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Corruption in Nigeria—Removing the Psychological and Ethical Connections through Civic Education

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Abstract: Corruption is pandemic in Nigeria. From high-profile cases to individual selfish mentality, the syndrome has been very pervasive and currently, corruption seems to be fighting back in the country. This paper highlights some definition of corruption and explores the psychological and ethical bases for corrupt mentality in Nigeria. The paper therefore posits that there is the need to institutionalize regulations with ethical reorientation of the young ones against greed and nepotism with appropriate civic value system. As charity begins at home, it is recommended that the home as an informal sector for civic learning should form a synergy with school civic education for promoting corrupt-free mentality.

Keywords: Corruption; Psychological and ethical; Civic education; Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Corruption is almost becoming a culture in Nigeria. This is because hardly will a day pass away without reported astonishing cases of corruption. It is a belief in Nigeria that you cannot get anything bureaucratic done without some elements of bribery and corruption. The monster known as corruption which entails abuse and misuse of power or abuse of trust has become a cancer that is retarding economic development in Nigeria. Mohammed (2013) catalogued more than 100 high profile cases of corruption that occurred between 2008 and 2012 in Nigeria. They included James Ibori (former Delta State Governor) laundering of over 9.1 billion naira, the Reverend Jolly Nyame (former Taraba State Governor) alleged stealing of 1.6 billion naira, Orji Kalu (former Abia State Governor) alleged looting of 3.1 billion naira to fund SLOK Airline and two banks in Gambia and Seirra Leone. Others included the Halliburton bribery case and the oil subsidy scandal tagged ‘brief case fuel importers’ (Adetoro, 2012). Currently in the court is the ‘Dasukigate’ 2.1 billion dollars arm fraud (Agande, 2016).

The most astonishing element of corrupt mentality is that 247 ureports.com (2014) reported the Wikileaks discovery that some unpatriotic politicians and miscreants were being sponsored by a renowned international community to fuel the Bokoharam insurgency that had claimed more than 10,000 lives and destroyed virtually all the lake – Chad Basin Communities in Yobe and Borno States with millions displaced from their homes. Currently, Ewubare (2017a) from a fact sheet obtained from the Economic and Financial Corruption Commission (EFCC) reported that 18 Senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were under investigation for alleged ₦367.5 billion frauds. This is why it is not surprising that the confirmation of the chairmanship of the EFCC by the senate has been vehemently opposed by the same lawmakers (Ewubare, 2017b). Some Federal House of Representative members also have the issue of 2016 budget padding hanging on their neck (Nwabughogu, 2016; Udo, 2016). No wonder why they mooted the idea of passing a bill that would grant full amnesty to looters (corrupt men and women) in Nigeria (Obichie, 2017).

The features of the bill according to him, will grant looters the opportunity to escape any form of probe inquiry or prosecution after fulfilling certain conditions; knowing fully well that majority of the members of the national assembly have pending cases of corruption with the ICPC or EFCC. More revealing is that apart from their bogus salaries, Uzochukwu (2017) noted that members of the national assembly pay themselves allowances for staff and officers they do not have or maintain. Other notable places where corruption are pervasive in Nigeria are police force, universities and colleges, the Nigerian football, churches, custom services and internet fraud (Uzochukwu, 2017). The objectives of this paper are to highlight the conceptual clarifications of the term ‘corruption’, explain its psychological and ethical connections in the Nigeria’s context, examine the roles that civic education could play as a panacea and make other vital recommendations for curtailing corruption in Nigeria.

2. The Concept of Corruption

Media Advocacy and Development Institute (2013) discovered that corruption was derived from a Latin word “*corruptus*” meaning to break or destroy. Therefore, it means to break away or depart from morality, ethical standards and civic virtues. Corruption in the views of Mohammed (2013) knows no bound irrespective of tribes and cultural affiliations. The section 2 of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission Act

2000 as cited by [Media Advocacy and Development Institute \(2013\)](#) defines corruption as “bribery, frauds and other related offences”. MADI goes further to state that this refers to wrong doings by those in special positions of trust including abuse of power, extortion, embezzlement, inflation of contracts, kick-backs, diversion of funds, falsification or suppression of records, perversion of justice (like the current celebrated cases of alleged judges that collected bribes), electoral malpractices (of which some electoral officers are undergoing trials for bribery on River State’s 2015 electoral malpractices), examination malpractices, drug trafficking, money laundering, abuse of selection processes, nepotism, sexual exploitation, gratification etc. These are acts that constitute a conflict of interest and are deemed as illegal due to the fact that they create unfair advantage for one party over the other ([Morgan, 2013](#)). Thus, in the opinion of World Bank cited by [Media Advocacy and Development Institute \(2013\)](#), corruption refers to abuse of office for private gains and it constitutes “illegal, or unauthorized profiteering by officials who exploit their positions for personal gains” (Blackburn, Bose & Haque, 2004 cited by [Melgar et al. \(2010\)](#)).

From the theory of family dysfunctionality, [Upadhyay \(2003\)](#) posited that corruption is learnt from nastiest parenting and excessive social pressures from home. On the other hand, [Hauk and Saez-Marti \(2001\)](#) used the theory of collectivism to submit that corruption spreads as a matter of association and sympathy but not of reasoning and examination. From social inequality theory, [Melgar et al. \(2010\)](#) posited that a greater level of inequality determines a higher level of corruption perception. Generally however, it is reported that poor governance, lack of accountability and transparency, low level of democratic culture and tradition, deficiency in civic participation, lack of clear regulations, low level of institutional control, extreme poverty and inequality are the major causes of corruption ([Asongu, 2012](#)). Others are greed, poor youth empowerment and unemployment ([Uzochukwu, 2017](#)). In terms of types of corruption, [Asongu \(2012\)](#) and [PWC \(2016\)](#) categorized them into basic three thus:

Table-1. Categories of corruption

Types/Categories	Main Actors	Mode
Incidental/Petty Corruption	Petty officials and opportunistic individuals	Everyday abuse of entrusted power by low and middle level officials leading to small embezzlement and misappropriation, bribes, favouritism and discrimination.
Systematic/Grand corruption	Public officials, politicians, donors, elites and businessmen/women	Bribery and kickbacks, collusion to defraud in a large scale, public tender abuse and abuse of privileges.
Systemic/political corruption	Buereaucratic elites, politicians, businessmen/women	Policy manipulations, large-scale embezzlement through ghost workers’ pay roll, false procurement payment for non-existent goods, large disbursement on fraudulent public property, favouritism and discrimination in favour of ruling political party

Sources: Adapted from [Asongu \(2012\)](#) and [PWC \(2016\)](#).

From the Executive Summary of [PWC \(2016\)](#) corruption in Nigeria was observed to have cost 1,000 dollars per person in 2014, and could cost up to 37% of her GDP (nearly 2,000 dollars per person) in 2030. As well documented by [Uzochukwu \(2017\)](#), Nigeria was ranked as the most corrupt nation out of 90 countries in the year 2000, second out of 91 countries in 2001 and maintained the same position among 102 countries in 2002 and 2003. In 2004, she was ranked third among 146 nations and ranked eight among 158 nations in 2005. The country ranked 21st most corrupt nation among 163 countries in 2006 and ranked 33rd in 2007 among 180 countries.

In 2012, Nigeria was the 37th most corrupt nation among 176 countries and the country dropped again to 33rd position among 177 countries in 2013 ([Uzochukwu, 2017](#)). According to this researcher, Nigeria stood at 38th position among 174 countries in 2014 and 32nd among 168 nations in 2015. Unfortunately however, Nigeria further dropped to 40th most corrupt nation among 176 countries in 2016 ([Uzochukwu 2017](#) citing the reports of Transparency International). Thus, by the hypothesis of [Calderon and Alvarez \(2005\)](#) corruption keeps on changing in an adaptive process in order to survive in an evolving environment.

The basic characteristics and effects of corruption in Nigeria according to [PWC \(2016\)](#) are:

- Tax avoidance resulting to low tax base for government revenue (less than 8% of the GDP).
- Huge government expenditure in vested interest rather than public interest.
- Poor business infrastructure, education, health facilities, epileptic power and water supply and bad transportation system.
- Unnecessary bureaucracy creating further avenues for bribes.
- Contract over-invoicing and weak property rights.
- Promotion of mediocrity and cliental patronage.
- Balance sheet distortions and economic recession.
- Poor technology and inability to protect intellectual rights.
- Wide gap inequalities and prevalence of social injustice.

3. The Psychological Dimension

[Corruption Watch \(2013\)](#) submitted that human beings are innately greedy. Citing Grobler, the organization noted that while some people can contain their self – enrichment and instant gratification, others cannot but waiting for opportunities to accumulate wealth. Hence, corrupt tendencies by psychological theory is a function of personality make-up. Even the way politicians behave in Nigeria makes corruption to become a social conformity, thrill-seeking behavior, worthy risk-taking behavior as a result of the need for power with pressure from the society to behave corruptly ([Corruption Watch, 2013](#)). [Rusch \(2016\)](#) further traced the psychological dimension of corruption to faulty intuition and mental shortcuts as a result of overconfidence effect, reciprocation gestures, scarcity mentality and fear of competition.

Sigmund Freud (1839-1856) as cited by [Uba \(1987\)](#) used psychoanalysis theory to discover that man's desire for corrupt tendencies involve three stages of development – id, ego and super ego. The id stage according to him is the primary process of thinking based on the pleasure principle. It is the stage of immaturity, selfishness, illogicality and amorality. It is a process for wish-fulfilling, hallucination and fantasy experience. The id stage is called “the spoiled brat of personality” ([Uba \(1987\)](#) citing Corey, 1982). The ego develops from id in an attempt to moderate the fantasy pleasures of the id. According to [Uba \(1987\)](#), while the job of the ego stage is how to satisfy id impulses within the limits of society without violating the super ego rules, it does this through defensive processes. The super ego on the other hand represents the stage of values and moral internalization. Unlike the id, the super ego admits no compromise because it serves as the judicial branch of personality. Thus, while the id seeks pleasure, the ego tests reality and the super ego strive for perfection. In testing reality therefore, most of the Nigerian politicians and elites use defensive mechanism such as seeking compensation through corrupt practices to project forged image and later rationalize on them. They further use reaction formation and pent – up feelings to repress all attempts to investigate and prosecute them. Consequently, these ego-repressionist activities make corruption to become a psychological cankerworm in Nigeria.

4. The Ethical Connection

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that deals with the rightness or wrongness of human action ([Ochulor, 2011](#)). It provides the basis for rationality and logicity of a behaviour. In whatever way it is, the rationality for corruption is a matter of “ethical blindness” ([Kirchner, 2014](#)). The ethical connection to corrupt – mentality is based on Kantian moral philosophy that sees corruption as an immoral or morally bad action because it goes against the supreme moral principle and the natural sense of duty that goes with it ([Ochulor, 2011](#)). [Adetoro \(2009\)](#) identified the basis for corruption in Nigeria from ethical egoism that states that man only takes action that is more favourable to himself/herself because he or she lacks commitment to national patriotism and deeply engulfed in ‘greedy materialism’. This behavior according to him is contrary to Aristotle's advocacy for “moral perfection of the individuals” and Glandi's philosophy of “self – discipline” and “self-purification”. Consequently, most men in Nigeria remain “ethical dwarfs” because they want money (and even certificates) without work ([Adetoro, 2009](#)).

From the consequentialist or utilitarian point of views therefore, all actions such as nepotism, forgery, embezzlement, falsification, bribe – taking, sexual harassment, over-invoicing, kick-backs etc that jeopardize the interest of the nation and inflict pains on others are unethical behaviors. Equally, the contractarian theory of ethical principle posits that most of the corrupt actions do not promote social cohesiveness in the society because such actions are not for the common good of the society. It is further argued that an altruistic individual who donates time and money for a local charity in expectation of a return compensation has displayed an unethical behavior because his/her action lacks moral worth ([Morgan \(2013\)](#) citing Sandel, 2011). In all these unethical actions however, it is believed that there exist interconnections between faulty home socialization structure and bad external environmental influences in the larger society. Consequently in the views of Aristotle as quoted by [Oladiipo \(2013\)](#), the dilemma of corruption places a heavy burden on virtue because a man cannot be prudent (corrupt-free) without being good; neither can also he/she be good without being prudent.

5. Civic Education as a Recipe

Civic Education as a subject that could promote “habits of the heart” is to foster sense of social justice, integrity, equity and selfless mentality. Quoting [Okam and Lawal \(2011\)](#) submitted that civic education is desirable for relevant knowledge, skills and values that would make an individual a functional and responsible citizen capable of exhibiting rationally balanced judgment. This socio-civic responsibility according to him is to bring-up attitude of the citizens such that they would be concerned in one way or another to bring harmony to the conflicting will that exist in the community ([Okam and Lawal \(2011\)](#) citing Russell, 1997).

The so called “negative civic values” as represented by corrupt mentality can be ameliorated through a carefully designed civic content and functions to produce good, useful, responsible and informed active citizens. In the views of [Nasir \(2011\)](#) such carefully designed civic content would make majority of the citizens to be reasonably honest, obedient and peaceful, while shunning acts of cheating for personal gains and treat others fairly. Thus, civic education becomes an important means for capacity development on social level by equipping people with corrupt-free mentality. [Oladiipo \(2013\)](#) opined that while the minimal civic education attempts to promote elitist moral engagement, it is the maximal content that promotes liberal public virtues that makes the individual to be conscious of being a member of a living community for the purpose of respect for common good. This is why in the views of

Phillip-Ogoh (2011), the ideal civic education is the one that would forge a synergy between the home, the school and the society especially for educating and mobilizing Nigerians to identify, expose and reject corruption and manipulation in all ramifications.

6. Conclusion

Arising from the foregoing write-up is the fact that Nigeria's level of corruption needs urgent value reorientation through concerted civic education. This should be an education that would promote 'soul cleansing' and 'self – purification'. It should be an education that will turn the current 'strangers' in our midst to 'soul-mates'. This is because the current economic recession is not accidental but an outcome of a monumental corruption. It is therefore necessary that the civic education framework that is being advocated should be one that would remove the psychological and ethical disorientations that form the bases for corrupt mentality from Nigerians.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that a carefully designed civic education can be a recipe for corruption in Nigeria. Hence, the need to implement the following suggestions.

- Civic education should be made compulsory as a subject at all levels of education.
- Content for civic learning should emphasize moral rectitude in Nigeria.
- Civic learning should be to engage the formal, non-formal and informal sectors of life with moral cases dialogue and should be full of practical demonstrations.
- There should be a synergy between the school and the home such that high profile cases of corruption should form part of civic textual materials for analytical criticism.
- The mass media should step-up their campaigns against corruption and corrupt mentality.
- Whistle blowing on unethical behaviour should form part of the civic learning while unique good moral conducts should be well rewarded to serve as motivation in promoting common good.

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