Power, Politics, and the Nigerian State: A Comparative Study of Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* and Obari Gomba's *Grit*

Eziwho Emenike AZUNWO, PhD and Amabi Precious Ataijong
emenike.eziwho@ust.edu.ng
+2348063733829
Department of Theatre & Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper examines the persistent issues of systemic corruption, nepotism, and power instrumentalization in Nigerian politics through contemporary drama. Focusing on Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* and Obari Gomba's *Grit*, this article employs postcolonial theory and functionalism to analyze how these plays critique the current political landscape. While *Our Son the Minister* satirizes political office as a communal spoils system, *Grit* exposes the violent machinery of political ambition. Together, they reflect the grim realities of Nigerian democracy, revealing the need for ethical leadership and accountability.

Keywords: Nigerian Drama, Political Corruption, Godfatherism, Postcolonial Theory, Satire, Ethical Leadership

Introduction

With the advent of democracy in 1999, Nigerians felt relieved from the draconian laws of the military, which had truncated the First, Second, and Third Republics. Hence, the return to democratic rule was met with high hopes and great expectations. Citizens looked forward to greater opportunities for infrastructural development, adherence to the rule of law, inclusive governance, and leadership accountability. The anticipation was intense, and the celebrations remarkable. However, as the years progressed, these expectations began to decline due to the apparent lack of accountability and failure by elected officials to deliver on their campaign promises. Nigeria, despite being a democratic nation, continues to face significant challenges that hinder the actualization of democratic ideals in its

governance and political processes.

Power and politics, however, are not unique to Nigeria; they are universal phenomena. Politics pervades every aspect of human society, shaping decisions, structures, and relationships at every level. It is a basic part of human organization, necessary for order, direction, and collective progress. For any society to function effectively, leadership is required, someone must steer the affairs of the nation, manage resources, and make decisions that influence the lives of citizens. Yet, the way power is acquired, exercised, and maintained becomes a critical concern, especially in contexts where leadership is often disconnected from public service.

Nigerian contemporary politics practices democracy, looking through literature, we can assert that There exists a long-standing debate among scholars regarding the definitions, parameters, and universal applicability of democracy, particularly in relation to ideological divergences and contextual realities. While some view democracy through a rigid Western lens, others argue for a more flexible and locally adaptive understanding. Nevertheless, democracy is ideally grounded on three interrelated foundations: as an ideological and aggregative tool; as a system that promotes active citizen participation; and as a safeguard against tyranny through institutional mechanisms that uphold social justice and equity. Within this framework, democracy encompasses core principles such as competition, choice, mass participation, popular consultation, and institutional platforms that enable ideological debate and political accountability. However, the practical manifestation of these ideals in contemporary Nigerian politics remains problematic. The larger picture included the universal monopolization of power by "moneyed or rich individuals" which can be referred to as the elites, which resulted in depriving the masses of their democratic rights.

Drama, in this sense, is an imitation of action. The concept of *mimesis* or imitation is crucial to the core meaning of drama. Within the African literary tradition, the evolution of drama can be traced to the first generation of writers whose works were often constructed on the foundation of Western or Aristotelian principles. Many of these early plays drew inspiration from Greek classical tragedies, either through direct adaptation or stylistic influence. As the tradition evolved,

subsequent playwrights began to derive content from African history, mythology, folklore, and contemporary socio-political issues. These indigenous sources helped shape a distinctly African dramatic voice, one that not only entertains but educates and challenges societal structures. Hence, Dramatists employ the theatre as a working platform through which they not only express feelings and desires but also call the people to collective action aimed at societal freedom and liberation from injustice. This article hence engages drama not only as literature but also as a sociopolitical instrument that mirrors and critiques power and contemporary Nigerian politics in Nigeria.

Nigeria's democratic governance, despite over two decades of practice, has failed to deliver expected dividends, as the nation remains plagued by electoral malpractice, political violence, voter apathy, systemic corruption, and ineffective leadership, resulting in widespread disillusionment, public mistrust, and socio-political instability. The problem is multi-faceted, rooted in poor leadership and the complicity of citizens, creating a paradox where democratic structures exist but core democratic principles are undermined by corruption, abuse of power, and failed leadership. These challenges have attracted commentary from philosophers, critics, political activists, and notably theatre practitioners, who employ drama as a medium to reflect, critique, and engage with Nigeria's political realities. Consequently, drama plays a vital role in promoting political engagement and societal reflection, with playwrights exposing power abuse, unfulfilled promises, and citizens' complicity in sustaining oppressive systems. However, the influence of dramatic works on political consciousness and civic responsibility remains underexplored in scholarship, thus necessitating this study, which examines two selected plays as representations of political power and contemporary Nigerian politics. The aim of this paper is to examine how the themes of power and contemporary Nigerian politics are represented and critiqued in Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* and Obari Gomba's *Grit*.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Theory

This paper adopts postcolonial theory as its theoretical underpinning. Postcolonial theory was principally propounded by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), and further developed by scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha and

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It serves as a critical framework for examining the lingering effects of colonial rule on formerly colonized societies and how those effects continue to shape their political, cultural, and social realities. Postcolonial theory emerged as a response to the exploitative legacies of European imperialism and continues to interrogate the structures of neocolonial domination that persist in modern societies (Young, 2001, p. 6). It provides a framework for analysing the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between the colonizers and the colonized, and the ways in which these relationships have shaped identity, governance, culture, and historical narratives.

Applied to the plays *Our Son the Minister* by Paul Ugbede and *Grit* by Obari Gomba, postcolonial theory allows us to explore how political power is represented as both a legacy of colonialism and a contemporary instrument of control. These plays depict characters who inherit or manipulate power through structures reminiscent of colonial domination, often resulting in exclusion, betrayal, and systemic injustice. Furthermore, the theory highlights how drama becomes a site of resistance. Nigerian playwrights, operating within a postcolonial context, utilize the stage to expose the failures of leadership and governance, creating narratives that reflect the disillusionment of citizens and the unfulfilled promises of independence (Rukundwa & van Aarde, 2007, p. 1190). As such, drama serves not only as cultural expression but also as political intervention, questioning authority and advocating for equity.

Functionalism Theory

Functionalism originating from the early sociological work of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, functionalism emerged as one of the earliest and most influential structural theories in understanding how societies operate. The theory was later popularized and developed by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the mid-20th century, and later expanded by Robert K. Merton (Milton, 2007, p. 2). Functionalism views society as an organized system of interrelated structures, such as family, education, religion, and politics, each functioning to maintain the stability and survival of the whole (Milton, 2007, p.3). When each institution performs its function effectively, society is said to be in a state of equilibrium. The central premise of functionalism is the concept of *social order* and *value consensus*.

Durkheim introduced the idea of *collective consciousness*—a shared set of beliefs and moral attitudes that function as a unifying force within society (Milton, 2007, p. 4). In the context of this study, functionalism offers an analytical lens to understand how Nigerian society and its political institutions are expected to work harmoniously, and how their dysfunctions, as highlighted in *Our Son the Minister* and *Grit*, lead to disillusionment, disorder, and the erosion of public trust. The plays illustrate the breakdown of the social contract when personal ambition overrides public responsibility, thus, revealing the gaps between institutional ideals and societal realities. Therefore, functionalism not only aids in identifying the societal roles of political institutions but also highlights the consequences when these roles are not fulfilled.

Conceptual Review

Power

Power, in political and social studies, refers to the ability of an individual or group to influence or control the actions, thoughts, or behaviour of others. It is a key factor in leadership, governance, and the management of public affairs. Power shapes the way decisions are made and enforced in any society, and it determines who gets what, when, and how. Power, in its most elemental form, refers to the capacity of an individual, group, or institution to influence, direct, or control the actions of others in pursuit of specific objectives. While the notion is often tied to political leadership, power operates across economic, social, religious, academic, and legal spheres, making it a pervasive element of human interaction (Bunier, 2010). These forms of power interact, compete, and reinforce each other. For instance, a person who holds economic power may influence political decisions through campaign financing or lobbying. Similarly, religious leaders can wield significant power over public opinion and societal values.

Political power, however, is often regarded as the supreme form because it has the capacity to control or regulate the exercise of other forms of power (Amuwo, 2014). Political power is central to governance, policymaking, and institutional authority. It dictates who gets what, when, and how, the fundamental question of politics. Max Weber, a foundational theorist in sociology, defines power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own

will despite resistance" (Weber, 1947, p. 152). This definition emphasizes not only the capacity to enforce one's will but also the inherent conflict and resistance that often accompany the exercise of power. In political contexts, this translates into how leaders gain, maintain, and wield authority over citizens and institutions. Foucault (1994, p.109) seemed to have formed the conclusive view:

> Power is dispersed across complicated and heterogeneous social networks marked by ongoing struggle. Power is not something present at specific locations within those networks, but is instead always at issue in ongoing attempts to (re) produce effective social alignments, and conversely to avoid or erode their effects, often by producing various counter-alignments (as cited in Outa, 2001).

In contemporary times, especially in Africa, there is a gradual redefinition of power, with more emphasis on constitutionalism, legitimacy, and the rule of law. However, remnants of coercive and authoritarian models persist, as seen in leaders' attempts to amend constitutions for extended terms or suppress opposition and the media (Onwuatuegwu, 2020). This dichotomy reflects an ongoing struggle between progressive and regressive understandings of power within emerging democracies. Ultimately, power should be seen not only as a means of control but as a contractual relationship, where both the rulers and the ruled have rights and responsibilities. When power is exercised legitimately, with accountability and transparency, it can promote social cohesion and national development.

Contemporary Politics

Contemporary politics refers to the current practices, ideas, and institutions through which political power is acquired, exercised, and contested in modern societies. It involves the structure and function of government, the role of political actors, the nature of democratic participation, and the interaction between citizens and those in authority. Contemporary politics is shaped by historical experiences, global trends, technological change, and evolving public expectations about governance and accountability.

Azunwo (2021) noted that politics is a worldwide phenomenon that essentially involves policy making and the governmental procedure of fluctuating high public

office holders. Its existence inclusively accommodates every nation of the world however, appears to be run differently according to the culture, doctrines and constitution of individual nations. In its most basic form, politics is about power and the distribution of resources and opportunities within a society. As Harold Lasswell (1958) famously stated, politics is about "who gets what, when, and how." In modern democratic systems, politics ideally reflects the will of the people through elections, representation, and public institutions. However, in many developing countries, including Nigeria, the practice of politics is often marked by manipulation, corruption, weak institutions, and elite domination, which undermine the principles of democracy. Contemporary politics in Nigeria is characterized by a number of persistent challenges. These include electoral fraud, political violence, vote-buying, godfatherism, and the personalization of power. Instead of representing the public interest, political leaders often pursue personal or ethnic agendas, leading to a disconnect between the government and the governed (Achebe, 1983, p. 4). As such, the democratic process becomes a tool for maintaining control rather than fostering development or justice.

Politics and Drama in Nigeria

Drama connotes different meanings to different people. But from the Greek origins of the word, Drama, 'dran' it means 'action', derived from the verb 'to do', 'to act or 'to perform'. This simply means that 'Drama is a representation of life on stage' (Olorunsomo, 2014). Drama in Nigeria, much like in other parts of the world, has long served as a mirror of society, reflecting and interrogating the power structures, social inequalities, and political tensions that define the nation's history. One particularly significant dimension of Nigerian drama is its engagement with political themes, often functioning as a tool for social critique, activism, and resistance.

Drama in Nigeria has long served as an effective channel for critiquing political authority, amplifying public dissatisfaction, and advocating for social change. From the colonial era to the post-independence period, Nigerian playwrights have employed theatre as a platform for political expression. The political challenges that plagued Nigeria, including dictatorship, corruption, oppression, and social injustice, provided fertile ground for dramatists to explore these themes through

performance. Drama has thus become more than a vehicle for entertainment; it is a critical tool for political engagement. As Achebe argues, an African writer who avoids the major political and social issues of his time risks irrelevance (Achebe, 1981). Politics, as a dramatic theme, often emerges from the desire to reform society, especially when political leaders manipulate public policies for personal gain. Zulu Sofola (1994, p.27) contends that dramatists must impact society through their work. She believes that drama should "heal and restore the life of a sick and battered humanity, create a new vision for growth, renewal, regeneration... and mobilize a collective conscience for a particular desired objective" (p. 27).

Representations of Power and Politics in Nigerian Drama

Power and politics are foundational elements in human society. Modern governance structures are designed to reflect the reality that power is unequally distributed and that certain individuals or groups have greater influence over decision-making processes. According to Dahl (1957), power is relational and requires a base, means, scope, and extent to function effectively, all of which contribute to the authority of the power-holder. Drama in Nigeria has historically functioned not only as a form of entertainment but as a serious vehicle for social criticism and political engagement. From the pre-colonial period to the post-independence era, Nigerian playwrights have consistently used the stage as a mirror to society, projecting the political realities of their time and challenging the status quo. The dramatization of political power in Nigerian theatre frequently interrogates the misuse of authority, the betrayal of public trust, and the failure of leadership.

Furthermore, Nigerian political drama often reflects the interplay between personal ambition and public responsibility. Characters are frequently constructed to illustrate how individuals abandon ethical principles in their pursuit of power. This is seen in plays like Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* and *Midnight Hotel*, where corruption, moral decay, and systemic injustice are dramatized through accessible language and engaging narratives. The use of dramatic irony, farce, and satire allows playwrights to comment on the state of the nation while making the critique palatable to a wide audience. By doing so, Nigerian drama becomes not just a reflection of political events but a critical tool for shaping public

opinion and encouraging civic engagement. Importantly, political drama in Nigeria has served as a counter-narrative to state propaganda. During periods of military rule, when press freedom was curtailed and dissent was criminalized, theatre offered a relatively safe space for political discourse. The dramatist, under these conditions, often had to employ subversive techniques, such as allegory and historical parallels, to bypass censorship. For instance, plays set in mythical or precolonial societies were often used to indirectly critique contemporary regimes. In doing so, playwrights preserved the political relevance of theatre while maintaining artistic integrity and public appeal (Adeyemi, 2012).

Politics and Corruption in Nigerian Society

Corruption in Nigeria is more than an isolated act of moral failure; it is a deeply embedded feature of political life and governance. Over the years, it has evolved into a defining characteristic of the Nigerian state, permeating the public sector, weakening institutions, and distorting the very essence of democracy and development. Understanding corruption in the Nigerian context requires both conceptual clarity and theoretical grounding.

One of the foremost challenges in the study of corruption lies in its definitional ambiguity. Scholars such as Peters (1978), Johnston (1991), and Brinkerhoff (2000) have all highlighted that despite widespread discourse, there remains no universally accepted definition. Johnston (1991) particularly noted that studying corruption is complicated by the fact that definitions are controversial, and reliable evidence is often elusive. While some scholars, like Nye (1967), define political corruption as acts that deviate from formal duties for personal or group gain, others, such as Jackson et al. (1994), argue that not all illegal acts are corrupt and not all corrupt acts are necessarily illegal. Therefore, some definitions consider legality, while others emphasize public opinion or the elusive notion of public interest. Yet, in the Nigerian context, corruption is generally conceived as the misuse or improper use of power and influence for personal or group advantage, deliberate and conscious acts that often involve abuse of public roles or resources, and the use of illegitimate means to attain or maintain power.

Historical evidence supports these theoretical perspectives. Corruption, which

appeared in milder forms in the early 1960s, exploded during the Second Republic. The Shagari administration (1979–1983) was notoriously described as a government "of the contractors, by the contractors and for the contractors." Massive misappropriation of funds led to public outrage and justified, at least in the eyes of many, the military takeover that followed. Yet, under subsequent military regimes, particularly that of General Babangida, corruption not only continued but was institutionalized.

Corruption in Nigeria is not merely the product of greedy individuals; it is embedded in the very structure of political and social relations. The colonial legacy, the fragmented nature of the state, and the self-serving character of the elite have all contributed to the normalization of corruption. As long as politics remains defined by the question of "who gets what, when, and how," with little regard for transparency, accountability, or service, the fight against corruption will remain a rhetorical exercise.

Contextual Analysis

Synopsis of *Our Son the Minister*

Our Son the Minister, written by Paul Ugbede, is a satirical play that critiques corruption in Nigerian politics. Set in contemporary Nigeria, it follows Dr. Makoji Ejembi, a principled doctor who receives a ministerial appointment. While Makoji aims to serve with integrity, his family and friends see his position as a chance for personal gain. His mother throws an extravagant party, Uncle Doga plans a mansion, and Imaji rents a crowd for the swearing-in ceremony, all expecting rewards. Overwhelmed by these demands, Makoji initially rejects the appointment, labeling himself as unable to meet their selfish expectations. This prompts his family to consider him mentally unstable, leading to comedic attempts to "cure" him of his integrity. Ultimately, Makoji accepts the role, promising to serve honestly and challenge the corruption surrounding him. The play highlights the failure of society to support integrity, emphasizing the need for a shift in the leader-follower relationship for true national progress.

Synopsis of *Grit*

Set in the fictional Nigerian community of Sonofa, this play centres on a fierce political rivalry between brothers Oyesllo and Okote, both retired soldiers. Oyesllo, seeking dignity and financial security, joins the Democratic People's Alliance (DPA) for a bye-election. Okote is persuaded by local women to run as an independent candidate out of duty. Despite their father Pa Nyimenu's warnings, the brothers' rivalry escalates, leading to violence and family estrangement. Matefi, a leader of the women's group, emerges as a strong advocate against political thuggery. The play explores how political ambition can fracture family bonds and questions the true cost of power.

Representation of Political Power in the Play

Political power is one of the central themes that African dramatists often interrogate, as it reflects the struggles, contradictions, and realities of governance in postcolonial societies. Plays that focus on politics usually portray power as a double-edged sword: it can either be used to promote justice and development or be corrupted by greed, violence, and personal ambition. In Nigerian drama, political power is frequently represented as an arena of conflict, where elites manipulate the system to maintain control while ordinary citizens struggle for survival and recognition. Obari Gomba's *Grit* and Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* is a strong example of this tradition.

Grit

In *Grit*, Obari Gomba provides a powerful representation of political power as a contested arena where ambition, corruption, and personal interest overshadow the ideals of democracy and public service. The play captures the realities of Nigerian politics, where political offices are not viewed as platforms for national development but as opportunities for personal enrichment and dominance. *Grit* interrogates the struggles and contradictions embedded in the quest for political authority in Nigeria. The central political struggle in *Grit* revolves around two brothers, Oyesllo and Okote, both retired soldiers who become opponents in a bye-election in the fictional community of Sonofa. Oyesllo, having endured years of poverty and neglect after military service, sees politics as a means to reclaim his dignity and access the privileges he was denied by the state. His ambition to secure

a seat in the House of Assembly is not driven by the desire to serve the people but by the need to escape economic hardship and elevate his social status. This underscores a critical commentary on the Nigerian political system, where aspirants often seek office primarily for personal gain rather than service. Firstly, political power is represented as a carefully rigged process. The so-called "family", a group made up of Bambo, Townse, Matefi, Yasuo, and Kakwa, are shown as powerful figures who control the judiciary, the police, and even the electoral commission. Townse openly admits their strategy:

> **TOWNSE:** I did not buy into this project for vendetta. It is business. It is power and profit. If my interest is not guaranteed here, I will move elsewhere. A party is just a vehicle, a means to an end. The brothers have public appeal and if they secure public support, our days of control are over. They are stirring awake and we must put them away. That is why we are holding the strings.
> **KAKWA**: You are right, Townse. To determine a political outcome, we must control political participation. We cannot rig the result if we do not rig the process.
> **BAMBO:** Let us not allow emotion to becloud our mission. We have to execute this project with ruthless efficiency. Let us not forget why we formed this team and positioned ourselves strategically. This structure will serve us and our children if we defend it religiously. To the family! [They all rise.] (p.77).

This exchange illustrates how elections in the play are stripped of their democratic essence and reduced to a business venture controlled by elites. The family views politics not as a civic responsibility but as an investment to be protected at all costs. Their emphasis on "rigging the process" rather than simply the result underscores how deeply entrenched corruption is; it begins long before the ballots are cast. Power is therefore represented as exclusionary and inaccessible to the ordinary people of Sonofa, available only to those within the inner circle who control the structures of governance. In this way, *Grit* mirrors the reality of Nigerian politics, where electoral outcomes are often predetermined by godfathers, party financiers, and powerful cliques rather than by the will of the electorate.

Okote, on the other hand, represents an alternative vision of leadership. Initially reluctant to contest the election, he is persuaded by the women of Sonofa to enter the race as an independent candidate. His hesitation reflects his awareness of the dangers of partisan politics, but the women appeal to his integrity and communal responsibility, convincing him that his participation is necessary for the survival of the people. Unlike Oyesllo, whose ambition is shaped by personal struggles and economic deprivation, Okote is motivated by moral responsibility and the genuine desire to protect the community from the exploitative grip of corrupt politicians. As Matefi tells him:

> **MATEFI:** We do not want a politician. We want a kind-hearted person. You are as kind and graceful as your late mother who carried the burden of every woman in this community.

From a postcolonial perspective, Okote embodies the search for indigenous forms of leadership rooted in communal ethics rather than colonial legacies of authoritarian governance. His candidacy, driven by grassroots women who resist political marginalization, recalls what Homi Bhabha terms a "counter-narrative" to dominant power structures. Through the lens of functionalism, Okote can be read as the individual striving to restore balance to a dysfunctional political system. His reluctance to join party politics reflects an awareness that existing institutions no longer serve their integrative function. The women's support demonstrates the collective consciousness that functionalism highlights as essential for societal cohesion, here, a community-driven demand for accountability. However, the violent clashes, betrayal, and manipulation he encounters reveal systemic dysfunctions within the political structure: rather than stabilizing society, institutions reproduce conflict and disorder.

The consequences of this culture of violence are tragic and far-reaching. Rival factions' resort to clashes that result in injuries, wrongful arrests, and the deepening of divisions not only within the community but also within families. Thus, *Grit* shows how political power destabilizes society and erodes the bonds of kinship when it is pursued through repression rather than dialogue. The play portrays political authority as fundamentally violent and repressive, targeting any individual or group that dares to threaten the dominance of the ruling elite.

The police, who are traditionally entrusted with the responsibility of protecting citizens, are instead represented as instruments of oppression and enforcers of elite interests. Their actions during the political debate in Scene XII underscore this reality:

> **DPA YOUTHS:** Suddenly, DPA Youths move in the direction of Okote's supporters and begin to shove the latter off the stage. A brawl ensues as both camps battle for supremacy. Someone on stage begins to throw firecrackers into the audience. There is general commotion. Police siren blares outside. The candidates and the party leaders move towards the door in an attempt to leave the building. Some policemen enter and pounce on Oyesllo and knock him. A policeman points at Okote and some policemen rush at him. Okote runs and the policemen pursue him. Light fades].

This scene illustrates the complicity of the police in political violence, as they do not intervene to restore peace but rather target candidates who oppose the ruling party. The fact that Okote is later shot while trying to escape arrest reveals the extreme lengths to which political actors will go in order to neutralize challengers. Violence, therefore, becomes normalized as a legitimate tool for attaining and maintaining political authority. From a postcolonial perspective, this reliance on violence is a continuation of colonial governance strategies, where force and intimidation were used to suppress dissent and secure compliance. The police, who should function as neutral protectors of law and order, instead reproduce colonial-style coercion by serving the interests of the political elite rather than the people. This reflects what postcolonial theorists describe as neocolonial continuity, he inherited structures of oppression, now controlled by local elites, are redeployed against their own citizens. Thus, the violence in *Grit* is not incidental but symptomatic of a deeper historical condition: a political culture built on coercion rather than consent. Through the lens of functionalism, political violence demonstrates the dysfunction of state institutions. Instead of promoting equilibrium by safeguarding democratic participation, the police and party structures undermine collective order, producing anomie (Durkheim's notion of normlessness). The intended "function" of elections, to channel competition peacefully and ensure legitimacy, is corrupted into its opposite, serving as a pretext

for repression. Merton's concept of dysfunctions is especially relevant: political institutions, rather than integrating society, actively destabilize it through the use of violence.

Through functionalism, these dynamic highlights a fundamental dysfunction within the political system. Instead of stabilizing society, institutions such as the judiciary and electoral umpire are hijacked by elites for personal vendetta, creating disorder and undermining collective trust. Merton's concept of dysfunction explains this collapse: the very organs that should serve the "body" of society are redirected towards destructive ends, destabilizing equilibrium. Thus, politics in *Grit* fails its functional purpose, producing anomie and cynicism among the people. From a postcolonial perspective, this moment is particularly significant. It shows how women reclaim indigenous cultural practices as counter-hegemonic tools against a corrupt, Western-modelled political system that excludes them. By invoking curses and ancestral justice, they resist the alienation and silencing of women within formal politics and instead deploy traditional authority to destabilize male-dominated power. Gomba therefore positions women as custodians of indigenous morality, capable of holding both local leaders and modern institutions accountable. Using functionalism, the women's activism highlights a struggle to restore balance in a dysfunctional political system. While elites destabilize society through corruption, violence, and betrayal, women act as a stabilizing force, mobilizing communities and safeguarding values of justice, integrity, and solidarity. In functionalist terms, they are an "informal institution" that steps in when formal institutions (police, parties, electoral bodies) fail in their roles.

Grit portrays political power as corrupt, violent, manipulative, and deeply personal. It shows that politics in Sonofa is not about public good but about private interests, vendettas, and profit. By using characters such as Townse, Matefi, and Bambo, the play reflects the Nigerian political reality where elections are manipulated, violence is normalized, and the people's voices are silenced. At the same time, the play warns that when political power is abused in this way, the society is doomed to chaos, riots, and destruction, as symbolized by the riot and bloodshed in the closing scenes.

In essence, *Grit* presents political power as a corruptible and destructive force in the absence of ethical leadership and responsible followership. This aligns with postcolonial theory, which argues that post-independence African states often reproduce the exploitative structures of colonial governance rather than dismantle them (Young, 2001). In Sonofa, politics is monetized and violence is normalized, echoing what Fanon (1963) describes as the persistence of colonial violence in the postcolony. Democracy thus becomes an illusion, as elections are rigged not merely at the ballot but at the structural level, while political office is weaponized for private enrichment rather than collective service. Obari Gomba's critique here mirrors the postcolonial insight that African governance remains trapped in neocolonial practices, where leaders mimic the authoritarianism of former colonial powers while abandoning the ideals of independence.

Our Son the Minister

In *Our Son the Minister*, Paul Ugbede satirizes how political power in Nigeria is often reduced to family inheritance, controlled not by the office holder but by relatives who treat the position as communal property. From the very beginning of the play, Mama, Uncle, and Abutu embody this mentality, each laying claim to the privileges of Makoji's ministerial appointment. Mama organizes an extravagant feast costing ₦250,000 without Makoji's consent, insisting that it is her turn to "enjoy" after years of sacrifice:

> **MAMA:** "How many times does a widow have the opportunity to host her extended family? … And how much did I spend anyway? Only two hundred and fifty thousand… Stop that aka gum of yours O! … This is my time to enjoy! Leave me let me enjoy O!" (Act One, Scene One, p.7).

Her words show that political power is perceived less as service to the nation and more as a reward for personal suffering. For Mama, the ministerial position is a family asset, justifying her display of wealth and social status. This is overlayed in subsequent scene as Mama, Uncle, Abutu, and Aunty see the appointment less as a call to national service and more as an inheritance that must be shared. Their squabbles over convoys, feast arrangements, and household prestige echo the culture of godfatherism and nepotism in Nigerian politics. For instance, Uncle

laments: "My house is being demolished and all you say is can you all be quiet!" (p. 66), showing how he has already begun investing in his own glory based on Makoji's new status. Imaji also reveals the selfishness behind their enthusiasm:

> **AUNTY**: My son's job opportunity has gone with the wind!
> **IMAJI:** I have five thousand people waiting to skin me alive if I don't pay them! My position as the personal assistant to the minister is at stake! You see? We all have something at abur stake. But if we don't keep quiet and think, what we all want will slip through our fingers...that will be disastrous...we can't afford to lose...not now that we are this close! (p. 67).

This collective sense of entitlement mirrors how political office in Nigeria is often treated as a family or community project, with the office-holder expected to "carry everyone along".

These dynamics can be explained through postcolonial theory, which highlights how colonial legacies of patronage and resource extraction persist in post-independence governance. Under colonialism, positions of authority were less about public service and more about access to privileges controlled by a small elite. Their quarrels over convoys, feasts, and social prestige echo what Rukundwa and van Aarde (2007) identify as the continuation of exploitative structures in postcolonial societies, where leadership becomes a tool of accumulation rather than a service to the collective. In this sense, the play critiques how Nigerian politics has failed to transcend its colonial inheritance, as office is seen as "loot" to be shared among kin rather than as an institution of national development. Functionalism also helps explain the dysfunction portrayed in the play. In theory, political institutions are meant to preserve social harmony by serving collective needs. However, the characters' behaviour demonstrates what Robert K. Merton calls *dysfunction*, where institutions fail to perform their expected roles and instead create instability.

The play's most dramatic representation of power lies in its conflation of integrity with insanity. Makoji's refusal to accept the ministerial appointment is met with horror and disbelief. Abutu exclaims: "Who in his right mind will reject a

ministerial appointment?" (p. 63). His family interprets his decision not as an act of conscience but as evidence of a curse or mental breakdown. Mama even cries to her late husband for help: "Baba Makoji, are you watching my enemies take sugar from my mouth?" (p. 64). The irony is sharp: the one man who chooses principle over corruption is tied up, mocked, and declared insane. Makoji himself captures this paradox: "Mad men have taken over the asylum. Sane men are now in chains" (p. 85).

Personal Ambition Versus Public Responsibility

A central concern in both *Our Son the Minister* and *Grit* is the tension between personal ambition and public responsibility. The plays reveal how political office in Nigeria, rather than being treated as a call to service, is frequently reduced to an arena for self-enrichment, patronage, and the pursuit of status. This conflict underscores the dysfunction of political institutions in postcolonial societies, where leadership is often compromised by individual desires and communal pressures.

In *Our Son the Minister*, Makoji embodies the struggle between these two competing demands. His desire to serve the nation is continually undermined by the suffocating expectations of his family and community, who interpret his appointment as a reward for their loyalty. Mama's insistence on extravagant feasting, Uncle's demands for status symbols, and Imaji's blunt reminder that "you are a minister because of such distractions" illustrate how communal entitlement overshadows national duty. Here, ambition is not Makoji's own, but that of his relatives and dependents, who view his office as an ATM for private gain. The play suggests that the burden of kinship and godfatherism transforms public responsibility into personal obligation, thereby eroding the foundations of good governance.

In contrast, *Grit* foregrounds ambition as the driving force of political actors themselves. Characters such as Danladi and Oyesllo are motivated not by communal welfare but by personal greed, vengeance, and the ruthless desire for survival. Violence, betrayal, and propaganda become the instruments through which ambition is sustained. Okote, though initially motivated by communal responsibility, is ultimately dragged into this vortex of ambition, where moral integrity proves insufficient in a political environment defined by corruption and

bloodshed. His tragic downfall highlights how, in a dysfunctional system, even the well-intentioned are forced to compromise or perish.

Viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory, this tension reflects the lingering colonial legacy in Nigerian politics, where leadership is framed in hierarchical, exploitative, and self-serving terms rather than participatory and service-oriented ideals. Functionalist theory further illuminates how the prioritization of personal ambition over public responsibility creates institutional dysfunction, leading to instability, disillusionment, and the erosion of collective trust.

Comparative Perspectives on Contemporary Nigerian Politics

Our Son the Minister by Paul Ugbede and *Grit* by Obari Gomba approach the same subject of Nigerian politics from different angles but arrive at a common truth: political power in Nigeria has been hijacked from its democratic purpose and redefined as a personal or communal resource. Both plays dramatize how politics, instead of being a tool for national development, is reduced to an arena for personal enrichment, familial entitlement, and the settling of private scores. By juxtaposing the two works, a deeper understanding of the contradictions within contemporary Nigerian democracy emerges.

In *Our Son the Minister*, Ugbede focuses on the microcosm of the family and community. Makoji Ejembi's appointment is immediately reinterpreted not as a call to national service but as a communal inheritance. Mama's ₦250,000 feast, Uncle's insistence on a convoy position, and Imaji's rented crowd illustrate how political legitimacy is tied to the ability of leaders to distribute largesse to their dependents. This mirrors Nigeria's patron-client system, where politicians are judged not by their policies but by how effectively they "carry their people along." In real political practice, ministerial or gubernatorial positions are often celebrated as "community achievements," with expectations that the office holder will provide jobs, contracts, and financial rewards. This has entrenched a cycle in which governance is equated with patronage, and corruption becomes normalized as a mechanism of survival.

Grit, on the other hand, broadens the canvas to depict the structural violence of Nigerian politics. Characters such as Matefi and Bambo weaponize politics to avenge old grievances, while Yasuo pretends to be a peace candidate but secretly serves elite interests. Pa Nyimenu's tragic fall represents how even well-meaning leaders can be consumed by a system built on betrayal and bloodshed. This reflects the Nigerian political reality where electoral processes are routinely marred by violence, thuggery, and judicial manipulation. The play's riot and bloodshed parallel Nigeria's recurring electoral crises—such as post-election violence in 2011, militarized elections in Rivers State, or the widespread use of political thugs to intimidate opponents. In both fiction and reality, the democratic system is corrupted by a culture where violence, manipulation, and hypocrisy are normalized tools of power.

When compared side by side, the two plays highlight complementary facets of Nigerian political dysfunction. Ugbede emphasizes the bottom-up pressure on leaders, where family and community create suffocating expectations that entrap public officials in cycles of nepotism and corruption. Gomba emphasizes the top-down corruption of political institutions, where elites twist democratic structures into weapons of vendetta and self-preservation. Together, they show that Nigerian politics is distorted both at the grassroots (where leaders are reduced to "ATMs" for relatives and supporters) and at the national level (where power struggles degenerate into violence and authoritarianism).

The colonial legacy of centralized authority, lack of accountability, and patronage networks has survived into the postcolonial state, making democracy appear as a façade rather than a lived reality. From a functionalist perspective, the plays dramatize how the dysfunction of political institutions produces instability and moral disorder. Instead of preserving equilibrium, political institutions in Nigeria generate anomie—citizens lose trust in leaders, violence escalates, and the very legitimacy of democracy is undermined.

Ultimately, the comparative perspective of *Our Son the Minister* and *Grit* underscores that Nigerian politics remains suspended between personal ambition and public responsibility, communal loyalty and national service, rhetoric and

reality. Both plays issue a warning that if political power continues to be reduced to patronage and violence, Nigerian democracy risks permanent instability. Yet they also serve as calls for reform, urging audiences to imagine a new political culture where leadership is redefined as service, institutions are strengthened, and democracy becomes more than an illusion.

Conclusion

This paper examined the themes of power and contemporary Nigerian politics as represented in Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* and Obari Gomba's *Grit*. The findings reveal that both playwrights use satire, irony, conflict, and symbolism to critique the failures of leadership, the corruption of political institutions, and the complicity of followership in Nigeria's democratic system and has the following findings. Power as Patronage and Family Inheritance: In *Our Son the Minister*, political power is represented not as a national responsibility but as family property. Mama, Uncle, Abutu, and Imaji view Makoji's ministerial appointment as an inheritance to be shared. This mirrors Nigeria's culture of godfatherism, nepotism, and communal entitlement, where political office is often reduced to patronage, and leaders are pressured to serve family and community interests over national development. Power as Violence and Vendetta: In *Grit*, political power is shown as violent, manipulative, and deeply personal. The rivalry between Oyesllo and Okote, supported by elites such as Matefi, Bambo, and Townse, demonstrates how politics is used to settle grudges rather than advance communal welfare. This reflects Nigeria's political reality, where elections are often marred by violence, intimidation, and the weaponization of state institutions like the police. Personal Ambition Versus Public Responsibility: Both plays highlight the tension between individual ambition and societal duty. Makoji initially refuses to misuse his position for selfish gain, but his integrity is ridiculed as madness. Similarly, Okote enters politics reluctantly, driven by communal appeal, but is crushed by systemic corruption and violence. These portrayals critique how Nigerian politics punishes honesty and rewards corruption. The Role of Women in Political Struggles: *Grit* foregrounds the activism of Sonofa's women, who resist oppression and demand accountability. Their reliance on cultural and spiritual traditions symbolizes grassroots resistance and the moral conscience of society. This resonates with Nigerian reality, where women are often marginalized in formal politics but play

significant roles in mobilization, protest, and moral checks on leadership. Political Hypocrisy and the Illusion of Democracy: Both plays reveal how democracy in Nigeria is frequently an illusion, manipulated by elites for self-interest. In *Our Son the Minister*, politics is monetized through rented crowds and communal demands. In *Grit*, elites such as "the family" rig processes and outcomes, turning politics into business and vendetta. These dramatizations reflect Nigeria's persistent problems of electoral malpractice, corruption, and elite domination. Institutional Dysfunction and Colonial Legacy: The plays illustrate how Nigerian political institutions, inherited from colonial rule, remain dysfunctional. Instead of promoting order and development, they reproduce inequality, violence, and disillusionment. Postcolonial theory explains how these structures are continuities of colonial domination, while functionalism highlights how their failure creates anomie, erodes collective trust, and destabilizes society.

In sum, the findings show that both Ugbede and Gomba portray political power as corruptible, violent, and self-serving in the absence of ethical leadership and responsible followership. Their plays serve as cultural resistance, calling for a redefinition of political power in Nigeria as a tool for service, justice, and genuine democratic accountability.

Finally, this study examined how political power is represented in Paul Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister* and Obari Gomba's *Grit*, showing how both plays mirror Nigerian political realities. In *Our Son the Minister*, office is reduced to family inheritance and patronage, while in *Grit*, politics becomes a violent contest manipulated by elites and driven by personal vendettas. Both plays reveal how corruption, entitlement, and systemic dysfunction undermine democracy. By applying postcolonial theory, the paper shows that Nigeria's politics reproduces colonial patterns of exploitation and patron-clientelism, while functionalism highlights the dysfunction of political institutions that should ensure stability but instead perpetuate disorder. The parallels with Nigerian reality, rented crowds, godfatherism, electoral violence, and nepotism—confirm that these plays are not exaggerations but social commentaries. However, the plays also gesture toward alternatives: grassroots activism in *Grit* and Makoji's integrity in *Our Son the Minister* suggest that ethical leadership and community accountability remain

possible. Ultimately, both plays call for a redefinition of power as service rather than self-interest, offering critical lessons for Nigeria's democratic development.

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