

The Prevalence of Corruption in Society as Depicted in Selected Xitsonga Poems: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Corruption is prevalent in many spheres of life today. Media platforms such as radio, newspapers, and television, as well as electronic platforms like Facebook and X frequently discuss various forms of corruption in both the public and private sectors. Similarly, literature, essays, and other literary publications often address numerous types of corruption. This article examines how language is employed to represent various forms of corruption in selected Xitsonga poems. This study employs the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to investigate how language in selected Xitsonga poems reveals underlying power relations, ideological positions, and social structures associated with corruption. Poems depicting corruption have been selected from various poetry anthologies and critiqued to illustrate the types of corruption identified by Xitsonga poets. The article finds that poets are concerned and worried about the corruption taking place within Vatsonga communities. In conclusion, this article demonstrates how society, through the eyes of poets, feels about corruption.

Keywords: corruption; critical discourse analysis; occupational corruption; poem; political corruption

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Introduction

Corruption is a pervasive issue that affects societies globally, manifesting in various forms such as nepotism, bribery, and favouritism (Transparency International 2023, 4). In South Africa, corruption has been a longstanding challenge that continues to hinder the country's progress in governance, economic development, and social justice (Madonsela 2019, 12). Poetry has traditionally been a powerful medium for artistic expression and social critique, enabling writers to explore societal issues (Finnegan 2012, 57). South African poets, especially those composing in Indigenous languages, have employed their works to raise awareness of and critique various forms of corruption, often drawing upon local experiences and cultural contexts (Mona and Kaschula 2018, 118). One prominent focus of these poems is nepotism, where individuals in positions of power favour relatives and close associates instead of selecting candidates based on merit. Through the lens of poetry, issues like nepotism become not merely abstract concepts but deeply personal and tangible problems that affect individuals and communities alike. For instance, in 2020, the Vhembe District Municipality in Limpopo came under scrutiny when it was revealed that officials had appointed relatives to senior positions, bypassing qualified candidates. Similarly, in the Eastern Cape, the Department of Health faced backlash over the hiring of family members during the COVID-19 response, sparking public outrage over unfair practices. By reflecting such real-life incidents, the selected Xitsonga poems use language as a powerful tool to critique and expose the lived realities of corruption, thereby aligning with the study's aim to uncover how poetic expression reveals power dynamics and societal injustices. Indigenous poets have artfully woven both direct and indirect references to the detrimental effects of favouritism into their works, employing metaphors, idioms, and evocative imagery to express their messages. For instance, Xitsonga poetry delves into themes of nepotism and the misuse of power for personal gain, illuminating how these practices contribute to social inequality, exploitation, and the erosion of trust in leadership. These poetic reflections not only critique contemporary political practices but also serve as poignant reminders of the cultural values of fairness, justice, and accountability, which are frequently overshadowed by corruption. The power of poetry in addressing issues such as corruption lies in its unique ability to articulate emotions, frustrations, and lived experiences that are often overlooked or muted in formal political or academic discourse. It provides a unique lens through which to explore the interplay between language, culture, and politics, offering readers an opportunity for reflection and dialogue. This article analyses the depiction of corruption in selected Xitsonga poems, with a particular focus on nepotism and its societal implications. By examining how poets employ their craft to challenge the status quo, this study seeks to demonstrate the crucial role that literature plays in revealing and addressing corruption in South Africa (Mndawe 2023, 132).

Types of Corruption

Corruption manifests in a variety of forms across different sectors, each characterised by unethical practices that exploit positions of power for personal or collective gain

(Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 2016, 12). Among these, occupational corruption involves the abuse of professional authority, often seen in practices such as hiring or awarding tenders based on nepotism or favouritism, thereby circumventing merit-based systems (Lindgren 1993, 3). Political corruption, as articulated by Igbo (2002, 109), encompasses the manipulation and misappropriation of public resources for private gain—typically to benefit political allies, relatives, or associates—while ignoring legal and ethical frameworks. Police corruption manifests through acts such as bribery, abuse of power, suppression of evidence, or the selective enforcement of laws, often undermining justice and public trust in law enforcement institutions. Religious corruption, on the other hand, occurs when spiritual authority is exploited for material gain, such as misusing congregational offerings, manipulating followers for financial or political leverage, or aligning with political entities to secure privileged access to state resources. These forms of corruption not only reflect individual moral failings but also signal deeper systemic issues that perpetuate inequality, disenfranchise citizens, and erode institutional legitimacy. While all these forms of corruption are prevalent in various contexts, this study focuses primarily on occupational and political corruption as reflected in selected Xitsonga poems. These poetic texts expose how nepotism, favouritism, and the misuse of public office are experienced at both community and national levels, articulating the emotional and social consequences that are often underrepresented in formal discourse.

Literature Review

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge in African societies, and poets across the continent have long used their work to critique this moral and political decay. In languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Yoruba-influenced English, poetry serves as a powerful vehicle for social commentary and resistance. This literature review explores how corruption is depicted in African poetry and focuses on five key themes: social commentary, linguistic and stylistic devices, moral critique, historical evolution, and the influence of Indigenous languages. Key sources include Mona and Kaschula (2018), Diko (2023), and Myeni and Sibiya (2021) on South African Indigenous poetry, as well as Nwosu and Adeshina (2021), Ilechukwu (2024), and Ogoanah (2003) on Nigerian poetic discourse. These scholars reveal how poets like Kola Eke and Niyi Osundare use metaphor, allegory, and oral tradition to expose corruption. The review highlights how poetry reflects shifting political landscapes and embeds anti-corruption messages in culturally grounded forms. Ultimately, African poets emerge as moral voices confronting corruption through language, tradition, and historical memory.

Poetry as a Vehicle for Social Commentary

Corruption has been a dominant theme in African poetry, particularly in languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Yoruba (via English), where poets function as commentators on political and societal issues. In isiXhosa poetry, Mona and Kaschula (2018) explore how poets writing during South Africa's first decade of democracy used their work not only to promote reconciliation but also to critique the emerging corruption of democratic

governance. These poets adapted oral forms to scrutinise leaders who had betrayed the promise of ethical rule. Similarly, Diko (2023) examines themes of corruption and money laundering in modern isiXhosa literature, identifying poetic techniques that expose financial misconduct and the moral failures of those in power. Beyond South Africa, Nigerian poets such as Kola Eke have contributed significantly to anti-corruption discourse. Ilechukwu (2024) presents a New Historicist reading of Eke's poetry, highlighting how his work critiques electoral and civil corruption by drawing from Nigeria's post-independence struggles. Nwosu and Adeshina (2021) further demonstrate that poets like Niyi Osundare and Odia Ofeimun use poetry to dramatise the institutionalisation of corruption, portraying it as a national crisis that permeates every level of society.

Linguistic and Stylistic Devices in the Depiction of Corruption

African poets use a range of stylistic and linguistic tools to enhance their anti-corruption messages. Myeni and Sibiyi (2021) focus on isiZulu performance poetry, where code-switching between isiZulu and English is strategically employed to heighten satire and social critique. Through metaphors, repetition, and idiomatic language, poets compare corrupt leaders to parasitic creatures and social diseases. In Nigeria, Nwosu and Adeshina (2021) analyse how contemporary poets use allegory and personification to frame corruption as a corrosive force that distorts public service and civic identity. Ilechukwu (2024) shows how Kola Eke's poetry incorporates metaphors and historical allusions to depict corruption as deeply rooted in Nigeria's political landscape. Similarly, Ogoanah (2003) highlights the stylistic devices employed by Niyi Osundare, such as parallelism and rhetorical contrast, to amplify themes of power abuse and greed, emphasising the poet's craft in turning language into a weapon of moral resistance.

Corruption and Morality in Poetic Discourse

The portrayal of corruption in African poetry is often tied to moral critique, where poets underscore the ethical failures of individuals and institutions. Mona and Kaschula (2018) emphasise that isiXhosa poets often invoke the philosophy of *ubuntu*—a concept rooted in community, respect, and shared humanity—to critique the moral degradation brought about by corruption. The erosion of communal ethics is positioned as a betrayal not only of political ideals but of cultural values. Similarly, Nwosu and Adeshina (2021) argue that Nigerian poets portray corruption as a spiritual and ethical crisis that undermines national integrity and civic trust. Ilechukwu (2024) builds on this by highlighting Kola Eke's focus on the betrayal of moral duties in the public sector. Ogoanah (2003) supports this view by illustrating how Osundare employs moral binaries—such as honesty versus greed—to dramatise the ethical implications of corruption, positioning poetry as both judgement and reform.

Historical Evolution of Corruption Themes in Poetry

The theme of corruption in African poetry has evolved alongside historical and political developments. Mona and Kaschula (2018) trace this evolution in the South African

context, showing how isiXhosa poets transitioned from addressing racial injustice during apartheid to critiquing corruption in the democratic era. This shift reflects growing disillusionment with post-1994 governance and the failure to uphold ethical leadership. Diko (2023) supports this by examining how more recent isiXhosa texts have shifted their focus towards the internal failures of political systems and economic exploitation. In Nigeria, Nwosu and Adeshina (2021) argue that poets have moved from independence-era optimism to deep scepticism about the ability of democratic institutions to resist corruption. Ilechukwu (2024) situates Kola Eke's work within this historical progression, showing how his poetry reflects the ongoing challenges of governance and transparency in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The Role of Indigenous Languages in Shaping Anti-Corruption Discourse

The use of Indigenous languages in African poetry adds cultural depth and resonance to anti-corruption messages. Myeni and Sibiya (2021) show how isiZulu poets skilfully combine vernacular expressions with English in their performance poetry, using this linguistic duality to bridge traditional audiences and modern urban spaces. Indigenous idioms and metaphors strengthen the message by grounding it in culturally familiar forms. Similarly, Mona and Kaschula (2018) observe that isiXhosa poets rely on oral traditions and linguistic heritage to convey their critiques in ways that resonate with community values and history. While writing primarily in English, many Nigerian poets incorporate Yoruba idioms and cultural references. Ogoanah (2003) highlights how Osundare's integration of Yoruba oral forms enhances his poetry's emotional impact and moral authority. Ilechukwu (2024) confirms that this blend of Indigenous cultural frameworks with modern critique gives African poetry a unique power in addressing the enduring problem of corruption.

The examination of corruption in society, as depicted in poetry across South African languages, highlights the critical role of poets in holding power accountable. Poetry serves as a form of social commentary, employing linguistic and stylistic devices to reveal corruption and address its moral implications. The evolution of corruption themes in poetry reflects historical and political shifts, and the use of Indigenous languages ensures that these messages remain culturally relevant. By analysing poetic works across various South African linguistic traditions, it becomes clear that poetry is not only an artistic expression but also a powerful tool for ethical critique and social change.

Theoretical Framework

This article is underpinned by critical discourse analysis (CDA) to unpack the representation of occupational, political, police, and religious corruption as depicted in some Xitsonga poems. CDA is a discourse analytical approach that primarily examines how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimised, and challenged through text and talk within sociopolitical contexts (Van Dijk 2015, 29). Van Dijk (2020, 14) further emphasises that discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping both cognitive and social structures, as it can manipulate public opinion

and reinforce hegemonic ideologies. Scholars such as Fairclough (2018, 22) stress that language is not neutral; it is a powerful tool for constructing meaning, influencing public perception, and justifying dominant ideologies. Wodak and Meyer (2019, 10) add that CDA does not only analyse linguistic features but also interrogates the broader sociopolitical and historical contexts in which discourse is produced and interpreted. This makes CDA a compelling framework for uncovering hidden power dynamics, ideological biases, and mechanisms of social control. In this study, key CDA tenets applied include:

- Hegemony and the naturalisation of discourse—examining how corrupt practices are presented as normal or acceptable within particular social institutions.
- Representation—exploring how individuals and institutions involved in corruption are depicted in the poems.
- Ideology—analysing how specific belief systems are embedded in poetic language to justify or critique corruption.
- Identity formation—observing how social actors (e.g., leaders, law enforcers, religious figures) are constructed through discourse.

These tenets were selected for their relevance in uncovering how corruption is both critiqued and obscured in poetic narratives, and how language contributes to constructing public perceptions of ethical failure. When applied to Xitsonga poetry, CDA reveals how poets deploy literary devices such as metaphor, symbolism, irony, and narrative structure to voice discontent and resist corruption. Through these techniques, poets critique abuses in governance, law enforcement, and religious institutions, providing a culturally embedded reflection on societal ethics and moral decline. This analytical approach not only deepens our understanding of poetic expression but also offers broader insights into how corruption is perceived, internalised, and contested within the Xitsonga cultural and linguistic context (Blommaert 2021, 47).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which is appropriate for exploring subjective meanings, cultural expressions, and the nuanced use of language in literary texts. Qualitative research is particularly suited to interpretive and critical approaches, such as this study's use of critical discourse analysis, which seeks to uncover how power, ideology, and social inequalities are embedded in poetic discourse.

The primary method employed in this study is textual analysis, a technique used in literary and discourse studies to examine the content, structure, and rhetorical strategies within texts. Textual analysis enables the researcher to interpret how language

constructs meaning, reveals hidden ideologies, and engages with social realities such as corruption. Data for the study were obtained through secondary data collection, which involves the analysis of pre-existing texts rather than generating new primary data through interviews or surveys. Specifically, the study analysed two collections of Xitsonga poetry: *Swilo swa humelela* by Ngobeni (2006, 15) and *A ndzi hembi: Ndzumba wa Afrika 3* by Malungana (1999, 22). These works were purposefully selected based on their thematic focus on corruption and social critique. Within the framework of CDA, the selected poems were examined for how they represent different forms of corruption—namely occupational, political, police, and religious corruption. The analysis focused on the use of metaphors, imagery, tone, and narrative voice, as well as how these elements reflect broader sociopolitical realities and contest dominant ideologies.

By combining qualitative inquiry, textual analysis, and secondary data methods, the study offers a critical interpretation of how Xitsonga poetry serves as a vehicle for social commentary and ethical reflection. Secondary data may include data that has been previously gathered and is under consideration to be reused for new questions, for which the data gathered was not originally intended (Martins, da Cunha, and Serra 2018, 12; Vartanian 2010, 5). Data was carefully identified to meet the criteria of critical discourse of the prevalence of corruption in society. This article analyses selected poems by Xitsonga poets following a set of themes that best describe corruption as featured in Xitsonga poems. Data was analysed guided by the types of corruption such as occupation and political corruption as themes.

Analysis and Discussion

African literature has a rich tradition of engaging with themes of corruption, resistance, and social justice. As a form of artistic expression deeply rooted in oral traditions, poetry has emerged as a particularly powerful medium for exposing corruption and advocating for social transformation. According to Osundare (2002, 123), poetry not only critiques the abuse of power but also gives voice to the marginalised, challenges dominant narratives, and inspires collective consciousness. In many African societies, poets function as cultural commentators and moral watchdogs, using metaphor, satire, and symbolism to highlight injustices and demand accountability. Within this tradition, Xitsonga poetry serves as both a mirror and a critique of society, capturing the lived experiences of those affected by nepotism, political manipulation, and institutional decay. By articulating these realities, poets contribute to public discourse and mobilise communities towards ethical reflection and social reform. Poets such as Malungana and Ngobeni have used their creative works to critique corrupt leaders and oppressive systems. The analysis and discussion section commences with a critical discourse analysis of the poem “A ndzi hembi” (I’m not lying) by Malungana (1999, 22), published in 1999, which exposes occupational corruption, particularly in the form of nepotism. Although this collection was written over two decades ago, its message remains strikingly relevant today.

In the poem, nepotism is personified as a force that was once dormant but is now revived and more active than ever. This metaphor captures the persistent and cyclical nature of corruption in the workplace and public institutions. Despite the time gap, the issues raised in the poem continue to resonate in present-day South Africa, where tender fraud, irregular appointments, and political favouritism remain widespread. For example, the Zondo Commission (2018–2022) revealed extensive nepotistic practices and state capture, affirming the ongoing significance of Malungana’s critique. Understanding this poem within the current sociopolitical landscape underscores the enduring nature of corruption and the foresight of poetic expression. It also affirms the central argument of this article: that Xitsonga poetry not only documents the societal ills of its time but also provides a timeless lens through which contemporary readers can understand and confront ongoing injustices. Poetry thus serves as both a cultural archive and a form of resistance, capable of bridging past and present in the fight against corruption. It reads as follows:

Xin’wana-manana xa ha hanya,
 A xi lo titivala kunene,
 Sweswi xi phaphurhukile,
 Futhi xo ganyula kunene,
 Loko ti ri tithendara to ba xindiwandiwana eka xona.
 (Malungana 1999, 22)

(Nepotism still exists,
 It was just fainting,
 Now it is awake,
 And it is walking very fast,
 As for tenders, they are circulating around it.)

In the opening stanza of “A ndzi hembi,” the poet begins with the idiomatic expression “Xin’wana-manana xa ha hanya” (Nepotism still exists), which introduces nepotism not as a past occurrence, but as an enduring and active force. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, this line functions as a discursive strategy of naturalisation, presenting corruption as a deeply entrenched and normalised part of everyday life. By portraying nepotism as something that is “still alive,” the poet taps into societal memory and shared experiences, implicitly asserting that the unethical privileging of relatives and associates is not an anomaly but a structurally embedded norm. The follow-up line, “A xi lo titivala kunene” (It was just fainting), uses metaphor to suggest a temporary disappearance or dormancy of corrupt practices, which CDA interprets as a strategic representation of power retreat. Here, the poet challenges the illusion of progress often projected by political elites who claim that corruption has been eradicated. Instead, the phrase subtly critiques the manipulative discourse of power holders who use silence or cosmetic reforms to mask ongoing injustices. In the line “Futhi xo ganyula kunene” (And it is walking very fast), personification and the verb “ganyula” (walk fast) dramatise the resurgence and intensification of nepotism. From a CDA standpoint, this metaphor not only emphasises the speed and prevalence of corrupt acts but also implies

a failure of institutional checks and public accountability. By attributing agency to corruption, the poet critiques a systemic failure where unethical behaviour is not only unchecked but actively progressing. The expression serves to expose the ideological disconnect between public policy rhetoric and lived reality, aligning with CDA's concern with the gap between text and social practice. This signifies corruption on high note. The poem goes on to say:

Hakunene xinombela xi ciniwa hi vuxaka,
Ngati yin'we hi yona xi xovelaka exinkambanini xa tithendara,
Hambi loko va xi fihla xa karhi xa phohla.
Hambi loko va xi phutsela moya wa xi huhula xi ku tlangandla!
(Malungana 1999, 22)

(It is true that xinombelani is danced by relatives,
One blood is the one that eats in an earthenware dish of tenders,
Even when they hide it, it breaks out of an enclosure,
Even if they try to cover it, the wind blows and exposes it!)

The line “Ngati yin'we hi yona xi xovelaka exinkambanini xa tithendara” (One blood is the one that eats in an earthenware dish of tenders) metaphorically illustrates the exclusive access to economic opportunities, particularly government tenders, enjoyed by those with familial or political connections. Within the CDA framework, this line exemplifies representational inequality, where power and privilege are naturalised through blood ties. The metaphor of sharing an “earthenware dish” positions nepotism not as an incidental flaw but as a communal practice protected and perpetuated within closed networks. It reflects an ideology of exclusion, in which social and economic advancement is contingent not on merit but on one's position within a relational power structure. The poet furthers this critique with the line “Hambi loko va xi phutsela moya wa xi huhula xi ku tlangandla!” (Even if they try to cover it, the wind blows and exposes it!). Here, CDA allows us to interpret this as a commentary on the fragility of hegemonic discourse, that is, the official narrative which attempts to obscure or rationalise corrupt practices. The use of the wind as a symbolic agent aligns with discourse as resistance; it represents truth, public awareness, or even poetic intervention itself—forces that can disrupt the concealment strategies employed by those in power. The poem goes on to say:

A hi makolo a hi makolo i tanani mi ta vona,
Xivumbiwa xa mimbirhi xi lava ku minta xoxe,
Munhu u hayekiwa ensinyeni a dya kona,
A tlhela a chika a ya dya ni timitsu,
Lava nga le hansi va sala va lo dlen'wa!
(Malungana 1999, 22)

(It is not just greediness it is a lot of it [greediness],
A creature of two legs wants to swallow [eat] alone,
A person is hinged up on the tree and eats there,

And also steps down to eat the roots,
Those at the bottom are left devoured!).

In the third stanza, the poet's repetition of "A hi makolo, a hi makolo, i tanani mi ta vona" (It is not just greediness, it is a lot of it) serves as a discursive intensifier that foregrounds the entrenched nature of the elite's selfishness within South Africa's sociopolitical context. Drawing from Fairclough's concept of naturalisation, this repetition challenges the normalised view that corruption and greed are isolated events; instead, it portrays them as structural and endemic. The poet's insistence that the problem is not merely "greed" but a systemic excess of it deconstructs the hegemonic discourse that often minimises or obscures the scale of elite corruption. Furthermore, the term "makolo," which colloquially captures the notion of selfishness, functions as a representational device, used to delineate the moral decay of the leadership class. Here, CDA's notion of ideological positioning is vital: The elite are positioned as morally bankrupt actors whose actions are driven not by national duty but by self-enrichment. This representation not only critiques individual behaviours but calls out the broader ideological system that enables and protects such conduct. The ironic line, "Lava nga le hansi va sala va lo dlen'wa!" (Those at the bottom are left devoured!), vividly illustrates Van Dijk's concept of elite power reproduction, where the discourse reflects systemic inequality perpetuated through language. The image of the poor being "devoured" is more than metaphor—it is an ideological reversal that frames the marginalised not as passive victims, but as sacrificial casualties of a predatory system. In this, the poet subverts the usual discursive power of elites by exposing how discourse itself is weaponised to justify the status quo, while poetry becomes a counter-hegemonic tool that voices the silenced. The poem continues:

Va ka hina mali yiya emalini,
Phela hina vampheheleni ho pfariwa mahlo,
Xin'wana manana xa ha ri kona,
Loko mi nga swi tivi hanyanyani mi ta swi tiva,
Xi kwihi xikopiyoni xi va pfukula?
Kumbe a xi ta basisa tiko.
(Malungana 1999, 22)

(My relative's money goes where there is money,
Us who don't have money we are just blindfolded,
Nepotism still exists,
If you don't know, wake up you will see,
Where is the scorpion to uproot them?
Maybe it was going to clean the country.)

In the fourth stanza, the poet begins with the idiomatic expression, "Va ka hina, mali yi ya emalini" (My relative's money goes where there is money), which, when viewed through a CDA lens, reveals the ideological reproduction of socioeconomic inequality. This line is a discursive strategy that underscores access asymmetry, where individuals

already possessing economic capital are further empowered by systemic structures that enable their continued accumulation of resources. This aligns with Van Dijk's (2015, 33) assertion that discourse not only reflects power imbalances but also legitimates and perpetuates them by rendering them natural or inevitable. The phrase encapsulates a symbolic power relationship in which wealth not only begets more wealth but also determines who is included or excluded from opportunities such as tenders or financial aid. This normalisation of exclusion is precisely what Fairclough (2018, 41) refers to as the naturalisation of dominant ideologies, where unequal access is no longer questioned, but accepted as the way things are. The rhetorical question "Xi kwihi xikopiyoni xi va pfukula?" (Where is the scorpion to uproot them?) functions as a moment of discursive resistance. It invokes the metaphor of a scorpion, not merely as a creature of defence but as an agent of disruption, challenging the entrenched power structures. In CDA terms, this reflects a counter-hegemonic discourse—one that questions and seeks to destabilise the authority of the elite. The poet is not merely lamenting inequality but calling for a radical intervention, a metaphorical "scorpion" to unsettle the entrenched networks of corruption.

Another poem that critiques a different form of corruption, political corruption, is "Manyala ya Varhangeri" (The dirt of the leaders) by Ngobeni (2006, 15). Although this poem was published nearly two decades ago, its themes remain profoundly relevant in contemporary South Africa, where allegations of state capture, misappropriation of public funds, and political patronage continue to dominate public discourse. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, the poem can be seen as a historic and ongoing discursive intervention, highlighting how power is abused, justified, and resisted through language. The poet's critique reflects the continuities in corrupt governance practices, illustrating how political elites have long used their positions for personal enrichment, an issue that resonates with present-day scandals such as the Zondo Commission's findings on state capture and the widespread misuse of COVID-19 relief funds.

By examining the poem in this light, the article situates "Manyala ya Varhangeri" not as a static historical critique but as a living discourse that continues to illuminate the dynamics of political corruption, elite impunity, and public disillusionment within the current sociopolitical climate. This approach allows for a richer, theory-driven exploration of how African poetry contributes to the discursive resistance against political injustice. It reads as follows:

Loko ri xile hi le ku hemberiweni.
 Hlawulani mina ndzi ta mi phaka mintirho.
 Mina ndzi ta mi akela tindlu, mi ta hanya kahle.
 Swi kwihi? A va hembanga loko va ku nomu a wu taleriwi hi
 nambu.
 (Ngobeni 2006, 15)

(All they do is lie to us every day,

Elect me, I will give you jobs,
I will build you houses, and you will live well.
(Where is it? They did not lie when they said barking dogs seldom bite.)

The poem's title, "Manyala ya Varhangeri" (Evil of leaders), immediately foregrounds the poet's ideological stance by framing political leaders as morally corrupt. Through critical discourse analysis, this title is not merely descriptive—it functions as an act of representation (Fairclough 2018, 36), establishing the leaders as unethical actors whose actions harm the public. This linguistic framing invites the reader to interpret political leadership not as a position of service, but as a site of systemic abuse of power. The first stanza criticises the manipulative discourse of election campaigns, where leaders promise housing and improved livelihoods in exchange for votes. These promises, often unfulfilled, function as discursive strategies to legitimise political power while concealing self-interest. According to Van Dijk (2020, 19), such discourse enacts symbolic power, manipulating public opinion to maintain elite dominance while reinforcing public dependency and trust in broken systems. The proverb used, "Swi kwihhi? A va hembanga loko va ku nomu a wu talerwi hi nambu" (Where is it? Barking dogs seldom bite), operates as intertextual evidence that challenges performative virtue. CDA interprets this proverb as a naturalised discourse (Fairclough 2018, 27), which critiques public boasting as a marker of insincerity. The poet's deployment of this idiom uncovers the discursive contradiction between leaders' grand claims and their actual failure to deliver, exposing the ideological work of language in concealing political corruption. Moreover, the proverb's cultural familiarity enhances the poem's rhetorical power, as it taps into collective memory and shared values. It implicitly calls for critical consciousness among the electorate, encouraging citizens to question the promises and the power structures that allow such deceptive rhetoric to persist.

The poem goes on to say:

Vuxisi hinkwabyo byi tiviwa hi vona.
Va xisa na vadyuhari lavanene lava!
Vanhu vatekeriwa na leswi swi nga swa vona.
Va dya hina, va etlela hina, hi vuxisi bya hava.
Mithelo va gonyisa yi kala yi dliwa ni tilo.
(Ngobeni 2006, 15)

(They know all the deceiving,
They even deceive disabled people this one.
People are robbed what is theirs,
They eat from us, they sleep on us, yet they deceive us for nothing,
Taxes are raised until they touch the sky.)

In the fourth stanza of "Manyala ya Varhangeri," the poet intensifies their critique of political corruption by emphasising the depth of betrayal and exploitation by political leaders. The use of the idiom "Va dya hina, va etlela hina, hi vuxisi bya hava" (They eat

from us, they sleep on us, because of their deceitful lies) functions not merely as figurative language but as a discursive act that frames the public as victims of institutionalised deceit. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, this idiom articulates the way political discourse is used to legitimate the abuse of public trust, turning democratic representation into a performance that masks exploitation (Van Dijk 2015, 45). The idiom reflects what Fairclough (2018, 33) calls the naturalisation of hegemonic discourse, a process by which political lies and manipulation become normalised in public consciousness, allowing corrupt practices to persist unchallenged. The leaders metaphorically “sleep” on the people, invoking symbolic dominance, where those in power benefit materially and socially from the subjugation of the electorate. This reflects a systemic imbalance where language conceals power asymmetries, and poetry becomes a means of counter-hegemonic resistance. The subsequent hyperbole, “Mithelo va gonyisa yi kala yi dliva ni tilo” (Taxes are raised until they touch the sky), serves as a powerful rhetorical exaggeration that draws attention to the exorbitant cost of living and the disproportionate tax burden placed on ordinary citizens. In CDA terms, this line exposes the ideological misrepresentation of economic policies that claim to serve the public good but in reality reinforce socioeconomic inequality. The poet’s metaphor suggests that while leaders enrich themselves, the public is financially strained, highlighting the economic injustice enabled through political discourse. The poem goes on to say:

Rirhandzu do! Va ri ku hehlana, ku lumbetana no dlayana.
 Loko ri xile va ehleketelelana vubihi, va vula leswaku loyi:
 “U ndzi dya swirhendze, u lava ku ndzi tekela xitulu.”
 Onge switulu swa kona va lo beburiwa na swona.
 Mi nga rivali leswaku hinkwerhu vulombe a hi hlanti,
 ha byi rhandza.
 (Ngobeni 2006, 15)

(The is no love! They gossip, accuse, and kill each other.
 Every day they imagine evil amongst themselves, and say:
 “You’re eating my heels; you want to take my position.”
 As if they were born with these positions.
 Don’t forget that we all don’t vomit honey,
 We love it.)

The poet’s use of “do!” as an ideophone is a powerful tool that expresses the emotional weight of rejection and denial, amplifying the intensity of corruption depicted in the poem. CDA allows us to explore this sound as more than just an aesthetic choice—it functions as a discursive act of resistance, calling attention to the absence of care and the lack of solidarity in political systems. In CDA terms, this use of sound can be seen as a way of challenging the status quo, where silence or indifference is the norm, and instead drawing the listener’s attention to the systemic breakdown of leadership ethics. By representing the sound of “do!” the poet challenges the dominant narrative that

politics should be about service to the people, using auditory imagery to convey that no genuine care exists.

In the next line, the poet employs the idiomatic expression “U ndzi dya swirhendze, u lava ku ndzi tekela xitulu” (You’re eating my heels, you want to take my position) to further critique the power struggles inherent in political environments. This metaphorical backstabbing depicts the betrayal and dishonesty of political leaders, driven by their desire for power at the expense of each other and the public. From a CDA perspective, this idiom reflects the ideological manipulation at play, where loyalty is undermined by self-interest and corruption. It draws attention to how language, when used by political elites, reinforces power dynamics and sustains political inequalities.

Findings

A critical discourse analysis shows various forms of corruption, such as political and occupational corruption, focusing on how different sectors, such as occupations and politics, are susceptible to abuse. These forms of misconduct are described through the lens of Xitsonga poetry, emphasising how individuals in power use their positions for personal gain. In politics, leaders may misuse government funds meant to help the nation, instead using them to enrich themselves or their associates. Those in higher authorities are involved in corruption by manipulating legal processes or falsifying appointments and positions. This article stresses the need for awareness and action to combat these forms of exploitation. The poets encourage the public to recognise these issues and work towards solutions, whether through legal or social means. The goal is to create a fairer and more just society by addressing and correcting the misuse of power across these sectors. In the context of some Xitsonga poems, this corruption highlights the significance of cultural wisdom in recognising and challenging social injustices. Vatsonga and other tribes should take into consideration the corruption depicted in poetry, remembering that poetry, as a form of literature, reflects human experience and transcends mere reality, offering a lens through which societal flaws, such as corruption, are both critiqued and understood. Corruption is a serious matter within the community that needs immediate intervention, as it hinders societal transformation and development in communities.

Conclusions

Poetry emerges as a culturally rooted and politically charged form of discourse that reflects societal realities and functions as a potent instrument of resistance. The selected Xitsonga poems vividly illustrate how corruption is discursively constructed, contested, and condemned within the cultural framework of the Vatsonga people. Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, this study has revealed how language is tactically employed to expose entrenched political and occupational corruption networks. The poets go beyond lamenting injustice; they actively engage in a discursive battle against hegemonic narratives, utilising idioms, metaphors, irony, and ideophones not merely for stylistic effect, but as rhetorical devices that challenge the normalisation of unethical

practices. Their critiques frame corruption as a moral lapse and a systemic barrier to development, equality, and public trust. The poems convey a wounded yet resilient collective consciousness that confronts corruption's pervasive impact by deploying personification, rhetorical questions, and symbolic imagery. Thus, these poetic texts act as interventions—mobilising language for social critique and awakening. The strategic use of discourse by the poets disrupts dominant ideologies and envisions a society grounded in justice, transparency, and moral leadership. This research contributes to broader debates on corruption by amplifying African Indigenous voices often sidelined in global narratives, reaffirming the power of Indigenous literature to challenge authority and inspire transformative change.

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