THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CORRUPTION AND LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
One of the most global concerns of the world in the 21st century is corruption, which from all indices affects other aspects of life. However the level of participation differs from one country to another. In Nigeria, the level of perpetrated with respect to leaders and policy makers, have become alarming. Hence the paper x-rayed the experience of Nigeria in the literature, exposing poor developmental performances, civil, ethnic and religious unrest, and the outright collapse of other viable sectors of the economy. This paper adopted the Political Economy approach as its theoretical framework to explain how endemic the issue has become within the Nigerian polity. It mirrored the involvement of leaders at the political level whether military or civilian, indicating: misappropriation, stealing, nepotism, favoritism, mediocrity, opportunism, god-fatherism as the fallout of the actions of these corrupt leaders. The work is qualitative in nature. The work concluded that corruption is not found within the leadership circle alone, but has eaten deep into the fabrics of the society, militating against development and good governance. The paper therefore recommended that the only way the circle of corruption can be broken is when society collectively reject and punish offenders with heavy sanctions such as total refund of the amount involved and outright banning of such persons from holding key societal positions. It also recommended that special programs aimed at teaching students the effects of corruption, and why it should be exterminated from our polity be structured as part of academic curriculum at all levels.

Key words: Corruption, Leadership, Political economy and Development
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Introduction
Before the colonial masters bequeathed a political system at independence, Nigerian had affinity for worthy causes and corruption was very minimal. Due diligence was appreciated and illegally accumulated wealth was treated as anathema by the society. The leadership was exemplary and the followership valued hard work. Nigeria inherited all the legacies of the British though alien. This importation of foreign culture and forced union of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by the colonizers was to accomplish their main objectives of subjugation and exploitation of the colonized (Yagboayaju, 2007).
At independence, instead of the political freedom to yield positive gains, it became a tool for the enemies of the state to exploit the masses and deepen alienation of rich state operators and the impoverished followers. Nigerians in public offices took advantage to enrich their personal estates, akin to what Arowolo (2004) calls ‘structures of exploitation and despotism’. This
obviously, was antithetical to the interest of the people (Ojo and Bakare, 2010; Oyovbaire, 1984). This paper is discussed after this introduction under these following headings: conceptualizing corruption and criminalization of state, corruption and criminalization of state, the theory and application, corrupt practices exposed and conclusion and recommendations.

**Conceptualizing Corruption and Criminalization of State**

The term *Corruption* has enjoyed several definitions from scholars all over the world as such this paper is not interested in the various sheds of definitions. The hydra-headed monster is generally understood to entail the use of an official position for purposes of private enrichment or illegitimate advantage capable of inflicting colossal damage on a nation and its citizenry, by truncating initiatives for economic growth and political stability, education, health and social justice (Olawole & Olukayode, 2010, UNDP, 2008).

Corruption comes in several forms such as favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, or amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power intoxication, and derivation of undue gains and benefits. Bribery, smuggling, fraud, illegal payments, money laundering, drug trafficking, falsification of documents and records, window dressing, false declaration, tax evasion, under payment, deceit, forgery, concealment, aiding and abating of any kind to the detriment of another person, community, society or nation, advance fee fraud (419), money laundering, unconventional and fraudulent trade practices, misappropriation or diversion of funds, kickbacks, under and over invoicing, bribery, false declarations, abuse of office, and collection of illegal tolls are its accessories (Olawole and Olukayode, 2010; Olaide, 2000).

Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary-General presents the negative effects of corruption in this manner:

> Corruption hurts poor people in developing countries disproportionately. It affects their daily life in many different ways, and tends to make them even poorer, by denying them their rightful share of economic resources or life-saving aid. Corruption puts basic public services beyond the reach of those who cannot afford to pay bribes. By diverting scarce resources intended for development, corruption also makes it harder to meet fundamental needs such as those for food, health and education. It creates discrimination between the different groups in society, feeds inequality and injustice, discourages foreign investment and aid, and hinders growth. It is, therefore, a major obstacle to political stability, and to successful social and economic development (Annan, 2003).

The criminalization of the state, on the other hand, is “the use and institutionalization of the political or government apparatuses as instruments of graft and as conduits of individuals’ accumulation of wealth” (Ochwada, 2010). In the postcolonial Africa, criminalization of the state has posed immeasurable economic and political difficulties. Criminalization and Corruption are highly related and could be used interchangeably especially for this work. In reality, corruption and criminalization presuppose that there is a correlation between political power sharing and the distribution of wealth in society. Perceived in the above context, the interaction of power with political practice has produced a crisis in governance of states where dominant social groups or the ruling elites have been engaged in activities of criminal nature.

**Corruption and Criminalization of State: A General Discuss**

Many developing states in Africa are endowed with abundance of natural resources. Due to mismanagement they have continued to be on the lower rung of the United Nations Development index. Here our focus is particularly on Nigeria, the ‘giant of Africa’. A few privileged persons have engaged in massive money laundering, fraud, trafficking, oil theft and these have
contributed to the criminalization of the state. Transparency International’s (TI), Corruption Perceptions Index in 2008 ranked Nigeria 121 out of 180 countries, in 2009, 130 out of 180 nations, and in 2010 it 134 of 178. Corruption has been nicknamed ‘the Nigerian factor’ and posing difficult to fight due to the government’s insincerity in confronting offenders; pre-bargaining by influential society elites; low deterrent; lack of virile social movements to tackle corruption, lack of access to public information, low public participation in governance, insecurity of informants, corrupt electoral system, systemic disorder, and weak government institutions.

More attention and resources have been devoted to discussing and fighting corruption in Nigeria than any other African countries in the last two or three decades. For instance the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) recognized the destructive effect of corruption and set up the Economic and Finance Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2002 and the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to investigate and prosecute acts of corruption in the country, in addition to such other agencies as Code of Conduct Bureau, and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). The EFCC was specifically mandated to “curb the menace of corruption” in the country. By 2010 under Nuhu Ribadu, a senior police officer, the commission had listed 55 high-profile cases on its website. By 2011 only four convictions were secured. Ribadu’s successor Farida Warizi recorded over 600 convictions and recovered $12 billion (Olabulo, 2011; HRW, 2011; Campbell, 2010). No matter how much anti-graft bodies fight, they are rendered invalid like toothless bulldogs, who only bark without action. The failure to establish special courts to expedite pending cases make difficult the management of cases at hand. More so, the immunity clause in the Nigerian constitution shield serving governments and influential elites when they commit these criminal acts from prosecution (ICG, 2006). These ‘untouchables’ even when prosecuted only serve a short term in jail only to be granted state pardon.

Serious allegations of financial misconduct abound in the chambers of the National Assembly which has become cash counters for sharing bribe money. The executive arm of the Federal Government has also become a drain of public funds with monies collected for contracts not executed (Suleiman, 2011). Massive allegations of abuse of office and corruption were levied against the Ibrahim Babagida regime; several of his officers were indicted for corruptly enriching themselves. The list includes Chief of General Staff-Vice-Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, Navy Captain Olabode George, Group Captain Ernest Adeleye, Navy Captain Mohammed Lawal, Captain Ibim Princewill (Gbeyega, 1996). Former civilian governors are on the list of top profile Nigerians indicted for money laundering, fraud and various other corrupt practices include Diepreye Alamaeyeseigha (Bayelsa state) 2005; James Ibori (Delta state) 2010; Lucky Igbinedion (Edo state) 2008; Orji Kalu (Abia State) 2008. Tafa Balogun was docked for corrupt practices while serving the Inspector-General of Police.

The control of state apparatuses by a few has led to their massively transferring the commonwealth of the people to their private estates. Development is hindered and poverty stare the masses on everywhere. Ake (1993) contended that the colonial state by virtue of its violent and arbitrary nature which it used to subjugate the colonial territory, could neither appreciate nor incorporate the captives’ cultures, policy and experience into the emergent state system. In the process the state became estranged from society and came to be regarded as an alien force by the people who later discovered a safe haven in their community realm where they are not only recognized and appreciated but their basic needs are catered for, where they feel obliged to contribute their human and material resources freely for the community development. It is here,
this parallel polity that the indigenous people find their identity and are governed by a different ethical code. Joseph (1986) attributed the failure to institute a responsive and responsible government in Nigeria to the use of public offices as pretend to meet the short term and long term interests of individuals and groups rather than those of the generality of the people. The building of patrons-client network by those who occupy public offices is to ensure their continued prebendalisation to meet the individual, family and sectional interests. Ekpebu (1996) described the situation thus:

*in office, the politicians turned the government treasury into large scale private gold mine. To remain in office, they used armed thugs to ensure better representation for their political parties and rigged elections in broad day light.*

As successive regimes especially the military took the centre stage of governance, destroyed the basic society blocks, corruption became institutionalized and the ethos that moderated society speedily eroded within the shortest notice. The coming to power of these juntas saw the beginning of official looting of public treasury, thus, the criminalization of the Nigerian state.

Since the Great Purge of the nation’s civil service in 1975 by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime which compulsorily retired civil servants without ‘cause’ before their retirement age, corruption has become personified in Nigeria. The canker worm is not only endemic but systemic. There is massive bribery and corruption in the everyday transaction in the public and private domain and misappropriation of public funds without recourse. This was aptly captured by Agbo (2010) who states that ‘in Nigeria, we breath corrupt air, eat corrupt foods and we are constantly surrounded by corrupt elements’. It is very visible as you walk pass any police checkpoint or meet any staff of the electricity distribution and marketing company in the community. Every strata of society have been affected negatively, especially the economic growth and development. The foot prints are the abundance of bad roads, epileptic power supply, and lack of potable water, failure of the health sector, inadequate housing and general lack of social amenities for the teeming population. Majority of Nigerians live in urban slums and live far below the poverty line despite the huge natural resources that Nigeria is blessed with.

Though each military regime since January 15, 1966 has hinged on ‘correcting the massive corruption of the previous’ in reality, the military propagate the seeds of corruption most and openly pluck the fruits whether they are mature or not. For instance, during the long reigns of General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) and General Sani Abacha, huge funds were siphoned abroad. The IBB regime’s open acceptance of ‘kick-backs and ten-percent’ from quoted contracts are in the history books. The Halliburton bribe which indicted the regimes of General Sani Abacha, General Abdulsalami Abubakar including Olusegun Obasanjo are just a few of the heinous cases in high places. No wonder, during a meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in 1996 James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank while assessing the impact of funds to countries from the Bank remarked that there was need to deal with the “cancer of corruption in Nigeria” if the goal of achieving growth and poverty reduction was to be achievable.

**The Theory and Application**

Political Economy theory posits that people pursue collective economic goals and deal with conflicts over resources and other economic factors in authoritative way by means of government. Therefore, the Marxist Political Economy approach is deemed fit to be adopted as
the analytical construct in this paper. The reason has been that, the approach scientifically studies the society in its totality and takes into consideration the interconnection of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the sub-structure (economy) and the super structure (politics). Thus, Political Analysis adapts the approach to explain or present a critique of any major economic policy of political actors. The experiences in the developing States of the world have shown that scholars, who are Marxist- inclined in their writings, often adopt the approach to explain certain economic-political relationship existing in a named political system or between a political system and another political system. They do this by applying the contending theories in political economy – Class Analysis, Dependence Theory, Development/Underdevelopment. In fact, their action only confirms the contention that the central concept of political economy is that of “class”.

Political economy is concerned about the relationship between the economy and state and about the various ways individual try to use the state to improve their economic welfare. The central premise of this perspective is that the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life (Anifowose, 2008). Thus, the society has a sharp divide and is characterized into classes of the rich and the poor or the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Therefore, the rich own the means of production, distribution and exchange, use their wealth/resources to persuade the poor to gain power (Olawole, 2007)

Put differently, the approach is seen as the window to understand the law that governs the economic life of the society.

According to the Marxist thought, this domination (Politics), exploitation (economic), and marginalization (dependency) of society is a dialectical material distribution and power which eventually will result in a consciousness or revolt to upturn the status quo. Therefore, political leadership owns the apparatus of government which can be used to marginalize, exploit, and dominate others in the stratum of the society. It is in this wise that this paper tries to expose and criminalize acts of government that are detrimental and at variance to the expectation of the responsibility of political actors in the discharge of duties in the society.

**Corrupt Practices Exposed**

In order to chart and establish areas of exposure of the criminalization of the state through corruption, certain indices that are cultural, economical and political play into focus actions of leaders in the polity of the nation. These indices are indicated in below mentioned variables that reflect the economical and political structure of the Nigerian state. These are: mono cultural base economy; inequality in wealth distribution; ascribing much important to public offices; cultural value to wealth accumulation and celebration; lack of strong institutions; a pathological identity creating dislocation for integration and absence of servant-leadership trait

It is imperative to also note that many corrupt vices identified in the Nigerian system is as a result of political exploitation, dominance and marginalization of power politics played by key actors in the scheme of things. The Nigerian mono cultural economy that is based only on oil has created a rent seeking attribute that promote exploitative tendency from leaders. Since the revenue base of the country is largely accumulated from oil, emphasis and attention of states are geared away from performance to self accumulation. This state structure of oil revenue base as the only viable resource of government has promoted attention that generated corruptive tendency of public holder for self gain rather than state development in the provision of infrastructures and eradication of poverty. Hence, this recourse of public gain amassing wealth syndrome has increased the level of poverty and by extension created a wide gap of inequality of wealth distribution in Nigeria.
The cultural value of primitive accumulation of wealth has also aided corrupt practices in the public arena. The Nigerian societal value of celebrating wealth is an underlining factor mitigating the fight against corruption in the land. This, by extension, has made public offices an exhorted position for quick money making from the “national cake” of our commonwealth purse.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The surgical operation done on this paper is to examine and expose colossal damage of corruption in the Nigeria system. The Political Economy theory was used to underpin and exposed how government functionaries used the apparatus of the state as instrument of oppression, marginalization and exploitation on the generality of the country. This has resulted in the distortion of moral and cultural values where corrupt practices are celebrated and promoted as a result of lack deterrent from government quarters. Poverty, misappropriation and lack of basic social amenities strive because public office holder continues to amass wealth for selfish and group interest.

For Nigeria to move forward there should be zero level tolerance to corruption at all sphere of governance. Government should exhibit a strong political will to deal with corrupt public holder. We need to build a strong institution where processes are instituted and internalized to last longer than individual or leadership. It should also review the existing laws setting up the anti-graft agencies with a view of making them relevant for our time. The issue of insecurity in the country, geared by tone of war, fear and acrimony under disguise of religiosity and ethnicity is the issue of wealth distribution and power game attendance.

A country that is built on culture of favoritism and nepotism will breed mediocrity and disintegration of unity. The only way the circle of corruption can be broken is when it starts with personal and interpersonal level where orientation and perception of state is moved away from materialism and a shift from oil-revenue based in the political economy where other viable economy sectors (agriculture and solid minerals) that have been abandon over years which were glory of the past resuscitated to redirect attention away from oil. Also, government should be seen as servant-leadership position and not instrument of wealth gain, for then; can we savage the nation from self destruction, acrimony, underdevelopment, and political instability.

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