

CORRUPTION AND GOVERNANCE IN A PLURAL BUT FRACTURED SOCIETY:THE CASE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Corruption has come to be defined as a phenomenon that has variously affected most societies of the world. The nature and forms of corrupt practices vary among cultures depending on the beliefs and moral orientation of the particular culture or society. This paper examines the impact of bad governance, corruption and value-erosion in Nigeria as a result of the plural and mal-integrated nature of the Nigerian nation-state. Though, some scholars limit corruption to official breaches, this paper tries to look beyond official actions or breaches to explore other forms of corruption. It further tries to find out the role of value erosion and ethnic pluralism on the continuing growth of the phenomenon of corruption in a fractured society like Nigeria. It further argues that apart from mal-integration resulting from colonial experience of the nation-state, corruption is also an outcrop of the integration of Africa into the world capitalist system without proper capitalist development thereby resulting to ‘dependent capitalism’ and the emergence of the comprador class that lives in affluence. It also argues that the norm of corruption can only be contained with change in our value orientations, and the government institutions charged with graft war should rise up to the occasion. This can only happen however, if the graft fighters are men of integrity and without their fingers in the cookie-jar.

Key Words: Corruption, Governance, Plural Society, Fractured Society, Value Erosion and Mal-Integration

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Introduction

Anytime the concept ‘corruption’ is mentioned, it evokes negative feelings in the minds of the people. In every human society, it is conceived to be a kind of canker that does the society no good; it is an anti-social behaviour (Onuoha 2014). Though corruption can be viewed as an abstract concept that describes the behaviour of the people, it could be closely linked to the absence of citizen’s influence and oversight brought

about by the unresponsive and irresponsible attitude occasioned by jaundiced political leadership. This is because citizens are not empowered to participate in the political and economic process and have no means of holding political actors and leaders accountable for their actions. Onuoha (2004) posits that corruption takes hold in societies where political and public leaders do not consider their actions as public trustees who are expected to adhere to rules, due process and laws that legitimate their positions.

In a post-colonial society like Nigeria where political leaders, who are mostly 'nouvre riche' whose attitude to governance is only tailored towards wealth acquisition through unethical means to the detriment of the generality of the populace are in constant power, corruption cannot but be endemic. This in turn gravely affects governance and the welfare of the citizenry. Right from the inception of Nigeria as an independent state, corruption seems to have become a norm rather than a taboo. Corruption, which adversely affects governance, has come to be part of the common language. Every one tends to openly condemn and abhor corruption, yet everyone, in one way or the other, tends to practice corruption. Many leaders and the citizenry in Nigeria, like most other developing democracies and economies, perceive corruption as a vehicle for negotiation between badly or integrated plural society and her structures and social order.

Due to the complex political and economic forces that have been shaping the global development agenda, the reasons for the phenomenal growth of corruption are also complex. Basu (2006) asserts that the roots of corruption go back to the history of human civilization. Corruption, in some form or the other, has existed since human lives became institutionalized and leader-follower relationship started in an organized manner (Bardhan 1997; Gong 1994).

Although corruption exists in all societies and at all times, the problem seems to be more prominent in the context of developing societies. It is not difficult to visualize a strong relationship between bad governance, scarcity and corruption in a plural society that is mal-integrated. When a plural society is mal-integrated with scarcity of economic resources, competition among the participants in such environment is strong. Gradually, corruption is becoming more and more institutionalized involving policy-making authorities and making the situation worse. Colonial and neo-colonial backgrounds of a large number of present day developing countries have also contributed in flourishing corrupt practices. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (1993) avers that:

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy, and the rule of law, leads to violation of human rights distorts market, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish.

The above assertion by the United Nations is a fact about Nigeria, and that is why a discourse on corruption is relevant. In Nigeria, the canker has become so

pervasive that the federal government has established a number of anti-graft agencies to fight the problem. This paper therefore is an attempt at x-raying the impact of corruption and governance arising from mal-integration of the Nigerian society.

Defining Corruption

It is a very difficult task to present a generally accepted definition of the concept of corruption. The first account of what constitutes corruption is sourced from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary which sees it as a dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority. It also sees it as an act or effect of making somebody change from moral to immoral standards of behaviour. The first part of the definition emphasizes people in authority. An anonymous writer held that the people get the type of leader they deserve. In other words, the leader is a mirror of the society he is leading. A corrupt leader is a product of a corrupt society. Corruption therefore, should be properly defined to incorporate everybody who does or desires to do things which are considered synonymous with corruption. The above assertion shows that corruption exists when a society becomes fractured.

Etymologically, the word corruption is derived from the Latin word 'corrumpo' (corrumpere, corruptus), which means to rot, decompose, disintegrate or decay. That is to say, to lose purity or integrity. Uduigwomen (2006), in what he calls an operational definition sees corruption as:

A deliberate act of indiscipline against the legalized moral norms of the state, and the natural law of justice, as it affects the realization of the common good of the citizens, whereby an individual or a group of individuals directly or indirectly diverts or misuses, with the tool of political maneuvering, the wealth of the state for personal use.

The problem with this definition is that it limits corruption to the public sector while leaving out the views of the subjectivists. In his contribution to the definition of corruption, Gboyega (1996) avers that:

We define corruption as any decision, act or conduct that was (is) perverse to democratic norms and values. It also covers any decision, act or conduct that subverted (subverts) the integrity of people in authority or institutions charged with promotion, defending or sustaining the democratization process, thereby undermining its effectiveness in performing its assigned roles.

The definition, like the earlier ones, is public sector oriented but is open to debate since the family and other social institutions can help in the promotion of democratic values. Traditionally, corruption appears to be seen from the prism of public sector only. Black's Law Dictionary defines corruption as the act of an official or fiduciary person who unlawfully uses his station or character to procure some

benefits for himself or for another person, contrary to duty and the rights of others (Blacks & Garner 2000). For Olopoena (1998):

All manifestations of corruption are motivated by the desire to use the instrumentality of office for gains for the benefit of the individual officer, his relations, ethnic group or friends at the expense of the general good.

The above attempt shows that corruption may not just be for the benefit of the perpetrator alone but maybe for a group which may be his ethnic group. For a mal-integrated society like Nigeria the definition seems apt in some sense.

For Akani (2001), corruption simply means the debasement or perversion of an approved process, for the purpose of gaining an advantage which, in most cases, are selfish and personal. It is a dishonest and putrid way of getting things which one ordinarily is not entitled to. In Nigeria, this has permeated the psyche of the citizens and has become a norm. Ekekwe (1986) argues that corruption is:

The deliberate and conscious perversion of an official process to fulfill a personal advantage. It is opportunities...for one self and/or for others through the use of public office or personal connection in ways other than those publicly acknowledged through the rules and procedures of offices.

Ekekwe further avers that every mode of production introduces its own super structural ethics including capitalism. Capitalism as a means of private production is aimed at the maximization of profits by all means which may include corruption. Furthermore, corruption accelerates the engine of capitalist mode of production because of economic, social and political benefits. In other words, the expansion of capitalism encourages the development of corruption. This agrees with the opinion of Basu (2006) that neoclassical economics brought the idea that value judgments and normative issues were not the concern of positive economics as the view regards corruption as efficiency enhancing. But its view of corruption sees it as a range of discrete social practices that can be specifically identified and addressed.

For Otite (cited in Agaga 1999), corruption is 'the perversion of integrity or affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity...societal impurity'. He argues that a country becomes more corrupt as it enters a crucial phase of modernization of which industrialization and democratization are very important components. The above definition shows that corruption causes debasement of human dignity. Okafor (2005), further defines corruption as the use of power for profit preferment, or prestige, or for the benefit of a group or class in ways that constitute a breach of law or high moral conduct.

Arguing from a sociological paradigm, it is necessary to attempt a sociological definition of the concept of corruption. Viewed from the sociological prism, corruption, in its widest sense, can be regarded as a process of trade in social rewards (Scolt,

1975). Thus, it is a process whereby typically, power is traded for wealth, wealth for prestige and prestige for wealth and wealth again for power. And the need for such trade is rooted in the “prismatic” situation where there are discontinuities in the evolutionary process due to an overlap or heterogeneity of elements of “fused” social systems and those of diffracted social systems. Of course, there are different levels at which the trade takes place and there are also differences in motivation between those who accept bribes and those who offer bribes (that is, between those who trade power for wealth and those who trade wealth for power, for personal gains, group gains, frustration at achievement goals through prescribed means). The working definition of corruption in this paper, therefore, according to Onuoha (2011), is any subversion of due process by state actors or members of the society to achieve selfish ends contrary to established norms of goals attainment in order to gain wealth, power or prestige.

Governance Defined

Governance can be defined as the exercise of the authority through formal and informal traditions and institutions for the common good. Governance encompasses the process of selecting, monitoring, and replacing government. It includes the capacity to formulate and implement sound policies, and it assumes a respect for citizens. From this viewpoint, governance can be construed as consisting of six different elements. These are: (i) voice and accountability which includes civil liberties and freedom of the press (ii) political stability (iii) government effectiveness which includes the quality of policy making and public service delivery (iv) quality of regulations (v) rule of law, which includes protection of property rights and an independent judiciary, and (vi) control of corruption.

Theoretical Explanation of Corruption

Given that Nigeria was being newly integrated into the international economic and political system, there seems to be a mal-integration (socialization) of its citizens. This mal-integration stems from the amalgamation of several nations (ethnic nationalities) into one political entity thereby creating culture conflicts. The incompatibility between the different culture systems gives rise to a subversive process. If people of a plural society are properly socialized and integrated into the new system, they would be always motivated to act as required by the new social and bureaucratic norms. As the various ethnic nationalities are not properly integrated, it therefore produces situations that create possible sources of motivation for deviance and corruption. The mal-integration and pressure of competition to trade on power, prestige and wealth therefore place on the actors the pressure to deviate from the standardized set of norms. As a result of his mal-integrated status and inadequate access to the scarce resources, the actor indulges in corrupt practices. This coincides with the opinion of Cohen (1968).

Foundations of Corruption in Nigeria

The foundations of corruption in modern Nigeria could be traced to a number of issues, though these may be contentious. One prominent cause of corruption in Nigeria, in the

opinion of this paper, is the amalgamation of various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria by Lord Fredrick Lugard in 1914. In trying to amalgamate Nigeria, Lugard did not intend to fuse or get the vast land integrated but wanted to create an empire for his administrative convenience. The British colonial masters have created three administrative units in Nigeria - The colony of Lagos, the Southern and the Northern Protectorates. Lugard merged these centres for his own convenience rather than for unification purposes. Commenting on this, Afigbo (1981) stated that,

It was basically these three colonial administrative units, with some adverse changes in boundaries in the case of the Southern Protectorate of Nigeria that formed the basic building blocks of the Nigerian federal arrangements, that is, its member states or regions. Each of these three colonial administrations came into being purely for reason of administrative convenience rather than out of concern for maintaining the integrity of geographic, cultural and/or linguistic area. It was for this reason that British colonial servants in Nigeria to the point where they were no longer quite able to see or manage the affairs of Nigeria as the affairs of one people, one country.

Afigbo's claim is corroborated by White (1981), when he averred that:

The British never really faced up to the problem of the political unification of the country they had created...the tendency was always to postpone it on the assumption that it would be somehow solved with time of which these were thought to be plenty by a process of natural evolution.

White (1981), drew out the fact that Britain never really aimed at unification. Because of this intention it is obvious that no effort was made at integrating the people of Nigeria. This fusion of different people into a federation without making any attempt at integrating them brings about the problem of mal-integration. Any society that suffers from mal-integration is bound to deviate from standard conduct norms, hence corruption.

Erim (1996) argues that Lugard's critics point to his method and attitudes. For example, his deliberate discouragement of Western education in Northern Nigeria (one most important single cause of disparity in social progress and development between the North and South). As a matter of fact, his maiden speech as the Governor General of Nigeria on 1st of January 1914 made it clear that administrative and not political unity was the goal of British stay in Nigeria. In his own words:

You are aware that his majesty's Government after long and mature considerations arrived sometimes ago at the conclusions that it might be the greatest advantage to the countries known as "Southern and Northern Nigeria" that they should be amalgamated into one government conforming to policy and mutuality of co-operating for the moral and material advancement of Nigeria as a whole (Lugard 1914).

The key issue there is that he is amalgamating two countries into one government and into one country. This set the tone for competition and agenda that may manifest through using public office for private gains either for the individual or his ethnic group.

This Lugard's scheme of administrative rather than political unity for Nigeria created a scenario where the people so amalgamated did not see themselves as one indivisible entity. Ethnical and prebendal ideology was thus planted. As a result, they did not have unity of purpose. Hence, their political leaders do not see the country from the samelance but as representing their sectional interests. Such a situation breeds unhealthy competition and corruption. This is at one level. The second level of mal-integration is on the super imposition of western social structure on the indigenous peoples of Africa with its attendant economic system. In the traditional economic system, the "trickle up" system was practiced while the new mode encourages the "trickle down" system. In the trickle up system, the individual generates his wealth, either cash or kind, takes his own portion and moves the rest to his immediate superior who does same until the most superior gets his. So, in such situation there is less economic corruption although other non-economic forms of corruption may exist.

On the second variant, the individual does the work and waits for the superior to reward him. This pre-disposes him to the temptation of pilfering or collecting bribes for his own personal gratification, even as the leaders are very unfair. This is not because he likes to, but due to the inability of the leaders who are mal-integrated into the new system to adequately reward their subordinates, due to unjust wage structures.

Another factor that has elevated corruption to statecraft in Nigeria is the erosion of our value system. Value in the ordinary sense, is defined as accepted principles or moral standards of a society. Societal values are therefore, the widely shared principles, moral and ethical standards in a society. Social values are part and parcel of culture which is a totality of peoples' way of life. All Nigeria ethnic nationalities have time honored social values that make for a strong society and good governance.

Though it is not the focus of this paper to discuss these values, it brings to the fore the idea that these time-honored values of honesty, integrity and hard work have been eroded. This erosion has truncated the value of honesty, integrity and hard work and has consigned them to the garbage bins. New values have been enthroned such as wealth acquisition and prestige. Because the core values of honesty and integrity are no longer valued, people now seek wealth and prestige using any possible means available to them. Prominent among the instruments used is corruption. Thus, corruption may include both economic and political.

This value erosion, however is a by-product of the mal-integrative effect of the administrative amalgamation of the Nigerian nation-state and the development of dependent capitalism that has produced comprador leaders. All the state actors see public fund as the national cake that needs to be shared, and as such collide with non-state actors (business men) to steal. Every single player in any sphere of life first looks at himself and his immediate family's benefit. The society no longer rewards hard work and integrity that were the core values in Africa.

The quest for material wealth and pleasure has replaced integrity. The society now rewards and crowns those who have made it without asking how they made it. Such level of moral depravity has elevated the unbridled quest for wealth, power and prestige to an alarming degree.

A school of thought argues that the erosion of our values is a result of the failure or collapse of the family institution, standing injustice and bad governance. A group attributes it to the failure of religious institutions to perform their sacred roles. The combined efforts of the civil war and prolonged military rule impacted on Nigeria core-values, changing the trajectory of the country. Erinsho (2006) argues that the civil war created a new wealthy class that was largely drawn from the rank of assorted contractors who supplied arms, ammunitions, equipment, food rations etc. to the Armed Forces during the war. These contractors had little or no education but inflated the contracts to make quick money and became influential on account of their money (wealth). With this, there emerged a new social class that not only started to display their wealth but to transmit the message that money is more important than education or other non-monetized but hugely cherished social values. This class, therefore influenced the transformation of Nigerian traditional core social values of integrity, honesty and hard work into believing that money (wealth) is the ultimate regardless of how one makes it. Every sector of the society began to imbibe the new value system that was engendered by Nigerians whose source of wealth was doubtful. Corruption thus became a vehicle for making wealth and norm instead of being a deviant act.

Political corruption and bad governance emanated as a result of loss of our core values of integrity and honesty. The political leader no longer sees or thinks of himself as a public servant, but sees his position as a vehicle to acquire immeasurable wealth since he cannot be questioned. The anti-graft agencies are also caught in the unending web of corruption. For instance how can one explain the former Governor of Delta State James Ibori being set free by the Nigerian anti-corruption agencies, yet a London court convicted him and sent him to prison. All the people that looted our common wealth are walking the streets raising their shoulders high and being elevated to other public positions of importance. Such encourages corruption.

Wealth has assumed the basis for social esteem and social mobility in Nigeria. In the past, Nigerians only showed respect to the wealthy whose sources of wealth were transparent. This is no longer the case since the emergence of the “nouveau riche” contractors. The mal-integration and erosion of values have created a society that is fractured; that is not cohesive but neck-deep into bad governance and corruption. This agrees with Ekeh’s (1975) “Theory of Colonialism and the two Publics” where there is a conflict between the general interest of the state and the individual ethnic group that sees him as representing them in order to get their own share of the national cake. This idea of two publics engenders prebendalism.

Concluding Remarks

It is in the developing world that the effects of corruption are most destructive. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, (funds to fight Boko Haram was openly diverted), undermining governments' ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice and discouraging foreign aid and investment. Corruption is a key element in economic underperformance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development.

Thus, controlling corruption emerges as just one of the most closely intertwined elements of governance. Combating corruption leads to improving governance. According to Jain(2003), improving governance should be seen as a process integrating three vital components: (a) knowledge, with rigorous data and empirical analysis, including in-country diagnostics and dissemination, utilizing the latest information technology tools (b) leadership in the political, civil society and international arena; and (c) collective action via systematic participatory and consensus-building approaches with key stake holders in society (for which technology revolution is also assisting). Any country serious about improving governance must improve all key stakeholders, guarantee a flow of information to them, and lock in the commitment of the leadership.

Recommendations

For corruption to be reduced in the Nigerian nation-state, a conscious effort must be made by our political leaders to change the foundation and political structure laid by the colonial government. That is, we must work toward political unification; avoid prebendal politics in addition to administrative efficiency. The superimposition of Western social structure on our local structures must be harnessed so that both state and individual actors will be in tune with the objectives of the society. The leaders and other state and non-state actors must be made accountable and the reward system must be re-examined while strengthening institutions of governance. Corruption, has led to bad governance due to diversion of funds meant for the provision of welfare services to the citizenry. Hence, adequate efforts should be made to ensure that those entrusted with governance should use the commonwealth under their care for the good of the people through proper oversight function by the citizens and appropriate institutions of governance. Concerted efforts should also be made seriously integrating the fractured society by giving every citizen a sense of belonging using the National Orientation Agency. The National Orientation Agency must step up her campaign for moral rebirth to change the value orientation of the citizens. The religious leaders must, as a matter of duty, change their lukewarm or "sitting on the fence" attitude and teach their followers the need for integrity and honesty to clean up the Augean stable that has left the Nigerian society as a sleeping and rotten giant.

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