Chapter 45

Severing Corruption from Everyday Life: Some Reflections from Nigerian Political Space

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenging scenarios regarding political landscape in developing countries has to do with corruption and Nigeria is not an exception. Politicians often tow the paths of corrupt practices (while preparing for election and upon assumption of political offices) due to a number of social and economic factors. Attempts have been made by different administrations in this country to sever these twin brothers (corruption and politics) in order to ensure a lasting democracy in Nigeria. In spite of these efforts, the success story is nothing to write home about. The questions therefore are: is there any tie between corruption and culture? At what point did corruption become an identifiable feature of Nigerian politics? What are the steps taken so far to address this menace and what are the achievements over time? All these issues and others become critical as this paper examines the place of culture in corruption in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption has become a household name in developing countries and African society is not left out. A large number of the population engages in this act secretly or publicly. It (whatever name it is referred to) has become an instrument of upward mobility within the society. In Africa, evidences available suggest that the menace has eaten deep into its fabrics and the trend implies that it may be abnormal to be incorrupt. In spite of efforts made at addressing the threat, it continues to spread like wildfire across different boundaries thus crippling all efforts being made at moving the continent forward. In Nigeria, which this paper focuses on, the challenges faced in addressing corruption makes one draw some assumptions regarding the bug in the country. The assumption is that separating corruption form everyday life may be difficult considering different programmes and polices put in place to address it and which have not yielded the expected results. The question
therefore is: what are the factors that make this
division impossible? This shall be the central
theme in which this discourse shall centre on using
the Nigerian political space as a case in point. As
a starting point in this dialogue, there is need for
us to understand what corruption entails in order
to throw light to important issues in this article.

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: ITS
GROWTH AND SPREAD

Corruption, often described as anti-social behav-
iour conferring improper benefits that are against
the legal and moral norms of the land (Osoba, 1996
in Dike 2000) on people; it is a situation whereby
an individual or group of people misuse public
power (financially or otherwise) for personal pur-
pose, usually carried out in secret and the act may
not be discovered immediately (Obasanjo 1994).
Obasanjo’s (1994) definition may not aptly fit in
to Nigeria situation. Corruption in Nigeria seems
to have become a way of life that is practiced
openly and without restraints. Nye (1967) opined
that people engage in corrupt practices without
blinking their eyes and other people around see it
as normal. This was corroborated by Jubril (2010)
in his paper on corruption and he argued that the
menace calls for concern based on the ‘degree to
which they are practiced by Nigerians and our
openness and discretion in doing so’. Lipset and
Lenz (2000) see corruption as efforts to ‘secure
wealth or power through illegal means, private gain
at public expense, or a misuse of public power for
private benefit’. Transparent International defines
corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for
private gain whether in the private or public sector
(Transparency International, 2011). The ones put
forward by T.I and Lipset and Lenz (2000) appear
broad and capture different sides of corruption, yet
it in spite of its limitations, the definitions have
thrown some light regarding corruption; it is an
act against the accepted rules and regulations of
the land and people engage in it in order to enrich
or put themselves in advantage positions.

Corruption is not limited to Africa; as a matter
of fact, it is a global phenomenon (Davies 2006;
Lipset and Lenz 2000). There have been cases of
corruption in developed countries like “Watergate
Scandal” of the 60s, in U.S.A; lobbying business
in present American society and among others
(This Day, 2005 and Ikubaje, 2003). In Africa,
corruption reflects in virtually all facets of its
institutions spreading like wild fire. In a survey
report compiled by Davies (No Date), she sub-
mitted that parliamentarians in Africa perceived
corruption as a threat to the development of their
respective countries. Several religious riots and
protests witnessed in some part of the country are
as a result of one form of corruption or the other.
Boko Haram, a religious movement campaigning
against western education for instance has been
attributed to unemployment, poverty due to cor-
ruption in the nation’s political landscape (News
Rescue, 2014). The situation is made worse due
to a continued socialization of people into dif-
ferent forms of corrupt practices. The menace
thus become refined, grounded, accepted and as-
similated into the lives of all and sundry without
restraints. One then begins to wonder where this
scourge emanated from; providing answer to this
might be a little difficult as several scholars have
tried to attribute the origin to different sources
ranging from the economic recession, uncontrol-
larable passion of human beings, and the rise of
capitalism among others (Dike, 2000; Girling,
1997; and Obasanjo, 1994). These explanations,
however, may not be able to fully trace, explain
and pin the origin of corruption to a particular
era in the history of Nigeria. However, Obasanjo
(1994) gave an interesting submission on the exact
period corruption may have begun in Nigeria. He
argued that the period of independence marked the
beginning of corruption. He further opined that