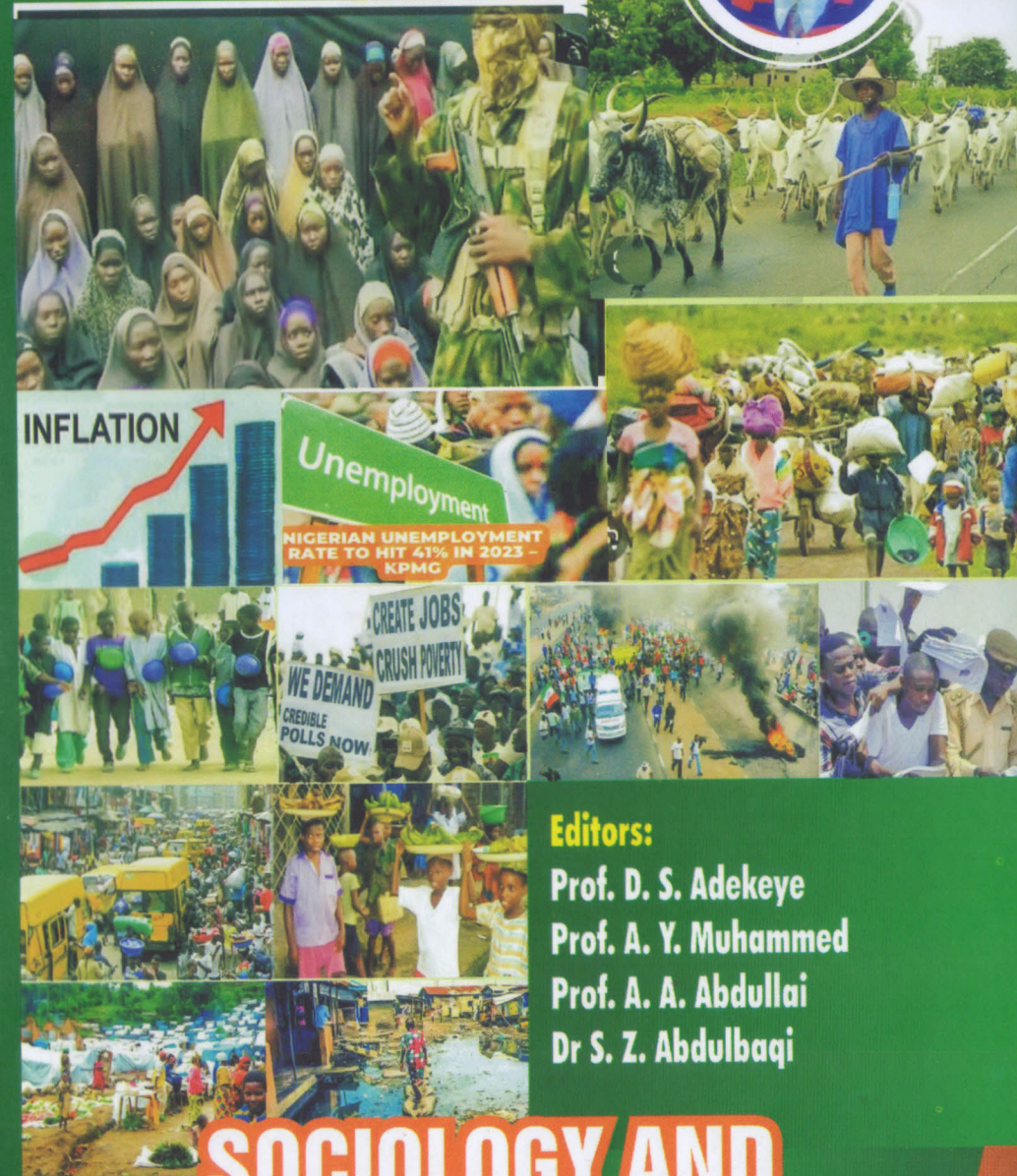




SOCIOLOGY AND
HUMAN CHALLENGES

FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR BASHIRU SALAWU

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Editors:

Prof. D. S. Adekeye
Prof. A. Y. Muhammed
Prof. A. A. Abdullai
Dr S. Z. Abdulbaqi

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PUBLISHED BY THE
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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Historical Trend of Corruption Prevalence in Nigeria: A Sociologist Explanation

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Introduction

The phenomenon of corruption is not just a recent social occurrence. It is as old as the world itself. In Nigeria in particular, corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the society. Hardly is there any part of Nigerian society where corruption does not exist. In the economic sector, the bureaucratic corruption perpetrated in most cooperate Organisations is on the increase every day. Worthy of mentioning here is the new trend of bribery such that unemployed graduates need to pay for a slot before they can secure an employment letter due to the unemployment crisis lingering in the country at present. Also among the political office holders, embezzlement is seen as a norm without being checked. As far back as 1962 for instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was investigated and found guilty of corruption by the Coker Commission of Inquiry due to his failure to adhere to standards of conduct which were required of persons holding public office (Coker Commission, 1962). In another instance, the Okigbo's panel Report in 1994 indicted former military president, Ibrahim Babangida, a former Head of state, late General Sanni Abacha, and a former Governor of the Central Bank, Alhaji Abdulkadri Ahmed for mismanaging about \$12.4 billion oil windfall between 1988 and 1994. Just very recently, it was reported that politicians and others stole N3.8 Trillion between 1999 and 2016 (Punch Newspaper, May 29 2016).

Consequent to the discussion above, there seems to be greater recognition in Nigeria today as in other countries of the world that corruption which is seen by all and sundry as a social problem, can have and is already having serious adverse impacts on development. Indeed, many people in Nigeria today believe that corruption is the most severe obstacle confronting the nation's development process. It is in this context that this research work attempted to examine the underlying factors that make corruption thrive in Nigeria and its consequences on economic and political development.

Concept of Corruption

Corruption is a universal phenomenon; there is no generally suitable definition of the term. Sen (2001) posits that corruption is the violation of created rules for personal gain and profit. Aluko (2009) defines it as an anti-social conduct conferring improper profits and benefits contrary to moral and legal standards, and which denigrates the ability of authorities to advance the living conditions of the people. World Bank (2002) defines corruption as the misuse of public office for personal gain. Public office is abused for personal gain when an official receives, asks, or extorts a bribe. It is similarly abused when private agents actively offer bribes to avoid public procedures and processes for competitive compensation or profit. Public office can also be abused for private advantages even if no bribery occurs, through nepotism and patronage, theft of state assets, or the alteration or diversion of public resources (Agbu, 2003).

Types of Corruption

A report published by Amundsen in 2010 delivers useful explanations of the kinds of corruption in Nigeria, which can be used to fathom out what the main kinds of corruption are and how they have an effect on the different levels of society. Based on this peculiarity, this subsection offers an overview of the existing facts on the core types of corruption in Nigeria.

1. Rent-seeking: Rent-seeking is a term from economics where actors try to derive economic rents by influencing and manipulating the political and social environment in which economic activities ensue rather than by improving value. Not all rent-seeking behaviour can be associated with corruption.

2. Embezzlement: Embezzlement is defined as "the appropriation of property or funds officially delegated to someone in their formal position as an agent or guardian" (U4 Glossary). Systematic and/or grand-scale embezzlement of public funds seriously destabilises the ability of the state to manage resources and render services (Abel & Blackman 2014).

3. Bribes and Kickbacks: Grand corruption in the form of bribes and kickbacks paid to public officers and politicians in substitute for huge public contracts also seem to be an area of interest in Nigeria.

4. Nepotism and Cronyism: Matters associated with nepotism and cronyism has been a familiar characteristic of Nigerian society (Ekanem & Ekefren, 2013). There is an affirmation that family bonds and individual personal connections play a significant part in the appointment of individuals to public positions, as well as with regard to promotions and remuneration. Government institutions are constantly filled according to ethnicity, religion or political affiliation rather than merit and professional qualifications (Okafor 2005).

Prevalence of Corruption in Nigeria

Many incidences have disclosed that corruption is a prevalent and widespread reality in Nigeria. This is obvious in all aspects of the private and public lives of the people. Nigeria has consistently over the years, ranked among the most corrupt nations worldwide (The Punch, 24 Oct, 2004; Transparency International, 2002, 2003, 2004; 2011 and 2012). Nigeria is placed 136th of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Comparably, the United Nations Human Development Index ranked Nigeria 159th out of 172 countries sampled. Due to the high prevalence of Corruption in Nigeria, the country is mostly referred to by experts as a failed state. The United States of America foreign policy Journal put Nigeria in 144th place in its annual ranking of 177 failed countries (The Nation, May 7, 2013). If someone is not convinced enough of these international accounts, the way in which pages of national newspapers in Nigeria are jam-packed with incidences of unlawful possession of fortune by public officials and private individuals through embezzlement, fraud, extravagances and all manners of bribes are arguable evidence, widespread reports on different kinds of corruption on the pages of newspapers are almost an everyday situation (The Nigeria Tribune, August 12, 2009; The Nation, December 1, 2009; The Nation, May 5, 2010; The Punch, June 11, 2011; The Leadership, August 4 2012; The Nation, April 30 2013; The Nation, May 7, 2013).

Corruption has indeed consumed the social structure in Nigeria Adetola (2012) her assumption affirmed that corruption is very possible to saturate the unborn future generation of Nigeria. Corruption is such a general practice in Nigeria that all Nigeria Presidents since the start of the Fourth Republic have always confirmed the widespread corruption in the polity. For instance, a former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, since the assumption of office in 1999 till he evacuated from office and up till now has consistently expressed the existence of corruption in Nigerian society (Obasanjo, 2013).

According to Obasanjo (1999), quoted in Okoosi-Simbine (2005), the instructions and regulations for performing official business were purposely disregarded or bypassed to facilitate corruption in the management of government corporations. Based on this remark, Obasanjo communicated his decisions to fight the scourge tooth and nail; he made the following assertion to express his stance on corruption

“Some say I should compromise a little, but I will not. And I persistently plead to God that rather than allow me to compromise; he should take the job away from me.”

In another example, he stated that US\$20 billion was embezzled in Nigeria (New Nigeria, November 25, 1999). Obasanjo conceded the widespread corruption and introduced measures to control the menace during his term in office; he initiated two anti-graft bodies; the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (Okosie-Simbine, 2006; Soyombo, 2006).

The prevalence of corruption in low and high places in Nigeria endured unrestricted that President YarAdua, on resumption of office, attested to the menace. He acceded that his election was flawed by electoral corruption, and he remarked that his government will give no tolerance for corruption (Onwubiko, 2013). It is indeed bothersome that in spite of all electioneering campaigns Jonathan to fight corruption in all capacities, much evidence abounds that his government is one of the most corrupt in the history of Nigeria. This is due to the fact that his administration is not only treating corruption

with kid gloves but is also fond of distinguishing past corrupt public officers with national honours, state forgiveness and federal promotions and appointments. For example, the past Governor of Bayelsa State (D.S.P Alamiesiyegha), who was sentenced to corruptly enriching himself (Idowu, 2011), was awarded a state pardon by the Jonathan-led government (The Nation, May 2013).

Historical Development of Corruption in Nigeria Colonial Period

Traditional colonial power was basically the unrestricted, authoritarian and autocratic rule of a small band of British colonial officials who were supported by their compatriots, the European Christian missions and monopoly trading businesses operating in Nigeria. These colonial officers not only usurped the Nigerian people's sovereign power and authority, but they also launched a kind of military rule or praetorian (Dudley, 1973) reformed by a form of monopolistic and Oligopolistic capital production, accumulation and appropriation.

The colonial authorities and their agents operated a corrupt and fraudulent accumulation system characterised by unequal terms of trade, low sustenance wages, exorbitant taxation towards the local population and exclusive monopoly rights of exploitation granted to British and other European firms over Nigeria's mineral and other natural resources. The few positions available to most Nigerians in the colonial were menial ones like peasant farming, petty trading, and minor clerical and subordinate jobs in the bureaucracy and the trading firms. This form of colonial authoritarianism created a crisis of accumulation whereby, in the favonian sense, "to be white was to be rich and to be black was to be poor".

By the end of the Second World War, the practice resulted in fueling the contradiction between the British colonial rulers and the ambitious up-and-coming Nigerian bourgeoisie elite and enabling the latter to challenge the power monopoly of the farmer, thus forcing a change in the colonial project. However, this only resulted in the cosmetic transformation of the mode of capital accumulation and the structure of governance dubbed by historians as the policy of decolonization during the last decade or so of British colonial rule in Nigeria.

Period of Decolonialisation (1952-1960)

The most striking feature of the politics of colonisation was the deftness with which the British colonialists perpetuated themselves in a dominant position over the wealth of Nigeria and its accumulation process by arranging a series of cleverly stage-managed constitutional projects and spurious power-sharing between themselves and their monopoly enterprise and the fledgling Nigerian bourgeoisie.

The departing British colonialists succeeded in retaining, consolidating and enhancing the existing structures of economic accumulation during decolonisation by progressively relocating the formal authority to rule to their Nigerian surrogate bourgeoisie. They appointed several key and politically influential members of Nigeria's ruling bourgeoisie from the three regions and Lagos into a lucrative but honorific and powerless partnership and directorships, giving them authority over awarding contracts for public projects and scholarships, issuing commodity buying agent licenses, etc., which was subject only to the veto of the ultimate colonial authority.

All these new roles in the public domain opened the doors to new forms of corrupt and substantial capital accumulation for major members of the Nigerian ruling class because of the shift from their marginal position in the scheme of things in the pre-decolonisation period. For instance, executors of public policies insisted on a prepayment to themselves of at least "ten per cent" of the value of the favour (contracts, licenses, scholarship, employment etc.) being sought by members of the public to perform the duty they were already being paid generous salaries and allowances from the public treasury for.

Independence and its immediate Aftermath (1960 – 1966)

As a consequence of the marginalization of the African population and the virtual monopoly of political and economic power by the British rule, the need to raise capital for investment in industry, commerce and agriculture and also in social and personal development, like professional and higher education, was a widespread trend throughout the country. However, the difficulties faced by the two latter-day financial giants (that is, Azikiwe in the 1920s and Awolowo in 1944) of the first republic in their efforts to raise capital in the closing decades of the colonial rule clearly demonstrate the phenomenon of capital

famine among all the indigenous population. Neither Azikiwe in the 1920s nor Awolowo in 1944 was able to raise significant funds to sponsor their higher education abroad. Both men also encountered the problem of capital acquisition in their particular ventures to establish newspaper firms in the 1930s and 1940s (the West Africa Pilot and others by Zik and Nigeria Tribune by Awolowo) as catalysts for progressing their political goals.

The point of this explanation, citing the cases of Awolowo and Azikiwe, is first to underline the fact that lack of capital was not peculiar to the two men but rather that their plight was typical among Nigerians under colonial conditions. Secondly, this experience of capital famine by the up-and-coming Nigerian elite who entered into the power-sharing partnership with the British colonial authorities in 1952 and ultimately took over from them at independence in 1960 – profoundly affected their attitude to the use of state power and state treasury when they acceded to supreme political power just before and at independence.

Azikiwe was revealed by the foster Sutton Tribunal of Enquiry of 1956 into the African Continental Bank (ACB) to have misused his position as Head of Government to siphon huge amounts of Eastern Nigerian Government funds into his own bank, the ACB, and subsequently enrich himself. In the same manner, the G.B.A Coker Commission of Inquiry of 1962 into Six Western Nigerian Public Corporations disclosed that Awolowo and his colleagues in the leadership of the Action Group Government of Western Nigeria enriched themselves and their party astoundingly at the expense of the gathered funds of the Cocoa Marketing Board, a property of the whole people of Western Nigeria.

These two cases of legally inspected corruption are only two dramatic instances of a phenomenon that was prevalent all over the country during the First Republic and even now. The succession of the Nigerian Political elites at independence to power signified that they could now resolve their central problem of a dearth of private capital through diversifying, accumulating and exploiting the public wealth of the state, which was initially unavailable to them. Examples of this include the fraudulent award (including outright sale) of unsecured government loans, produce buying and import licences to their associates, the inflation of government contract values (and the

significant expansion of payable “kickbacks” to themselves) and the direct looting of the treasury. These forms of corrupt political practices were executed by its main political groupings to monopolize, or at least have the lion's share of the loot from this systematic plundering of the wealth of the Nation was a major factor in intensifying and embittering the contest for political power along ethnic-regional lines.

Military Rule and Foundation of Kleptocracy (1966–1975)

The abortive Nzeogwu – led coup d'etat of January 15 1966 lasted for only a short period in its futile intention to end its misrule, corruption and ineptitude of the proceeding five years and above. In spite of its failure, it set the agenda of military rule in Nigeria as a “corrective” form of governance dedicated against corruption and disorderliness and in support of the rebuilding of democracy and justice. This agenda set by Nzeogwu in his broadcast on Radio Kaduna on 16 January has been opportunistically and fraudulently embraced by all succeeding military regimes, including the Abacha government.

The war against the dual vices of corruption and indiscipline was more noisy than effective and there are quite a few knowledgeable people who considered it a phoney war, drummed up more for the regimes self-promotion than out of concern for public morality and morale of the Nigerian state.

The Deepening Crisis of the Nigerian Kleptocracy (1979–1983)

The conditions and circumstances under which politicians of the Second Republic acceded to power on 1st October 1979 ensured that they would put corrupt enrichment at the very top of their political agenda. Among these conditions and circumstances was the peculiar constitutional order, midwived by the Murtala – Obasanjo regime, and governing such aspects of political life as registration of national political parties and election to various offices at all levels of government. The constitutional provisions governing the formation and registration of political parties and election to public offices on the platform of the registered parties were such that nobody could hope to be elected to any public office without a huge financial outlay, which was often several times larger than the total legitimate payment which a successful candidate could reasonably expect to earn in his or her four-year tenure in office.

Since most members of the Nigerian political elite were not known to be motivated by anything but the crudest business considerations of how to maximize their profit from holding public offices, it became a matter of urgent necessity for them rapidly to recoup the capital outlay on their elections and show a substantial profit on their investment.

The Second Coming of the Military and the Development of Corruption to its Highest Possible Level (1984 – 1999)

The twenty-month Buhari – Idiagbon – Babangida regime which succeeded the second Republic was distinctive by its stem, even harsh response to the twin ills of indiscipline and corruption among the public officers of the Second Republic. Numerous top officials at federal and state levels were confined for almost the whole tenure of the regime without being charged or tried for any offence, while some were tried covertly by special military tribunals and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, including life for crimes ranging from “illegal enrichment” to contributing to the economic hardship of the country”. But the main reason for the loss of steam of the Buhari regime's campaign against corruption and indiscipline was the regime's inability to deal effectively with the problem of economic and social decline inherited from the preceding regime. The regime shot itself in the foot by trying to assert the country's economic and social decline through doctrinaire and anti-people policies like mass retrenchment of workers in the public service, the introduction of many new taxes, levies and fees on citizens, drastic reduction in public expenditure, especially on social welfare and agricultural subsidy and the widespread destruction of the means of livelihood for small privately employed persons like Motor Mechanic, petty traders, food vendors etc. By pulling down their makeshift sheds, kiosk and Bukas in the name of urban environmental Sanitation.

Conclusion

So far, we have been able to delve into the problem of corruption in Nigeria by examining its causes and its various forms as well as its origin in Nigerian society. The negative impacts of the menace in all spheres of our society as well as the fruitless outcome of the battle against the menace continue to generate concerns in our contemporary

society, hence bringing about underdevelopment and persistent suffering in the citizenry in general.

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