjo initiated to rubbish the image of his deputy, Atiku Abubakar, is a classic instance of how “principalities usually come to grief when the transition is being made from limited power to absolutism”, (Machiavelli, 2003: 35) of how the self-preservative instinct of the ego is deflated when confronted with the reality principle, of how “the interplay of forces within the mind, arising from the tensions that develop when instinctual drives meet the necessities of external reality” (Wright: 9) is fore-grounded, all because private life is muddled up with public responsibilities. The ensuing confrontation, apart from the representational course (to effect change) that it takes – the thrust of this exegesis – is a quintessential mirror in which Machiavellian principles of sustaining a power hierarchy and hermeneutic considerations of the chasm between utilitarian proclamations and ego-driven ‘modalities’ (Martin&Ringham, 85) are perceived.

Punctuating the EFCC attack on Atiku with a choreographed meeting with ten editors from ten frontline organizations from the United States, Chief Obasanjo resorts to high-level and rhetoric-loaded grandstanding, one laced with proprietary control of power pedals. Playing to the gallery, he gloats:

Four ministers lost their jobs and have been prosecuted, unfortunately one died in the process; the number three man in the country, a Senate President, has been dealt with and he lost his position, he is being prosecuted and I hope he will not lose his seat. The number two man in the country, the Vice-President, is currently fighting the fight of his life because of corruption around and about him. I don't know of any country in the world which can claim such achievements in four years. (The Punch, January 26, 2007: 2)

But then, is there any semantic parallel between Obasanjo's pontification and his moral standing? The answer, provided in incontrovertible detail, will be given shortly.

Meanwhile, the main question continues to reverberate: was the indictment of the Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar, by the EFCC panel instituted by the President and constituted by his appointees a result of his utilitarian ideology, cum, distaste for graft, or recourse to ill-motivated vindictiveness, the Vice-President being at the vanguard of the termination of the third term agenda? Bearing in mind the volume of evidence that avails to either support or negate this poser, it is instructive to point out that the question cannot be ideally exhausted in this critical ambience but the semantic and signifying ventilation of the crisis may indubitably raise the stakes of the connection between politics on the one hand and semantics and semiotics on the other, literacy sensibilities being the ultimate benefactor.

The Obasanjo-Atiku feud emanates from the ‘interoceptive’ (Martin&Ringham, 76) sentiments of the then President about the evils of corruption. However, it offers an ‘exteroceptive’ opportunity for ‘adjudicators’ immediately he constructs a ‘topicalisation’

around the issue and subjects it to a ‘quest test’. At this juncture, a canvass of ‘actorialization’ emerges, opening the debacle to ‘the narrative level’ consummation of ‘iconicity’ which encompasses the “actantial” and “canonical narrative schema”. The ‘actantial’ roles spell out the possible relationships in a story. This announces the subject-object relations. The then President Obasanjo seems to be the subject as he pursues a quest – the impeachment of the Vice-president with the remote aim of thwarting his political expectation – by submitting the EFCC Report to the Senate; but he has three tests to contend with after the ‘contract’ (44), he having communicated his desires to the receiver – the Senate, which also becomes a subject but a seemingly dispassionate one, as it also embarks on its quest of verifying the claims of the President/EFCC. Naturally, the Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar, becomes the ‘anti-subject/ anti-sender’ for he institutes values that conflict with the original quest. Lest it is forgotten, the actorialization process also involves the emergence of the aides of the two main actors, whose supportive statements and actions oil the wheels of the narrative.

According to Machiavelli, “[...] a wise prince must device ways by which his citizens are always, and in all circumstances dependent on him and his authority; and then they will always be faithful to him” (Machiavelli, 35). This may be the pragmatic purpose and sense of anaphora behind the President accusing the Vice-President of disloyalty. He exploits the asymmetrical relationship, constitutional he thinks, of ‘power’ (Palmer, 62&63) semiotics between him and his deputy but the latter appreciates in the relation the symmetry in ‘solidarity’ (62&63). Unfortunately for the President, he is oblivious of the assertion that he became “a prince with the help of the nobles” (Machiavelli, 33) indirectly, one of whom is

the Vice-President. The undesirable upshot: “he finds himself surrounded by many who believe they are his equals, and because of that he cannot command or manage them the way he wants” (33).

Against this backdrop, and as a reminder, the ex-President is faced with three tests in the canonical narrative mode; but does he have the ‘acquisition’ – ‘attribution’ or ‘appropriation’ (Martin&Ringham, 26) – to bring about the subject/object conjunction – the ‘qualifying test’ stage? (106). At a point, “virtualisation” – neither “conjunction” nor “disjunction” (52) (success or failure) – is the case, because with it, the “qualifying test” is on – Chief Obasanjo being equipped with the primary competence – the EFCC panel of his appointees – to fructify his desire. Appropriation takes place, but with this, there still exists a disjunct between him and his object, as the Vice-President cannot be impeached by the EFCC Report without the assent of the National Assembly. The National Assembly now turns out to be the attribution he must procure for this to happen. The Senate, not pandering to his whims, sets up an ad-hoc committee to examine the authenticity of the Report.

Again, the President sets out to work with his appropriative instinct. While the Vice-President goes to defend himself with volumes of evidence, the President never does; he sits pretty in Aso Rock while members of the panel go to him. A judge visiting a petitioner in his house! Incredible, one would opine. Meanwhile, the Vice-President has already released an ‘anti-sender’ (25), not only to prove his innocence, but more constructively to show that the President is also corrupt – something close to *tu quo quem* fallacy at its creative height. Creative in that it works for the Vice-President who produces impregnable evidences of how the PTDF is used as a slush fund for the President, how =N=700 Million is allegedly paid into the account of one Mr. Fasawe, with documents to support how and when withdrawals

are made and how Obasanjo allegedly bought a vehicle for a lady. Interestingly, and up till now, neither Chief Obasanjo nor any of his aides have denied at least the =N=700million issue. The list is long. With this, another disjunct between the subject and object surfaces – that is, the quest suffers a reverse. By the time, the Ndoma Egba ad-hoc committee submits its report, it already reeks of credibility blemishes. It gives the president a ‘rap on the wrist’ (Odili, August 17, 2007: 43) for making withdrawals that are unconstitutional, saying after all the Federal Executive Council, which he heads, approves it. Considering the fraternal semantic synonymy that exists between the FEC and the President and the approvals made for huge withdrawals designed for some allegedly spurious purposes, the Senate sets up a review committee, the Tsauro panel, to review the Ndoma-Egba Report, which had already expectedly slammed the Vice-President for making a deposit as the head of the PTDF in a bank allegedly for his friends to borrow as loans.

The setting up of the review panel takes the quest to the ‘decisive test’ (Martin&Ringham, 47) stage, the climactic point, where the object of the quest is at stake; the subject presumably confronts the anti-subject on axiological terms, reflecting value antonyms at their peak, the height of relational opposition. Cognizant that he is bereft of political influence in the minds of the review panelists and very unsure of the consequences of his enunciated resolve to discredit the Vice-President, Obasanjo realizes that an ‘anachronism’ (23) is in the offing in his taking the Report to the Senate, he responds to the review-panel’s call for his side of the story, and quickly too, unlike in the discredited pseudo-‘paratopic’ (98) space of the Ndoma-Egba panel. Suddenly, there is a pseudo-role reverse; he mutates into a part-subject and part-object, the Vice-President now a part-subject; the hunter now being part-hunted. This veritably explains the engendering of the ‘topic space’ (135), where the principal subject (Chief Obasanjo) undergoes change of state.

The ‘glorifying test’ (68) stage witnesses a collapse of Obasanjo’s quest, a subject unequipped with the values of a ‘competent observer’; he and the Vice-President are indicted, but the Vice-President secures his post. It is, indeed, the ‘utopic’ phase of the quest. However, the President, Chief Obasanjo, carries his quest onto the realm of legality; what happens thereon is history. That the review panel indicts the President subverts the ferocity with which he tried to undermine the political strength of his deputy.

Later discoveries not only support this assessment, they also reveal the extent to which his eight-year rule was corruption-infested. These few examples, among others, are thought-provoking testimonials: the Obasanjo Holdings’ 220 Million Transcorp equity share issue; which was confirmed by Mr. Lucky Egede, the Group Managing Director of Obasanjo Holdings (Ishiekwe, September 26, 2006: 32); a former Auditor-General of the Federation, Vincent Azie, was sacked for releasing an audited Report of the profligate nature of the Presidency, the Judiciary and the National Assembly. Another audit report was equally fetid. A critic writes on this: “The nation is sitting on serious financial scandals, particularly as the two Reports covered the period under which a self-styled anti-corruption President managed and supervised national affairs” (Obijiofor, June 20, 2007: 65); In June 2006, the Chairman of the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission, Alhaji Hamman Tukur, officially notified the National Assembly that “there were illegal withdrawals from the Excess Crude and Federation Accounts, “for inexplicable reasons” (the “inexplicable reasons” being the reason adduced by one Ministry of Finance official) (The *Guardian*,

September 12, 2006: 16). Critics interpret making unapproved withdrawals for “inexplicable reasons” to be fraud by other means. The amount allegedly involved is in the region of =N=2 Trillion. The EFCC of Ribadu saw nothing worth prosecuting in this: since that time, the RMAF has announced the discovery of new illegal withdrawals. It is even reported that “the Special Adviser to the President on “Ethics, Good Governance/Human Rights reportedly advised some government officials that “you must not steal, and if in any way you choose to steal, please don’t take the money abroad. Instead invest in the country”. (*Vanguard*, May 19, 2006: 47). A ludicrous advice indeed! The Ndudi Elumelu power probe report (<http://www.nigeriaintel.com/2012/06/30/elumelu-power-probe-where-is-the-report/>) seems also to give a lie to Obasanjo’s pontifical honesty in managing the economy of the state while in power. Obasanjo’s privatisation scheme, one of the bases of his World Bank-guided deregulation-prone economic model, also turned out to be another dark conduit through which Obasanjo and his many PDP cronies destroyed part of the nation’s industrial base just for self-enrichment during his presidency (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201108151319.html>).

The atrocious list is endlessly sickening to the extent that calls for the Obasanjo regime to be probed are becoming deafening by the day. It is doubtful this will happen soonest because iconic symbols at the political level do not favour it. The following averments are a mind-boggling conclusion on how morality can be double-faced in the realm of governance and take on the form of appearance and reality: “According to Alhaji Nasir-El-Rufai, former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory: “President Olusegun Obasanjo had no more than =N=20,000 in his bank accounts in 1998 before he became President [...] Today, he is reported to be the owner of a billion naira Ota Farm [...]” (Ifedi, July 30, 2007: 40); “One contradiction that portrays Obasanjo’s anti-graft battle as shallow and insincere is the failure to pass the Freedom of Information Bill” (Arowolo, 2007: 15).

Conclusion

The face of the Nigerian anti-graft crusade under the 1997-2007 Obasanjo Administration is a gripping advertisement of the Platonian suggestion that “[...] injustice breeds divisions and animosities and broils between man and man [...]” (Plato, 1997: 31), especially when there is a negative affirmation of Bentham’s argument that “it is in vain to talk of the interest of the community without understanding what is the interest of the individual” (Bentham, 2000: 9). Explained through the norms of axiology, the whole campaign is fraught with value conflicts, where “value-pluralism is just another name for inconsistency”, (Gray, 2000: 54) rendering “the interest of the community” (Bentham, 9) phraseology unmeaning. This is the fate that befalls and negatives the resolve and successes of the anti-corruption bodies – one which inspires hortatory pleas from critics for a depoliticisation of the anti-graft crusade – a necessity to divorce the fight from the conflict that may arise when there is a negative distance between the ‘theme’ and ‘rheme’ (Leckie-Tarry and Birch, 137/138).

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