

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 wild fire 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 from everyday life may be difficult considering different programmes and policies put in place to address it and which have not yielded the expected results. The question

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8195-8.ch045

therefore is: what are the factors that make this severance 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 behaviour 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 purpose, 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 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 fire¹. In a survey report compiled by Davies (No Date), she submitted 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 corruption in the nation's political landscape (News Rescue, 2014). The situation is made worse due to a continued socialization of people into different forms of corrupt practices. The menace thus become refined, grounded, accepted and assimilated 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, uncontrollable 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

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