



Institutional Corruption: An Exegetical Analysis of Amos 2:6-16 in the Context of Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the interrelations between Amos 2:6-16 and institutional corruption in the context of Nigeria. Existing studies have analysed Amos 2:6-16 and institutional corruption historically and socio-politically. However, only a few studies have critically analyzed Amos 2:6:16 and applied it to the Nigerian context as it relates to institutional corruption. Thus, this research establishes a critical basis for the conceptualisation of Amos 2:6-16 and institutional corruption in the context of Nigeria. The historical-critical method of biblical exegesis and the contextual biblical interpretation method of expressing biblical message in a contemporary context were deployed. The exegesis discovered that Israel abandoned the covenantal demands to care for the vulnerable of the society and, consequently, engaged in social, religious and judicial abuses. The research discovers that institutional corruption is essentially organised and involves the manipulation of social structures for personal gains. The abuses in Amos 2:6-16 show features of organised corruption and, just like the 8th century Israel, those with political power and the powerful rich in Nigeria manipulate the system at the detriment of the vulnerable poor. This paper concludes by recommending the election of credible leaders into public offices, strengthening the rule of law, encouraging citizenship participation in leadership selection and reform of the civil service as possible solutions to the problem.

Keywords: Institutional corruption, Israel, The Poor and the Vulnerable, Punishment, Amos 2:6-16.

How to Cite this Paper

Onwordi, F. A., (2026). "Institutional Corruption: An Exegetical Analysis of Amos 2:6-16 in the Context of Nigeria". *Planeyo Journal of Art and Humanities (PLANJAH)*. Volume 3, Number 4, 1-16.

1. Introduction

Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed growth politically, economically and in other vital areas of development. However, this growth has not been progressive and this inconsistent growth trajectory finds its root in institutional corruption. The developmental strides are consistently being eroded by corruption which is carried out in different facets of life in Nigeria. Institutional corruption is systemic, with a structure that drives and encourages it. Corruption frustrates all forms of actions against its operations as it is woven into the fabrics of governance. Thus, it is perpetrated in politics, civil service, the military, religious and educational institutions, among others. Consequently, some who hold public offices see these offices as opportunities to loot public funds, while judicial corruption keeps increasing, with judges giving judgments to favour their cronies. The oppression of the poor and vulnerable of the society is not abating with tough economic and social policies widening the gap between the powerful rich and vulnerable poor.

Amos 2:6-16 narrates the practice of judicial injustice, oppression of the vulnerable, abuse of social power and religious violation in 8th-century Israel. It presents a society where the powerful abandoned the religious obligation of care for the vulnerable of the society and completely exploited the poor. These features provide a basis for examining whether, and to what extent, the narrative may illuminate contemporary institutional corruption in Nigeria. Therefore, Amos 2:6-16 will be analysed and institutional corruption will be deployed as an analytical category to better conceptualise the text. This paper argues that Amos 2:6-16 provides the basis for examining institutional corruption in Nigeria. However, understanding that both contexts are different historically, politically and institutionally, ethical and theological analogies would guide the application of the text to the Nigerian context.

It is important to stress that there are existing literatures that have examined Amos 2:6-16 historically and have also studied institutional corruption from socio-political point of view. However, there are few exegetical studies that have applied the prophetic charge of Amos 2:6-16 to the context of contemporary Nigeria as it relates to institutional corruption. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap.

Historical Background of Amos 2:6-16

Amos' prophetic mission was in the northern kingdom of Israel and this coincided with the reigns of Jeroboam II (Israel) and Uzziah (Judah). Under Jeroboam II, Israel witnessed economic prosperity and it was at the height of its powers (Lange et al., 2008). Judah too was not left behind in this economic and military growth (Andersen & Freedman, 2008). During this period, Assyria did not pose any threat to both nations (Lange et al., 2008), as Jeroboam II restored and strengthened the boundaries of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 14:25; Eickmann, 2002). Such territorial expansion aided greatly the economic prosperity of Israel under Jeroboam II. However, in terms of religion, Israel faltered, just as Judah was not any better. Jeroboam II's continuation of the cult instituted by Jeroboam I (cf. 2 Kings 14:24) and king Uzziah's pride which led to his "intrusion into the sanctuary" (Andersen & Freedman, 2008, p. 20), marked the beginning of the decline of both nations. Specifically, in the northern kingdom, the practice of idolatry

and blatant violation of the covenantal demands paved the way for the prophetic ministry of Amos.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in design and this allowed the research to probe and understand issues in their peculiar context and the meaning ascribed to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This research relied on existing literature, books and documents in collating data. Specifically, the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis was used. The exegesis involved the delineation of the literary structure, historical-critical evaluation of the Amos 2:6-16 and the exposition of its theological underpinnings. Also, the contextual biblical interpretation method was deployed and it involved establishing an analytical nexus between Amos 2:6-16 and the Nigerian context which produced an ethical-theological framework for institutional evaluation in Nigeria. Therefore, there is a movement from the text to the context and from the context to the text.

Analysis of the Text (Amos 2:6-16)

This paper divides Amos 2:6-16 into three parts, showing how Israel was condemned by God on account of her conducts which contravened the covenantal demands. Israel repudiated the religious obligation to care for the vulnerable poor. In articulating Amos 2:6-16, scholars agree that it announced charges and judgment against Israel (Paul & Cross, 1991; Gingrich, 2004). Gingrich (2004) opined that the remaining parts of the book of Amos are an elaboration of the charges mentioned in Amos 2:6-12. Consequently, Amos 2:6-16 is divided as follows:

- i. The crime against Israel (Amos 2:6-8)
- ii. Historical account of God's deeds and Israel's Action (Amos 2:9-12)
 - a. God's action on behalf of Israel (Amos 2:9-11)
 - b. Israel rejects God's Messengers (Amos 2:12)
- iii. Threatened Punishment (Amos 2:13-16)

Interestingly, Smith and Page (2001), argued that it is difficult to state the number of crimes listed. However, Gingrich (2004, p.10) show that within the first division (Amos 2:6-8), there are three charges against Israel and in the second division (Amos 2:9-12), one charge, while the third division (Amos 2:13-16) contains the threatened punishment.

The Crime against Israel (Amos 2:6-8)

The prophet confronted Israel with the problem of perversion of justice, oppression of the poor and inhuman treatment meted out to follow vulnerable Israelites. Eickmann (2002), articulated that the first charge confronted the ungodly treatment of the poor by the court and miscarriage of justice when the poor complained of oppression (p.201). The acts of injustices and oppressions were direct violation of the law of God which commanded the Israelites not to defraud their neighbours or rob them, not to pervert justice and to love their neighbours (cf. Lev. 19:13-18) (Eickmann, 2002, p.10).

Articulating Amos 2:6-8, Smith and Page (2001) hold that it opens with the use of the traditional numerical formula which enumerates the indictment of Israel. Mamahit and

Venter (2010) state that Amos 2:6-8 deals with the specific sins of Israel, beginning with an introduction, body comprising the oracle and ending with a conclusion. However, Smith and Page (2001) insist that Amos 2: 9-12 functions as an extension of verses 6-8. Mamahit and Venter (2010) support this position, arguing that Amos 2:6-8 can be understood within the context of the larger narrative (cf. Amos 2:6-16), insisting that the theme of wine in verse 8, for example, continues in verse 12.

Amos 2:6 opens with the phrases *ʾal šəlōšāh pišē* (for three transgressions) and *ʾal ʾarbāʾah* (for four), which represent prophetic formulae for expressing God's tolerance of sin to a point. God's tolerance is impartial, but there comes a time when a peoples' sin reaches the breaking point and what comes on them is God's judgment. The first charge was perversion of justice and it is expressed thus: *miḵ-rām bak-ke-sep̄ sad-diḡ* (they sell the righteous for silver) and *ʿeb-yō-wn ba-ʾā-būr na-ʾā-lā-yim* (sell the needy for pair of shoes). In this context, *sad-diḡ* means 'righteous poor' and *ʿeb-yō-wn* means 'needy'. According to this charge, the judges in Israel were accused of habitually collecting bribes which resulted in the perversion of justice. In essence, the rich bribed witnesses to speak against the righteous poor and vulnerable. For Gingrich (2004), the righteous refused to give bribe and the needy were incapable of offering bribes and, as such, these two categories of persons are constantly denied justice. Eickmann (2002) explains that when a poor Israelite cannot pay back a debt, even when the said debt is so insignificant, the poor Israelite is sold into debt slavery. Gingrich (2004) articulates that “even a very small bribe, such as a pair of shoes, could influence a judge to render an unjust verdict in Amos' day” (p.10). The key phrase here is “a pair of sandals” (*na-ʾā-lā-yim*) and, according to Smith and Page (2001, p.62), it means the ridiculously insignificant low amount for which a fellow poor Israelite was sold into slavery. Lange *et al.* (2008) argue that the expression does not necessarily state the price for which the judge was bribed, but points to a mere token for which the vulnerable Israelite was in debt and for which the judge hands the debtor up into the control of the creditor as a slave (cf. Lev 25:39).

The second charge throws up the problem of translation and is considered obscure (Smith and Page, 2001; Spence-Jones, 2004). However, Smith and Page (2001) believe it pointed to how the courts undermined or perverted justice, while Spence-Jones (2004) argued that the expression emphasises the eagerness of the oppressors to crush the vulnerable of the society. In line with the above, Gingrich (2004) contend that the wealthy and powerful, capitalising on the indebtedness of the poor, defrauded them of their inheritance through the manipulation of the justice system. In essence, Lange *et al.* (2008) maintains that the activities of the rich Israelites perverted the way, bringing the vulnerable to utter distress, embarrassment and misery. The word *sha'aph* (trample) is instructive and, when it is read in combination with *yattū* (turn aside) and the noun *derek* (path), verse 7a speaks about the perversion of justice and exploitation of the poor (*dallim*) and the vulnerable (*ʾnāwim*). Contributing to the argument, Andersen and Freedman (2008, p.315) insist that the verse reveals the determined hateful actions against the vulnerable of the society at denying them justice. It also shows how they were physically abused which included bodily harm like smashing their heads, shoving them of the street and trampling them.

The third charge is stated in verses 7b–8 and, as Eickmann (2002) captures it, borders on religious immorality, indicating that Israel profaned the name of God who called her to be holy. The third charge was listed in three indictments which are:

- i. A man and his father visited the same girl to profane God's name.
- ii. Clothing held in pledge was used for immoral act.
- iii. Wine collected as unjust fines drank in the temple festivities (Gingrich, 2004).

The phrase *wə-ʾiš wə-ʾā-bîw* (a man and his father) poses some difficulties in its translation. Wolf and McBride (1977) consider verse 7b to address clan ethos which provided protection for the legal rights and personhood of a slave girl and, at the same time, protecting her marriageability status. Waard, Smalley and Smally (1979), on the other hand, argue that the issue is not necessarily about sexual intercourse with the girl, but how the girl was abused. This, for them, underpinned the general theme of oppression that Amos addressed. Martin-Achard and Re'emi (1984), however, insisted that it explained the degree of social disorder in Samaria.

In any case, what is clear is that *ʾiš* (a man) is used in a distributive sense meaning 'each'. Andersen and Freedman (2008) conclude that the phrase *wə-ʾiš wə-ʾā-bîw* would refer to 'everybody' and not just 'two men' (a son and his father). With this in mind, it means that everybody is guilty of the indictment. The distributive sense ascribed to the phrase seems to be right as the text would have just read 'father and son' if that is what is intended. Examining *han-na-ʾă-rāh* (the same maiden or girl), Craigie (2001, p.143) explains the term in relation to sexual activities associated with the fertility cult of Baal. Thus, he considered it to be an abuse of the true religion. Furthermore, Andersen and Freedman (2008) explain that *han-na-ʾă-rāh* is a slave girl that is sexually assaulted by the powerful Israelite. For them, evidence in verse 8 suggests the existence of cult prostitution. On the contrary, Smith and Page (2001) agree that the word referred to a slave girl bought for either the father or the son under a covenant. Thus, for both to have sexual relation with her would amount to a breach of the covenant and, in essence, profaned the name of God. Finley (2003) sharply disagrees with the notion of temple prostitution, arguing that even though it referred to a slave girl, the mentioning of altar and temple in verse 8 do not suggest temple prostitution. He insists that what is at stake is simply the oppression of the vulnerable in the society. Regardless of the different interpretations, what remained constant is that the name of God was desecrated by the actions of everyone who participated in cult prostitution, who betrayed the covenantal stipulations on how slaves are to be treated and who oppressed the vulnerable.

The second and third indictments that make up the third charge against Israel are related in the sense that they both constitute items collected from the poor debtors and are used by the rich creditors for their pleasure and gratification. The law stipulated that a poor Israelites garment (*beḡed*) given as pledge to the rich Israelite must be returned to the poor Israelite to help keep the Israelite warm and protected from cold at night (cf. Exodus 22:27, Deuteronomy 24:12-13). Amos observed that the poor Israelites' garments were withheld and used for other purposes. Smith and Page (2001) suggest that the sin involving garments (*bəḡāḏîm*) and wines (*wəyên*) were concurrent and were direct acts of oppression of the poor. Finley (2003) adds that the verse points to the actions of fining the innocent unjustly by the court, illegally extorting money in legal

cases and using these to purchase wine for drinking in the temple. Accordingly, Spence-Jones (2024) clearly “condemns the cruel luxury which, contrary to the Law, made the poor debtor's necessities minister to the rich man's pleasures” (p.25). One striking point here is that items got through exploitation were used for religious worship. This is social injustice amidst the claim of religious worship. Therefore, it is argued that the major indictment in the verse is social in nature (Martin-Archard and Re'emi, 1984; Smith and Page, 2001). Thus, while this position is correct, the inappropriateness of the religious feasts cannot be overlooked. Therefore, to conclude that both social and religious indictments were involved will not be wrong.

Historical Account of God's Deeds and Israel's Action (Amos 2:9-12)

a. God's Action on Behalf of Israel (Amos 2:9-11)

Smith and Page (2001) identify a shift from 3rd person to the first person in verse 9 and, here, God's benevolence in making Israel a nation is contrasted with Israel's oppressive conduct towards the poor and needy in the society. These verses portray the constructive works of God who loved Israel and Israel's destructive works. Lange *et al* (2008) argue in the same direction, insisting that Amos 2:9-11 represents the manifestation of God's benevolence and grace to Israel. One that distinguishes Israel from other nations and puts the responsibility of reciprocal charity in view.

In essence, Amos 2:9-11 recount the deeds of God in the history of Israel. In bringing the charges against Israel, the prophet reminds Israel of God's love. God has continued to be benevolent to Israel and in return Israel is expected to be thankful. Being thankful in this regard would mean that the vulnerable of the society must be protected and cared for by the rich and powerful. Therefore, Israel is charged with ungrateful forgetfulness. Amos enumerates God's love in Israel's history which is contrasted with her ungrateful forgetfulness. They are:

- i. The destruction of the Amorites and possession of their land (Amos 2:9)
- ii. The deliverance from Egypt (Amos 2:10)
- iii. The preservation in the wilderness for forty years (Amos 2:10)
- iv. The sending of the prophets and Nazarites (*nezîrîm*) (Amos 2:11)

God remained faithful to Israel and secured her destiny in that he did not only deliver her from the slavery of Egypt, but with His help, the Amorites were also defeated and their land secured for Israel. Also, God sent prophets (*nabîîm*) and Nazarites (*nezîrîm*) to guide and teach Israel on how to walk in the way of the Lord (Gingrich, 2004). However, through her conduct, Israel neglected and closed this channel.

b. Israel Rejects God's Messengers (Amos 2:12)

Amos 2:12 presents Israel's rejection of God's benevolent acts. Interestingly, Israel despised God's effort by constituting a barrier to the prophets (*nabîîm*) and Nazarites (*nezîrîm*) in discharging their duties. The word *nabî* means someone who speaks on behalf of God and a *nazîr* is a consecrated person who speaks God's words. Thus, in rejecting the prophets and Nazarites, Israel rejected God. Spence-Jones (2004) explains that Israel refused to listen and accept the message of the *nabî* (prophet) that God sent to her. Israel's action was so intense and deliberate that it practically shut the door at the prophets. Gingrich (2024) argues that Israel completely refused to listen to the truth, stopping the prophets from speaking the truth her (p.11).

Threatened Punishment (Amos 2:13-16)

The threatened punishment on Israel was a direct consequence of Israel's ungrateful response to God's benevolence. Greater responsibility was expected from the one who has enjoyed great privilege and blessing (cf. Amos 2:6-11). Israel, having received so much from God, her punishment too would be severe. Ogilvie (1990) argues that God's punishment will be inescapable as all would be caught up in it. Lange *et al.* (2008) describes the punishment as crushing, terrible and inescapable. Folarin and Olanisebe (2014) insist that the judgment of God is essentially corrective and not punitive. However, they argue that the sweeping nature of the threatened punishment was most embarrassing.

The wordings in Amos 2:13-16 are vivid and intense, presenting a scary picture on how devastating the punishment would be. Finley (2003, p.156) holds that these Amos 2:13-16 portrays an army marching with might and great devastation. Smith and Page (2001) argue that God is the active agent of Israel's judgment and Eickmann (2002), analysing the verb *'ûq* (press down) in verse 13, concludes that God is bearing down on unheeding Israel like a heavy grain of cart to pass his judgment on her. The situation is dire, the disaster is inevitable and Israel surely would pay for her sins. The swift, the strong, the warriors, the archers, the infantry, the chariotry and the brave at heart will all be consumed by the devastating hand of God's punishment. The word *'ā-rō-wm* (naked) perfectly describes the intensity of the punishment. The bravest of all will flee and, in doing so, will flee naked in a clear show of fear and overwhelming defeat.

Interestingly, there are some opinions that linked the events Amos 2:13-16 to the fall of Israel. Ogilvie (1990) states that these verses represent “a startling description of what actually happened in 722 BC during the siege of Samaria and the subsequent fall of the northern kingdom” (p.303.). Lange *et al* (2008) argues that the punishment described in the verses are about the invasion of a more powerful adversary. Folarin and Olanisebe (2014) insist that Amos 2:13-16 was speaking to Israel about other impending judgment of God if they refused to return to Him. This, for them, included the Assyrian invasion, displacement and destruction of the nation (cf. 3:12, 4:2-3, 5:3). One thing is sure, the threatened punishment is a consequence of Israel's failure to uphold the covenant and maintain social order (justice). God, therefore, is at the centre of the judgment and Israel's refusal to change would necessitate these threatened punishments.

Findings from the Exegetical Analysis of Amos 2:6-16

The above exegesis can be appreciated from its linguistic, social-historical, moral and religious contexts. The language is forensic in nature, the narrative catalogues the transgressions of Israel using words that depict commercial and social sins. Craigie (2021) argues that in this narrative, Israel is made to see and acknowledge her own sins. Concerning its social and historical meaning, it established that Israel was prosperous economically. However, Israel indulged in debt-slavery: economic system where indebted poor citizens were sold unjustly; commercialisation of justice, class and gender exploitations (cf. Amos 2:6-7). The economic boom coincided with the collapse of social institutions (cf. Amos 2:12). In Israel at this time, the religious cult was corrupted and the worship that took place at Bethel was championed by the oppressors of the vulnerable. Lange *et al* (2008) argue that these oppressors went against the

covenantal demands (cf. Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 21:12), and indulged in the sin of frivolous luxury in the name of sacrificial offerings and meals. Theological the paper gleaned from the exegesis the following points:

- Election does not suggest immunity: The record of transgression and threatened punishment brought on Israel show that divinely elected does not exclude responsibility.
- The social dimension of righteousness: Righteousness is defined by justice, equity and fairness. True worship must be seen in justice and righteousness.
- God is the protector of the vulnerable: The narrative identifies the righteous poor, weak or oppressed and the young lady as the victims (cf. Amos 2:6-8). These are dear to God and all actions that undermine their wellbeing are a direct attack on God.
- The inevitability of God's Judgment: Since Israel in her ungrateful actions has not remained faithful to God, she will surely face certain judgment which will impose punishment on her if she does not retrace her steps.

A Brief Exposition of Corruption in Context

A briefly definition of corruption in the Nigerian context is very important. Thus, Smith (2007, P. 35), in the following words, define corruption:

When Nigerians talk about corruption, they refer not only to the abuse of state offices for some kind of private gain, but also to a whole range of social behaviours. . . Nigerians' notion of corruption encompasses everything from government bribery and graft, rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals, to the diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school, and even deceiving a lover.

Furthermore, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) Act of 2004 included actions such as: bribery, fraud, embezzlement, smuggling, tax evasion and money laundry as aspects of corruption (Oni, 2021).

Be that as it may, it is important to note that corruption can be connected to an individual or to social institutions. That is, corruption can be solitary or systemic and as such, Rahman and Sobuz (2026), opined that corruption maybe in layers (political, public sector and agency based). Thus, there is always the need to properly delineate personal, judicial, administrative and political corruption. In view of this, individual corruption deals with a person who decides to engage in corrupt practices for personal gains. Ediagbonuvie and Gasiokwu (2025) opine that judicial corruption occurs when officials, acting in their capacities as persons who dispense justice, subvert justice for personal gains. Administrative corruption, on the other hand, occurs when the laws and regulations guiding administrative systems within institutions are undermined for personal or selfish goals. Commenting on this, Rahman and Sobuz (2026) insist that government bureaucracy may appear to be legal, but in essence are mechanisms for corrupt actions. They argue that political corruption occurs when political leaders and government officials engage in the abuse of office, position and power for personal gains. From the foregoing, Umoudo *et al.* (2025) articulate that the interrogation of the term showed that it is both a criminal offense and a function of failed system or institutions.

Conceptualising Institutional Corruption

Smith-Crowe and Warren (2014) argue that institutional corruption involves misconducts and offenses found among persons who have the responsibility of managing government institutions. Institutional corruption weakens the effective operational capacities of institutions in terms of delivering their core mandates. The weakness of law and order that encourage institutional corruption rest on the degree of power and influence that is exercised by the human elements involved in the operations of the institutions. In essence, the degree of their involvement in corrupt practices within the organisation has a lot to do with institutional corruption. Interestingly, Schulz (2023) explains that institutional corruption occurs when actions undermine a social institution, even if those actions do not involve private gain, quid pro quo exchanges, or inherently immoral or illegal conduct. In other words, the action of the human person may not necessarily be illegal, but in as much as it obstructs the institution from operating as intended and ensuring maximum benefit for all members of the society, it constitutes corruption.

Considering the above argument, (Milner, 2017) opines that two factors are prominent in the discussion of institutional corruption and they are: the institution and the institutional authority that has the responsibility of exercising discretionary cum social powers. The fact is that these authorities manipulate administrative structures to commit corruption. According to Obinna (2022), they rely on the control they have over the system to commit self-serving acts. Regardless of how one perceives institutional corruption, Schulz (2023) insists that it is responsible for undermining institutions and, thus, creating social problems. Corruption, here, is systematic and operates within the institutions, using institutional frameworks and “entrenches a form of hybrid corruption in the long run, which eventually undermines the efficient functioning of the institutions and puts the institutions' long-term survival at risk” (Obinna, 2023, p. 68). It is, therefore, correct to assert that institutional corruption is a type of corruption that creates the platform upon which institutions are engineered to fail. Institutional failure in this regard benefits the controlling authority, while the majority of the people who are supposed to benefit from the institution lose out completely. Institutions are created to serve the need of the society, and when these institutions fail, the society suffers. In line with this, institutional corruption leads to failure in the operations of institutions and breeds perversion of justice, bribery, oppressions of the vulnerable, lack of accountability, embezzlement, nepotism, diversion of public funds and weak governance structure.

One important question to ask is: at what point does individual, administrative, political or judicial corruption become part of institutional corruption? In other words, when does the overlap take place? The layers of corruption identified above become aspects of institutional corruption when the corrupt practices become structured, guided and enforced by the system. A clerk who collects bribe to get something done and shares the proceeds of the bribe with the boss, while keeping a part of the bribe proceed for running the office is engaged in institutional corruption. An elected official who is suspected of having embezzled public funds for personal gains and for the running of the ruling political party and is not investigated or charged to court can be said to be involved in

institutional corruption. Institutional corruption involves those in authority muscling institutions of governance, creating a system that appears legal, yet not achieving greater productivity for the people and only meeting their selfish interests.

In concluding this discussion, factors that encourage institutional corruption should be put in perspective, and Kabiru (2019, pp.22-23) identifies moral backwardness, greed, get rich syndrome, judicial delay, fear of poverty and weakness of anti-corruption agencies as drivers of corruption. Yusuf (2014) argues that poor reward system is very central to the flourishing of corruption on all levels. This point is very important as a system that fails to equitably reward hard work opens the door for the possibility to undermining such a system. Also, Gbadamosi and Ajogbeje (2018) argue that the drive for material wealth and possession represent a major factor that fuels corruption both on individual and institutional levels.

Analysing Amos 2:6-16 in the Context of Institutional Corruption in Nigeria

It should be stressed that the Hebrew bible does not use the term institutional corruption in the exact same way it is deployed in modern political science and governance. The prophet's concern in the narrative cannot be conclusively said to be addressing institutional corruption as understood in the contemporary world. Significantly, therefore, institutional corruption is deployed as a conceptual lens through which Amos 2:6-16 is understood.

Critically, institutional corruption is a fitting conceptual lens for Amos 2:6-16 because the oracle does not only denounce individual sin, but denounces the systemic repudiation of the covenantal institution. Indeed, the judicial, religious, political and economic institutions mandated to protect *tsaddiq* (righteous poor), *ebyon* (poor), *dallîm* (needy) and *năwîm* (vulnerable) have been manipulated for the benefits of the powerful rich. Amos' ministry, thus, transcended the critique of personal ethics, but critiqued more intently the collapse of the covenantal structure.

Evidences in the narrative suggest that institutional authority was abused. The prophet referred to corrupt practices such as: 'selling the righteous and needy for silver and pair of shoes'. He mentioned individual oppressive acts that violated the rights and dignity of the vulnerable (cf. Amos 2:7a), sexual and immoral actions (cf. Amos 2:7b) and religious aberrations (cf. Amos 2:8). All these display features of organised judicial, social and religious abuses.

The interesting point is that those who perpetrated these acts of corruption were not challenged or brought to book and the consequence was the manipulation of justice. Martin-Achard and Re'emi (1984) argue that the judges allowed themselves to be bought over, leading to the sentencing of the innocent poor and vulnerable for practically nothing. Finley (2003) insists that the situation was such that an innocent person ended up receiving fine in court, just as those in power unjustly extorted money in legal cases. What is obvious is that the abuses (social, judicial and religious) showed features of systemic corruption.

The above point must be carefully articulated. The prophet did not mention the royal court which was the seat of government and power. However, the fact that judges and elders who midwived justice (cf. Deuteronomy 16:18) at the city gate, the palace and the temple or royal sanctuary were appointed and sustained by the royal court gives credence to the argument that the abuses had the features of systemic corruption. So, while the prophet did not mention the throne directly, there was the element of protection of the interests of the powerful. Martin-Achard and Re'emi (1984) argue that in the kingdom the interest of the influential took great precedence over the rights and dignity of the vulnerable (p.21). Justice was commercialised, equity disregarded to the detriment of the righteous poor and weak of the society. It can be inferred, therefore, that the throne is not interested in the plight of the vulnerable and that the system (social and religious) was rigged against the poor and vulnerable of the society.

The system was compromised and, as Ogilvie (1990) argues, powerful Israelites either ignored the verdict of the court or bribed the judge to do their bidding. The judges and elders as public servants abused their offices, while the rich and powerful of the society also manipulated the system solely for the achievement of their selfish interest. The system did not benefit the masses, but was skewed to benefit only those with authority. Therefore, while individual aristocrats indulged in these crimes, the role of state officials (judges), state institutions (courts), that the abuses were widespread and the apparent silence from the throne suggest or point to features of systemic corruption. As a result, social institutions (courts) became weak and opened the door for social injustice.

Institutionalised Corruption in Governance

Within the context of Nigeria, institutional corruption in the judiciary and public service is rampant. Accordingly, the 2024 NBS/UNODC report showed that judges and magistrates received the highest form of bribe (cash) in 2023. Anene and Iyala (2023) insist that political interference from high-ranking politicians and the failure to implement full financial autonomy for the judiciary continue to reinforce judicial corruption in Nigeria. Sadly, Takeme (2026), opined that corrupt practices are systematically carried out within the judicial bureaucracy. As a result, justice is perverted, purchased by the highest bidder and in some cases delayed at the detriment of the vulnerable. Unfortunately, within the civil service, corruption is not abating. In 2023, public officials reportedly received approximately a total of #721 billion in cash (2024 NBS/UNODC). Atakpa and Akpan (2023) articulate that the administrative corruption in Nigeria's civil service is bureaucratic and well entrenched in the system. This continues to hinder the social structure from providing maximum benefit for the citizens (p.121-122).

The question of economic injustice throws up the all-important issue of just wage for workers and the utilisation of scarce resources for the common good and not for individual or selfish goals. Adamaagashi and Olajide (2023) held that there is a great sense of impunity among politicians and public officials who engage in embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds. Interestingly, these same politicians refuse the idea of living wage for workers, but continue to commit to minimum wage which Adamu (2025) argue are usually lower and inconsistently enforced. The implication of

this is that workers groan under economic hardship which outweighs their financial capacities. The effect of the above gives rise to economic oppression as the rate of poverty increases, cascading into a situation where huge members of the population lack decent housing, health care, food, clothing and other basic necessities of life.

The prophet's condemnation of religious sacrifice devoid of justice (cf. Amos 2:7b-8) questions the morality of Christian churches accepting proceeds of money got from money laundering, advance-free fraud and other related criminal acts in the name of thanksgiving, tithes. As some have argued, these Christian Churches are not aware of the background behind the money, but the important question to ask is: do these churches ask questions concerning the sources of these monies? Some church leader through their actions consciously and unconsciously encourage systemic corruption in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 2017). Abonyi (2023) argues that some church leaders are complicit in systemic corruption, especially in their action of celebrating individuals who possess questionable wealth (p. 148). Indeed, following Amos' paradigm, one can conclude that while it is noble to give to the church, any gift that is a product or proceed of unjust acts does not qualify for an acceptable spiritual exercise. Also, all forms of economic policies that bring about untold hardship on the vulnerable amount to social injustice

One very pivotal accusation in the narrative is Israel's action against the Nazarites and the prophets sent to them by God (cf. Amos 2:12). These were disregarded completely, and Paul and Cross (1991) argue that Israel disrespected these messengers, making for themselves rules of conducts contrary to God's. Smith and Page (2001) agree with the above argument, insisting that Israel commanded the prophets not to function. The ability of the elite in 8th-century Israel to stop the Nazarites and prophets from dispensing their ministries points to a system that is so powerful, protecting the status quo from any form of scrutiny and accountability. Smith and Page (2001) explain that Israel's actions at stopping the messengers of God from acting was deliberate and the encounter between Amos and Amaziah provides a context for the ban on prophetic ministry (cf. Amos 7:16). Consequently, the above actions represented rebellious actions against God and also show the immense authority behind it.

The systematised muscling of all means of scrutiny finds meaning in the organised and, in some cases, the violent shutting down of all forms of agencies that call government and political office holders to accountability. It is often the case that journalists, religious leaders, activists and opposition members who call out corrupt practices and leaders who perpetrate these acts are attacked by those with political authority. In some cases, state power is deployed to arrest and even incarcerate those who speak truth to power. This also includes the manipulation of certain government agencies saddled with the responsibilities of maintaining financial, judicial, political propriety into doing their bidding and short-changing the vulnerable. Essoh *et al.* (2025) articulate this thought, saying that both the EFCC and ICPC continue to face interference and low funding from the government. Actions that limit their abilities, forcing them to ignore the corrupt powerful elites in power.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper examined Amos 2:6-16 and critically exposed institutional corruption as an analytical category that has aided the understanding of the text within the context of Nigeria. The social and judicial corruption in Israel violated the all – important divine demand to care for the vulnerable of the society. Systemic corruption remains a reality today in Nigeria and, just like the 8th-century Israel, it continues to reinforce social, judicial and political aberrations in governance. This paper, therefore, recommends:

1. **Recruitment of credible leaders:** Efforts must be made to ensure that credible leaders are recruited. Also, credible leadership selection process which would produce patriotic, incorruptible and competent leaders must be encouraged.
2. **Strengthening the rule of law:** This is central to building a just and equitable society. The rule of law must be supreme and applied without sentiment at all times.
3. Citizen participation in leadership recruitment process. Citizens must wake up to their responsibilities in the recruitment of leaders. Failure to participate may open the door for unpatriotic and incompetent leaders to emerge.
4. Reform of the civil service together with ensuring proper remuneration for workers. Civil service must be reformed for greater productivity and dismantling all forms of bureaucracy that supports corruption. Also, workers must be paid just wages so as to reduce the tendency for corruption.

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