

MONEY, POWER, AND IMMORALITY: THE NEW FACE OF NIGERIAN POLITICS IN AHMED YERIMA'S *PARI*

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Abstract

*Nigerian politics has become a theatre of power struggles where morality is sacrificed for wealth and influence. Politicians of today use financial inducements, judicial manipulation, and bribery to further their ambitions, eroding moral principles in governance and society. This article uses Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* as a case study to examine how money and power contribute to political immorality in Nigeria. Gaetano Mosca's *Elite Theory*, which describes how a ruling minority manipulates institutions to retain control, serves as the foundation for the study. Findings show that the normalization of corruption has weakened state institutions including the military, police, and judiciary, while influencing the public's belief that moral compromise is necessary for political success. The study further highlights how poverty, unemployment, and economic hardship are deliberately used as tools to sustain political dominance. To restore ethical governance, the article recommends strengthening anti-corruption laws, enforcing judicial independence, and promoting civic education to reshape societal values. A political system that prioritizes morality over manipulation is essential for national progress.*

Keywords: Politics, Corruption, Power, Governance, Ethical Decline

Introduction

Politics in Nigeria has become synonymous with a relentless struggle for power, where morality is increasingly eroded by the desperate pursuit of wealth and influence. Political actors have devised a variety of strategies over the years to secure and maintain power, such as bribery, electoral malpractice, judicial interference, and using economic hardship to manipulate the populace. A political culture where integrity is often seen as a weakness rather than a virtue has been fostered by these unethical practices, which have penetrated important institutions. Beyond politics, the consequences of this moral decline are felt in all sectors of Nigerian society, influencing the belief that corruption is the only viable path to success.

Nigeria's democratic process has been marred by the excessive influence of money and power, where politicians manipulate legal systems, security agencies, and public institutions to serve their selfish interests. Elections, which are meant to be a reflection of the people's will, have often been reduced to mere transactions where votes are bought and sold. In many instances, judicial verdicts and legislative decisions are determined by the highest bidder, rather than being guided by justice and fairness. This situation has deepened public distrust in government institutions, as citizens increasingly perceive governance as a self-serving enterprise rather than a commitment to public service.

The degree to which politicians use financial inducements to influence court rulings and legislative decisions in their favor is a particularly disturbing aspect of Nigerian politics. Political actors frequently utilize state resources to manipulate democratic processes, due to an unquenchable hunger for power and control. Billions of naira, funds meant for national development, are redirected to secure personal gains, further entrenching a system where political survival is prioritized over public welfare. Because of this fact, people who choose to uphold moral principles are viewed as weak and marginalized. Politicians unwilling to engage in the prevailing corrupt practices are labeled as naive, incompetent, or

unfit for leadership. Consequently, the notion of a 'good politician' in Nigeria has become synonymous with one who can manipulate systems, suppress opposition, and maintain an unshakable grip on power through any means necessary.

In addition to weakening governmental institutions, the normalization of political immorality has had a significant effect on the Nigerian society at large. Growing up in a nation that rewards corruption, the younger generation increasingly sees dishonesty as an essential tool for advancement. Beyond politics, ethical deterioration has permeated many areas of daily life, such as work, education, and business. Nowadays, a lot of young Nigerians think it is practically impossible to succeed without indulging in bribery or nepotism. The unethical political practices that young people witness, where wealth and power are obtained through manipulation rather than merit, have a significant influence on the 'hustle mentality' that permeates today's youth.

This paper uses Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016) as a case study to examine the pervasive moral degradation in Nigerian politics. Yerima's play exposes how power struggles and self-interest overshadow the principles of justice and governance, providing a critical analysis of Nigeria's corrupt political sphere. This study clarifies how political elites use money and influence to sustain their dominance at the expense of ethical leadership and national advancement, by examining Yerima's *Pari* (2016).

This article will also highlight on the current political crisis in Rivers State, where influential political players have shaped court decisions, legislative maneuvers, and party defections. The extent to which power can override legality in Nigeria is demonstrated by the influence of former Governor Chief Barr. Nyesom Wike on Supreme Court rulings, even in the face of overwhelming public proof of political defection. This case further demonstrates how politicians have used state institutions as weapons to achieve their agendas, thus undermining public confidence in democratic procedures.

Therefore, moral standards have deteriorated as a result of the overwhelming influence of money and power in Nigerian politics, making ethical leadership the exception rather than the norm. This study aims to expose the extent to which corruption has permeated the political system, demonstrating its effects on governance, public institutions, and societal values. By examining Yerima's *Pari* (2016), the study emphasizes how urgently reforms that support accountability, transparency, and ethical governance are needed. Without deliberate efforts to restore morality in politics, the cycle of corruption will continue to hinder Nigeria's democratic and socio-economic progress.

Theoretical Framework

The Elite Theory, originally developed by Gaetano Mosca in his seminal work *The Ruling Class* (1939), serves as the foundation for this study. Mosca (1939) posits that “in any society, a minority elite dominates and controls power, while the majority remains largely powerless” (p. 50). He argues that a combination of political maneuvering, resource control, and mass-level ideological influence is how the ruling class keeps its hold on power. This is consistent with the current political climate in Nigeria, where politicians sway public institutions, the judiciary, and state resources in order to hold onto power.

Mosca's Elite Theory contends that elites possess superior organizational skills, which enable them to dominate society. Mosca (1939) emphasizes that “despite variations in governance structures—whether democratic or autocratic—the power structure remains unchanged: a small group wields authority while the masses comply” (p. 53). This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigerian politics, where politicians use wealth, influence, and coercion to shape public opinion and maintain dominance.

Other scholars have expanded on Mosca's work, providing deeper insights into elite dominance. Vilfredo Pareto (1935) introduced the concept of the 'circulation of elites', suggesting that "elites are not a fixed group but change over time as new powerful individuals emerge" (p. 128). C. Wright Mills (1956) further developed the theory in his work *The Power Elite*, where he argued that "political, military, and corporate elites in the United States control society through interlocking interests and mutual reinforcement" (p. 9). His analysis is still applicable in Nigeria, where political elites collaborate with security forces and business magnates to maintain dominance.

Additionally, Robert Michels (1911) proposed the 'Iron Law of Oligarchy', asserting that "all organizations, regardless of their democratic ideals, eventually succumb to elite control due to hierarchical structures" (p. 365). This aligns with the Nigerian experience, where political parties and governance structures, despite democratic claims, remain in the hands of a select few.

In relation to Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016), the play shows how the ruling class abuses its position of authority for its own benefit, often at the expense of justice and morality. The protagonist's struggles are a reflection of the harsh realities of Nigerian politics, where political survival takes precedence over morality. This study critically analyzes how power structures sustain corruption and immorality in Nigerian politics, by applying Mosca's theory in conjunction with other scholars' contributions.

The implications of this theory on governance and morality in Nigeria are profound. The elite's stranglehold on political processes fosters a culture where corruption is institutionalized, ethical leadership is discouraged, and public institutions are weakened. Due to their lack of opportunities, the masses often resort to loyalty pledges to political figures in exchange for economic survival. Therefore, this study uses Elite Theory to evaluate critically how Nigerian politicians manipulate institutions, wealth, and power to solidify their dominance at the expense of national progress.

Politics and the Death of Morality

The decline of morality in Nigerian politics is a pressing issue that has pervaded every sector of governance and public life. The political landscape is now characterized by a culture of impunity, where unethical practices are normalized. Politicians engage in electoral fraud, bribery, and manipulation of judicial processes to maintain their grip on power. This moral decadence is not only accepted but often celebrated as a necessary strategy for political survival.

The political elite in Nigeria has systematically eroded moral principles in governance, by abusing their power over state institutions. Coercion, patronage, and financial inducements are now a norm in our society. Studies, according to Ogundiya (2010) show that "political corruption in Nigeria is deeply entrenched, with leaders prioritizing personal gain over public service" (p. 204). As a result, people who choose not to engage in corrupt activities are now seen as weak or unsuited for positions in politics.

This moral dilemma is depicted vividly in Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016), which shows how politicians manipulate the masses, stifle opposition, and put their own interests ahead of moral principles. The protagonist of the play battles a corrupt system that penalizes integrity and encourages immorality. According to scholars like Chinua Achebe (1983), "the problem with Nigeria is not a lack of resources but a failure of leadership" (p. 1), and the play's depiction supports their claim. Politicians have fostered a culture of moral decay that has become so ingrained in the society that even young Nigerians now believe that using unlawful means is the only practical way to succeed.

The judiciary, police, and military—institutions meant to uphold law and order—have also been compromised. Politicians wield influence over these bodies, ensuring that justice is subverted in their favor. Research has shown according to Oko (2005), that “political interference in the judiciary has significantly weakened the rule of law in Nigeria” (p. 75). Consequently, court rulings can be swayed by financial inducements, and law enforcement agencies act at the behest of politicians rather than serving the public interest.

This moral deterioration is made worse by the economic hardships that many Nigerians endure. Hunger, unemployment, and poverty are purposefully employed as instruments of control to make people rely on corrupt politicians. Consequently, according to Aiyede (2006) “many people are willing to trade their votes, support, and even their moral compass for financial or material benefits” (p. 76). Social values are being undermined and national growth is being impeded by the systemic entrenchment of immorality in politics.

To address this crisis, there is an urgent need for institutional reforms that prioritize accountability, transparency, and ethical governance. Strengthening the independence of the judiciary, enforcing anti-corruption laws, and fostering civic education can help rebuild the moral fabric of Nigerian politics.

Immorality as a Standard for Political Success

Immorality is no longer an anomaly in Nigerian politics today; rather, it is a necessary condition for political success. Integrity is often seen as a weakness rather than a virtue because of how severely the political landscape has been contaminated. Achebe (1983), opines that “political aspirants who refuse to engage in bribery, vote-buying, or electoral malpractices are frequently dismissed as naive or unfit for the political arena” (p. 87). The notion that politics is a game best left to the ruthless and unscrupulous has been strengthened by this culture of moral compromise.

It is impossible to overemphasize the contribution of financial power to maintaining political supremacy. Politicians use enormous sums of money to sway public opinion, buy loyalty, and influence election results. According to Osaghae (1998), “this financial influence extends beyond elections into governance, where vested interests rather than the public good drive contracts, appointments, and policy decisions” (p. 112). This aligns with Mosca's (1939) assertion that “the ruling elite consolidates power through economic dominance” (p. 55).

This reality is depicted vividly in Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016), which shows how political figures manipulate institutions to further their own self-interests. The play demonstrates that in Nigerian politics, morality is often sacrificed on the altar of ambition. Political leaders are celebrated for their shrewdness and capacity to thwart democratic procedures, rather than being held accountable. Aspiring politicians are further encouraged by this culture of impunity to engage in corrupt activities in order to survive in the political arena.

The normalization of immorality in politics has significant effects on social values and governance. Young people increasingly see unethical activity as a means of achieving success after witnessing the benefits of corrupt leaders. This is why Okocha (2000) believes that “this has contributed to the erosion of ethical standards in both public and private sectors” (p. 144). Nigerian democracy has a dismal future unless concerted efforts are made to buck this tendency.

The Role of Politicians in Corrupting Society

Nigerian politicians are mostly to blame for society's moral and ethical deterioration. They establish a precedent that influences both public behavior and governance by normalizing deceit, corruption, and political manipulation. Research by Ibeanu (2021) highlights how “political elites use financial inducements and coercion to control key institutions, ensuring that corruption becomes an accepted norm rather than an exception”(p. 167). This systemic corruption goes beyond the political sphere, affecting sectors such as law enforcement, the judiciary, and even education.

Yerima's *Pari*(2016) provides a compelling dramatization of this phenomenon, illustrating how political figures exploit both the masses and state resources for personal gain. The play depicts a society where morality has been completely eroded, and individuals must either conform to corrupt practices or be excluded from the political and economic benefits controlled by the elite. According to Nwankwo (2019), “this type of political environment fosters a culture of dishonesty, where even ordinary citizens feel compelled to engage in bribery and fraud to navigate daily life” (p. 93).

One of the most damaging effects of political corruption is its impact on future generations. When young people see politicians acting unethically, they start to believe that corruption is the best pathway to success. According to Adeyemi (2022), “this reality is evident in the rise of fraudulent practices such as cyber crime and money laundering, which have been linked to the culture of impunity fostered by Nigeria's political class” (p. 119). If left unchecked, this trend might solidify a cycle of corruption that weakens the moral fabric of the country with each new generation of leaders.

Additionally, a general deterioration in the development of the country has resulted from the failure to address political corruption. Misappropriation of resources intended for public welfare leads to failing educational institutions, poor healthcare systems, and inadequate infrastructure. As a result, the common man is left to bear the brunt of a corrupt system that prioritizes the interests of the elite over the needs of the populace.

The Influence of Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty and unemployment are among the most significant socio-economic challenges in Nigeria, contributing immensely to political corruption and the erosion of moral values. A desperate populace that is susceptible to political manipulation has resulted from the government's inability to provide sustainable jobs and economic opportunities. People often sacrifice their morals for financial security in a society where even basic survival is unpredictable. As a result, political elites exploit these vulnerabilities by using monetary inducements, patronage, and political appointments to secure loyalty and suppress opposition.

Ahmed Yerima's *Pari*(2016) effectively captures this reality by illustrating how characters, due to economic hardship, become tools in the hands of political elites. The play reflects how economic deprivation forces individuals to align with corrupt leaders, not necessarily out of political conviction but as a means of survival. This situation aligns with Ake's (2018) assertion that “economic instability weakens democratic institutions, making citizens more susceptible to political manipulation” (p. 82). The ruling elite deliberately maintain economic hardship as a tool for political control, ensuring that the masses remain dependent on them for survival.

Electoral malpractice and political violence have been greatly aided by unemployment, especially among young people. Due to a lack of employment opportunities, many young people are recruited as electoral violence tools, ballot snatchers, or political thugs. Ojo (2020) points out that “unemployed youths are often lured into political violence with promises of financial rewards and future political appointments”(p. 134). This pattern has created a dangerous cycle in which electoral fraud and violence serve as stepping stones to political power.

In addition, the pervasive effects of unemployment and poverty have fostered a society that rejects meritocracy in favor of favoritism and nepotism. Yerima illustrates in *Pari* (2016) how those with political connections secure government jobs, positions, and appointments, while those who are qualified but politically and economically disadvantaged are left out. This is similar to the actual scenario in Nigeria, where political patronage takes precedence over competence. Eze (2019) notes that "poor governance and institutional inefficiency have resulted from the prioritization of political loyalty over merit" (p. 121). The implications of this are far-reaching, as it not only undermines national development but also entrenches a culture of mediocrity.

Another effect of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria is the normalization of bribery and vote-buying. Political players take advantage of economic difficulties during elections by offering cash, food items, and other material goods in exchange for votes. Many voters view elections as a chance to obtain short-term relief materials, rather than a platform to demand accountability, since they are having difficulty meeting their fundamental needs. According to Dike (2021), "poverty has eroded the electorate's ability to make independent political choices, reducing democracy to a transactional affair rather than a system of governance rooted in the will of the people" (p. 97). The inability to break free from this pattern perpetuates a vicious cycle where corrupt leaders continue to exploit economic deprivation to maintain power.

Additionally, many have turned to fraudulent activities including money laundering, ritual killings, and cyber crime as a result of their desperate need for wealth in an economy with little opportunities. The glorification of wealth, regardless of its source, has created a culture in which material success takes precedence over morality. This aligns with Adeyemi's (2022) argument that "economic hardship has significantly contributed to the moral decay of Nigerian society, as individuals prioritize wealth acquisition over ethical considerations" (p. 143). The younger generation is increasingly adopting the belief that integrity is a barrier to success, after witnessing the success of corrupt politicians and fraudulent people.

In a nutshell, the influence of poverty and unemployment on Nigerian politics cannot be overstated. These socio-economic issues serve as tools for political manipulation, weaken democratic structures, and promote corruption at all levels of governance. Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016) effectively dramatizes these realities, illustrating how economic hardship forces individuals into moral compromise and political servitude. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive economic reforms, job creation initiatives, and policies that prioritize meritocracy over political patronage. Without significant changes, the cycle of poverty-driven corruption will continue to define Nigerian politics.

The Role of Electoral Malpractice in Sustaining Political Immorality

Electoral malpractice is one of the most damaging factors sustaining political immorality in Nigeria. Vote-buying, ballot snatching, intimidation, and election manipulation have become entrenched in the country's democratic process over time, making it challenging to get trustworthy leaders. Elections are now often predetermined, leaving little room for democratic choice, as a result of politicians' desperate attempts to hold onto power at any costs. As Ogundiya (2019) observes, "electoral fraud in Nigeria is not merely an anomaly but a systemic feature of the political process" (p. 204). As a result, dishonest leaders who put their own interests ahead of the advancement of the country are being recycled.

Vote-buying, in which politicians give voters cash or tangible things in return for their support, is one of the most prevalent types of election fraud in Nigeria. This practice, which has grown widely, promotes a corrupt culture and undermines democratic principles. According to Umezurike (2021), "the commodification of votes in Nigeria has reduced elections to mere financial transactions, where the highest bidder secures political office" (p. 76). This not only disenfranchises the electorate but also ensures that governance remains in the hands of those who can afford to manipulate the system rather than those with genuine leadership qualities.

Election violence and ballot snatching are important forms of electoral malpractice that fuel political immorality. In order to crush opposition and sway election results, political thugs—who are frequently employed by desperate candidates—commit acts of intimidation, assault, and even murder. Adebisi (2020) notes that “political violence in Nigeria is not an isolated occurrence but a strategic tool used to control power and silence dissent” (p. 119). Elections are now perceived as contests of force rather than democratic processes due to the normalization of such practices.

Furthermore, it is impossible to overlook the role of compromised electoral bodies. At different points in time, institutions such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have been accused of conspiring with political elites to rig elections. According to Eke (2018), “cases of electoral officials altering figures, declaring fraudulent results, or turning a blind eye to obvious malpractices have been well documented” (p. 45). This strengthens the culture of political immorality and damages public confidence in the democratic process.

Electoral misconduct has disastrous long-term effects on democracy and governance. Leaders who gain power through dishonest means are not morally obligated to serve the people. Rather, they concentrate on using fraudulent means to recover election-related expenses, which feeds the vicious cycle of poor governance. As Nwosu (2017) asserts, “electoral fraud not only delegitimizes democratic institutions but also normalizes corruption as a tool of governance” (p. 93). This explains why many Nigerian politicians put their personal gains ahead of their public duties after assuming office.

For Nigeria to break free from the stranglehold of political immorality, electoral reforms must be prioritized. Strengthening institutions to ensure free and fair elections, prosecuting electoral offenders, and educating the electorate on the dangers of vote-buying are crucial steps in restoring democratic integrity. Without addressing electoral malpractice, any effort to combat corruption and improve governance will remain futile.

Case Study: Ahmed Yerima's *Pari*

Synopsis of the Play

Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016) is a compelling dramatic piece that examines the themes of power, corruption, tradition, and gender oppression within a socio-political landscape that is reminiscent of modern-day Nigeria. The play revolves around the eponymous character, *Pari*, a woman trapped in a patriarchal system that dictates her fate. Yerima criticizes the social systems that permit electoral fraud, political immorality, and the exploitation of vulnerable people, especially women, through her struggles and eventual fate. The plot develops in a way that emphasizes the relationship between individual aspirations and institutional corruption, offering a microcosmic representation of the larger Nigerian realities.

Analysis of Yerima's *Pari*

Yerima's *Pari* (2016) is a layered text that engages with the political and moral crises pervading Nigerian society. The play presents a protagonist whose struggles are emblematic of the experiences of marginalized groups. *Pari*'s plight is not just a personal story but a commentary on the structural inequalities embedded in Nigerian sociopolitical life. The character's suffering and resilience serve as a vehicle for Yerima to expose the intersection of political power and traditional authority, which often operate to the detriment of justice and equity.

The manipulation of election procedures to maintain political dominance is one of the main themes of *Pari* (2016), as seen below:

- Tada:** (*smirking*) You talk of justice, Pari, but justice is for the strong. We don't win elections with truth—we win them with numbers. It doesn't matter how they come. By dawn, the results are already declared, the people too hungry to ask questions.
- Pari:** But Father, shouldn't the people choose their leaders? Shouldn't their voices matter?
- Tada:** (*sighs*) My daughter... you still see the world through innocent eyes. The people's voices are loud only when we let them be. But in this game—this *political gospel*—we feed them just enough to keep them singing. Women, especially. A bag of rice, a wrapper, and they line up like choir singers on election day.
- Pari:** And what about dignity? What about change?
- Tada:** Change is a myth we sell during campaigns. What matters is who controls the pulpit. And in this country, control comes not from votes, but from strategy (p. 31).

Yerima uses the play to show how political players take advantage of societal vulnerabilities, especially those of women, in order to maintain their control over the society. According to Ojo (2019), “this reflects real-life electoral malpractices in Nigeria, where the use of financial inducements, intimidation, and outright fraud has been widely documented” (p. 86). Pari's role as a pawn in a larger political chess game illustrates how the political elite exploit the disenfranchised.

Additionally, *Pari* (2016) by Yerima examines how tradition perpetuates political immorality as shown below:

- Alhaji Abdullahi:** (*sitting with a prayer bead in hand*) The elders say a girl's place is behind the veil and within her husband's gates. But today, because of elections, you want Pari to speak like a man in public?
- Mallam Bako:** (*firmly*) The times are changing, Alhaji. But if using her name keeps the emirate calm while we secure our seats, then let her speak. We must bend tradition when it serves a higher cause.
- Alhaji Abdullahi:** (*chuckling*) Or when it serves our pockets. These old customs—they are not just beliefs, Mallam. They are tools. The people obey without question.
- Mallam Bako:** (*nodding*) Precisely. We invoke tradition, and they surrender. That is how the game is played. Let the girl dance the dance of her forefathers while we collect the votes (p. 36).

According to the play, antiquated beliefs and customs often serve as a pretext for unethical practices. Because patriarchal norms are so ingrained, people like Pari are unable to question the status quo and are

therefore kept in subordination. This supports scholarly observations, as put by Ake (2000), that “traditional structures in Nigeria frequently intersect with modern governance in ways that sustain corruption and political exploitation” (p. 112).

Another significant theme in Yerima's *Pari* (2016) is the illusion of democracy, according to the below excerpt:

Mallam Bako: (*leaning against the wooden post of the corridor*) Democracy, they call it. But tell me, Alhaji, when last did the people choose?

Alhaji Abdullahi: (*smirking*) The people? My brother, the people are goats. We lead, they follow. Elections are theatre. We already know the winner before the first ballot is cast.

Mallam Bako: (*thoughtfully*) And yet, they sing and dance in the streets, thinking change has come.

Alhaji Abdullahi: Change? The only change is in the name of the puppet. We, the puppeteers, remain the same.

Pari: (*entering quietly*) So all the hope we see in their eyes is just smoke?

Alhaji Abdullahi: (*without shame*) Smoke, my dear Pari. Beautiful smoke that keeps them blind while we arrange the game (p. 29).

While Nigeria operates under a democratic system, Yerima's play reveals how the democratic process is often a façade, manipulated to serve the interests of a select few. The character interactions in *Pari* (2016) expose the reality that political transitions are rarely about genuine governance but rather about maintaining an elite cycle of power. This mirrors the real-world scenario, according to Ibrahim (2017), where “elections are riddled with irregularities, making it difficult for true democratic principles to thrive” (p. 73).

Yerima also addresses the commodification of people in politics through the character of Pari. Pari's experiences in the play highlight how women are exploited in politics, either as tools to achieve particular goals or as pawns in political schemes. According to Ogunyemi (2015), “women remain significantly underrepresented and are often used as symbolic figures rather than active participants in governance” (p. 42), reflecting broader concerns about gender imbalance in Nigerian politics.

***Pari* and its Reflection of the Nigerian Society**

Deeply ingrained in Nigeria's sociopolitical environment are the themes explored in Yerima's *Pari* (2016). The play allegorizes the broader problems with Nigerian democracy, such as gender marginalization, political corruption, and electoral fraud. Yerima's *Pari* (2016) serves as both a critique and a call to action through its narrative structure and character development, imploring society to address these pervasive problems.

Among the most notable similarities between modern-day Nigeria and Yerima's *Pari* (2016) is the persistence of political godfatherism, as shown below:

Alhaji Abdullahi: (*speaking in low tones*) Pari is not just a girl, Bako. She is a symbol—young, innocent, untouched by scandal. With her beside us, the people will believe again

Mallam Bako: (*frowning*) But she doesn't understand the game, Alhaji. She asks questions—too many. She speaks of justice, of truth.

Alhaji Abdullahi: (*with a smile*) That is why we must guide her. Like the child she is. We place her where we need her, speak through her mouth, and when it is done, we retire her with praise.

Pari: (*entering abruptly*) So this is the truth? I am your puppet?

Mallam Bako: (*softly*) No, Pari... you are chosen. You carry a legacy.

Pari: (*bitterly*) A legacy of silence and obedience?

Alhaji Abdullahi (*sternly*) A legacy of survival. Do not bite the hand that lifts you (p. 38).

Just as Pari finds herself entangled in a web of power dynamics beyond her control, according to Adebawale and Obadare (2011), “many Nigerian politicians operate under the influence of powerful godfathers who dictate political decisions” (p. 61). This system makes sure that loyalty to existing power brokers, rather than merit, is the basis for getting political positions.

The play also highlights the difficulties caused by institutional and judicial failures according to Pari's dialogue with other characters in the play:

Pari: (*voice trembling*) I went to the council. I told them everything—how I was used, promised a future, then silenced. They said it was not their concern.

Mallam Bako: (*avoiding her gaze*) These things are not always so simple, Pari. There are protocols... procedures.

Pari: (*angrily*) Protocols? I have no father. No title. No power. So justice is not for me?

Alhaji Abdullahi: (*calmly*) The system is not built for noise-makers. You should learn to endure quietly. That is how women survive in this land.

Pari: (*bitterly*) Then your courts, your councils, your laws... they are all shields for men like you.

Mallam Bako: (*softly*) Pari, this is how the world works. You cannot fight it.

Pari: (*firmly*) Then it is the world that is broken—not me (p. 48).

The inability of political and judicial institutions to defend people like Pari is a reflection of the clear fact that those in positions of authority often sabotage social justice. Okonkwo (2020) asserts that, “this

is particularly evident in Nigeria's weak judiciary, where court rulings on electoral matters are frequently influenced by external pressures rather than the rule of law”(p. 95).

Additionally, Yerima's *Pari* (2016) highlights the disillusionment of ordinary citizens with the political system, as shown below:

- Pari:** *(sitting on a mat, staring into the distance)* I believed them, Mallam. When they came with their promises, their speeches. I thought... maybe I could help make things better.
- Mallam Bako:** *(sighs, sitting beside her)* We all want better, Pari. But politics is not about belief. It is about power—and who holds it.
- Pari:** *(shaking her head)* Then why dress it up as hope? Why make people dream if the plan is to crush them?
- Alhaji Abdullahi:** *(approaching)* That is not crushing, child. It is leading. The people need symbols. You were that for a time. Be grateful.
- Pari:** *(bitterly)* Grateful? For being used and cast aside? For learning that justice and truth are only for the rich?
- Mallam Bako:** *(quietly)* This is Nigeria, Pari. Those who dream too loudly wake up in chains (p. 49).

Just as Pari finds herself betrayed by a system she cannot navigate, many Nigerians experience a similar sense of disenchantment with governance. No wonder Ekeh (2016), opines that “the lack of accountability and the recurrent cycle of corrupt leadership contribute to widespread apathy and mistrust in the political process” (p. 118).

Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016) is a profound dramatization of the socio-political crises in Nigeria as seen below:

- Pari:** *(tears in her eyes, speaking to Mallam Bako)* You told me I could make a difference. That standing beside Alhaji would give women voice. But all I see now is silence—mine.
- Mallam Bako:** *(hesitating)* It was necessary, Pari. Your presence gave the campaign life. You were never meant to speak... only to be seen.
- Pari:** *(bitterly)* So I was decoration? A girl dressed in hope to sell lies?
- Alhaji Abdullahi:** *(entering confidently)* Enough of this sentiment. Politics is not a child's game. We win by any means, and your role—though small—was effective.
- Pari:** *(stepping back)* And the people? Their votes, their trust?
- Alhaji Abdullahi:** *(shrugs)* Tools. Just like democracy itself—a mask we wear when convenient (p. 41).

The play examines gender oppression, election corruption, and the exploitation of democratic processes for personal benefit, via the experiences of its protagonist. The narrative is in line with real-world events, and offers a theatrical perspective that allows audiences to interact with and critique the shortcomings of the Nigerian political system. Yerima's work is not merely a story but a reflection of the realities that continue to shape the nation, making it a relevant and necessary text for discussions on political morality and governance in Nigeria.

The Rivers State Political Crisis: A Reflection of the Society in Yerima's *Pari*

The long-standing practice of godfatherism, in which outgoing political figures try to manipulate their successors, is mainly responsible for the political crisis in Rivers State. This crisis, which has caused political divisions in the state, is the result of a power tussle between former Governor Nyesom Wike and Governor Siminalayi Fubara. The state's power dynamics have changed as a result of the drama that has been playing out, including accusations of betrayal, legislative defection, threats of impeachment, violent altercations, judicial rulings, and federal intervention.

The above is related to the play according to the dialogue below:

Mallam Bako: *(speaking in hushed tones)* Alhaji, things are falling apart. Your name stirs unrest in the council. Some say you still pull the strings—others say you should step aside.

Alhaji Abdullahi: *(firmly)* Step aside? After building this house with my own hands? No, Bako. I choose who sits on the throne, not the people (p. 42).

The Root of the Problem: Godfatherism and Political Control

The 2023 gubernatorial election is the root cause of the current crisis in Rivers State. As the state's Accountant-General during Wike's administration, Governor Fubara was largely seen as his political protégé. Ojo (2023), opines that “his emergence as the gubernatorial candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was orchestrated by Wike, who reportedly handpicked him in a bid to maintain control over the affairs of the state even after leaving office” (p. 45). But, shortly after assuming office, Fubara started to show his independence by making decisions that were not in line with Wike's wishes. This is similar to what happened in the play, as seen below:

Alhaji Abdullahi: You think power is yours to wield freely? I made you, Pari.

Pari: Then perhaps it's time the maker watches his creation rise beyond him.

Alhaji Abdullahi: Loyalty is not a choice, it's a debt.

Pari: And what of justice? Of truth? I won't be your puppet.

Alhaji Abdullahi: Defiance is betrayal, and betrayal has its price (p. 39).

This assertion of autonomy created friction between the governor and his predecessor. Wike, who had moved on to become the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) under President Bola Tinubu's administration, expected Fubara to remain loyal to his political directives. Eze (2024), puts that “Fubara's refusal to be controlled sparked a political battle that quickly escalated into a constitutional and governance crisis” (p. 78).

Legislative Impeachment Attempts and Political Defections

The conflict had gotten to the climax, by late 2023, when 27 members of the Rivers State House of Assembly, all Wike's supporters, started the impeachment process against Governor Fubara. Chukwu (2024) claims that “this action caused a breakdown in governance and that Wike was using the legislature to control the executive arm of government” (p. 92). When suspected political thugs set fire on the State Assembly Complex, the situation drastically changed, signaling a dangerous escalation of hostilities. A similar conflict like the above happened in the play, according to the below excerpt:

Hon. Bitrus: The Assembly moves, not with the will of the people, but by the whispers of Alhaji Abdullahi.

Pari: So laws are no longer written with ink, but with ash and fire?

Hon. Bitrus: When power trembles, it seeks to destroy before it crumbles (p. 37).

The 27 lawmakers, who were all elected on the platform of the PDP, later allegedly defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC) in December 2023. According to Ajayi (2024), “this defection was seen as a strategic move to undermine Fubara's government, aligning themselves with Wike's new political allegiance at the federal level” (p. 56). However, this move triggered legal debates over the constitutionality of their continued stay in office as legislators.

The Rivers State High Court Ruling and Supreme Court Reversal

When the issue was brought before the court, the political crisis took a decisive legal turn. The Rivers State High Court ruled on December 20, 2024, in accordance with Section 109(1) of the 1999 Constitution, that the 27 lawmakers who defected from the PDP to the APC automatically lost their seats. This section stipulates that any legislator who defects from the party under whose platform they were elected must vacate their seat unless the party is experiencing a division (Rivers State High Court, 2024, p. 12).

All legislative activities by the defected legislators, including their attempts of impeachment and budget approvals, were declared unconstitutional by the ruling. The Court additionally ruled that in order to fill the vacant legislative seats, new elections must be conducted. This ruling affirmed Governor Fubara's control over the state and dramatically tipped the scales in his favor (Rivers State High Court, 2024, p. 14).

However, the case escalated and was taken to the Supreme Court, where the judgment took a different turn. On February 28, 2025, the Supreme Court, passed a controversial ruling, overturned the High Court's ruling and reinstated the 27 defected lawmakers. The judgement was widely criticized as a politically motivated ruling rather than a strict interpretation of the law, given the existing constitutional provision on party defection (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2025, p. 22).

The lawmakers who had been reinstated by the Supreme Court immediately resumed legislative activities after this ruling, passing motions that further undermined Fubara's authority. They reinstated the governor's impeachment threats and moved to overturn certain executive decisions made while they were away.

Federal Government's Seizure of State Allocations and Economic Implications

The political crisis in Rivers State took an even more drastic turn when the Federal government, allegedly acting on directives from Wike's allies, placed a hold on the state's monthly allocations from

the Federation Account. This action was widely seen as a coercive measure to subdue Fubara, justified under the guise of an "audit review" of state finances by the Barr. Wike camp. This financial blockade may have immediate negative and disruptive repercussions on state projects, such as public services, workers' salaries, and infrastructure development.

The political crisis in Rivers State serves as a reminder of the perils of godfatherism, electoral fraud, and how they affect democratic governance. Although political godfathers often install their successors in order to maintain influence, disputes occur when these successors want independence. The judicial battle between the Supreme Court and the Rivers State High Court demonstrated how legal institutions can be swayed by political influence, which in turn affects governance and stability.

The federal government's role in the crisis, particularly through the seizure of state allocations, paints the disturbing picture of economic hardships for ordinary citizens, making governance nearly impossible. For true political stability to be achieved, there must be a shift away from personal political ambitions toward governance that prioritizes the welfare of the people.

The Declaration of a State of Emergency and Suspension of the Rivers State Government

Amid the worsening crisis, President Bola Tinubu declared a state of emergency in Rivers State on March 18, 2025, citing threats to governance and security. This extraordinary measure led to the suspension of Governor Fubara, his deputy, and all members of the Rivers State House of Assembly for an initial period of six months. In their place, the President appointed retired Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas as the military administrator to oversee state affairs (AP News, 2025).

However, this action sparked a great deal of controversy. A state of emergency does not excuse the dissolution of a democratically elected government, the Nigerian Bar Association told Nigerians, which condemned the action as unlawful. The decision was also criticized by former President Goodluck Jonathan, who cautioned that it could damage Nigeria's democratic image (Channels TV, 2025). On March 23, 2025, Governor Fubara appeared in public despite his suspension, signaling his intention to contest the federal government's decision (Channels TV, 2025).

The National Assembly subsequently approved the president's declaration, legitimizing the emergency rule and the temporary dissolution of the state government. However, this action has raised concerns about the overreach of federal power and its implications for democratic governance in Nigeria.

Rivers State's political crisis serves as a warning of the dangers of electoral fraud and godfatherism, as well as how they affect democratic governance. Political godfathers often install their successors in order to retain their influence, but conflicts occur when these successors want autonomy. The Supreme Court vs. Rivers State High Court battle served as an example of how political influence may alter legal institutions, affecting governance and stability.

An alarming precedent in Nigerian democracy is set by the federal government's direct intervention, which involved declaring a state of emergency and suspending an elected government. Critics argue that the action represents a dangerous centralization of power, even though it was justified on security grounds.

For true political stability to be achieved there must be a shift away from personal political ambitions toward governance that prioritizes the welfare of the people. Addressing the underlying causes of political godfatherism and ensuring judicial independence will be critical in preventing future crises of this nature.

Conclusion

Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* (2016), serves as a profound reflection of the grim realities of Nigerian politics, where money, power, and immorality shape the socio-political landscape. Yerima paints a disturbing but realistic image of a political system in which individual ambition, greed, and power, are prioritized over ethical morals, through the play. As exemplified by real-life political events such as the political unrest in Rivers State, the themes explored—political godfatherism, corruption, betrayal, and the degradation of moral integrity—reflect the ongoing crisis in Nigeria.

The dominance of money in Nigerian politics has made governance to be determined by financial interests rather than public service, and leadership has become a transactional process where loyalty is purchased. Power is becoming a weapon used by a few to manipulate elections, suppress opposition, and uphold political dynasties, rather than being a tool for the advancement of the country. In turn, immorality takes the shape of blackmail, deceit, and even violence—strategies employed to secure political power at all costs.

According to the findings of this study, Nigeria's commodification of political power has turned leadership into financial transactions, rather than service to the masses. Again, because ambitious politicians must pay allegiance to powerful figures rather than the public, political godfatherism continues to undermine democratic processes. Going further, judiciary which ought to act as an unbiased defender of democracy is regularly coerced to further political agendas, leading to inconsistent rulings that erode public confidence. As Yerima's *Pari* (2016) reveals, this moral decay within the political space encourages deception, betrayal, and corruption, ensuring that governance remains a self-serving enterprise rather than a tool for national development. The political instability that emerges from these power struggles is not just a theatrical construct but a lived reality, as seen in the ongoing crisis in Rivers State, where political maneuvering and economic sabotage disrupt governance and deepen public suffering.

Ultimately, *Pari* (2016) is more than just a play—it is a socio-political commentary that forces Nigerians to confront the harsh truth about their leadership and governance. The parallels between fiction and reality reveal that unless structural reforms are implemented to curb the excesses of political elites, Nigeria will continue to grapple with cycles of corruption, electoral malpractice, and governance failures. The only hope for change lies in a collective effort to demand accountability, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote ethical leadership. Until then, Nigerian politics will continue to be characterized by immorality, money, and power.

To address the pressing issues highlighted in this study, the following recommendations are necessary:

Electoral Reforms and Strengthening Democratic Institutions: Policies should be enacted to prevent financial influence from determining electoral outcomes. Strengthening institutions such as INEC and the judiciary will help curb political godfatherism and ensure credible elections.

Public Awareness and Political Education: Civic education campaigns should inform Nigerians about the dangers of money-driven politics and encourage them to vote based on integrity rather than financial incentives.

Judicial Independence and Anti-Corruption Measures: The judiciary must be protected from political interference to uphold justice. Stronger anti-corruption laws and independent oversight mechanisms should be enforced to hold political leaders accountable.

Ethical Leadership and Political Accountability: Nigerian politicians must undergo leadership training that prioritizes service, transparency, and accountability. Those found guilty of corrupt practices should face strict legal consequences.

Empowerment of New Political Actors: Nigeria must create a political environment that allows for credible candidates with moral standards—especially youths and women—to participate without the influence of political godfathers. This includes reducing the cost of running for office and providing a level playing field for all candidates.

By implementing these reforms, Nigeria can begin the process of reclaiming its democratic integrity and ensuring that governance serves the people rather than the ambitions of a selected few.

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