

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A MANAGERIAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

The concepts; culture and society are suggested to be combined because all human phenomenons are considered by some sociologists as truly socio-cultural. Corruption is a state of dishonesty especially offering and accepting of bribes. To what extent is corruption a socio-cultural phenomenon. This paper attempts to answer the same. The objective is to establish the socio-cultural content and context of corruption in Nigeria. The paper used secondary data and non participant observation to establish that; some cultures in Nigeria have contributed to the corruptive tendencies of some public officers who do not have the moral restitute to stand in isolation to be counted. And that indulging in corruptive tendencies is a cover to be seen as a 'team player' in many organizations that is, corruption break the religious and ethnic divide and unifies the participants.

Keywords: Corruption, Nigeria, Social, Culture, Society

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a state of dishonesty especially through offering and accepting of bribes. This is however a very narrow definition of corruption. In the 1980's former military president General Ibrahim Badamisi Babangida set up a political Bureau which gave a broad characterization of corruption in Nigeria. The bureau submitted that corruption pervades all state of the society from the highest level of the political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village. Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Hogan 2006). Culture also consists of patterns explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifact, the essential core of culture consists of tradition. Some sociologists have suggested that the concepts culture and society goes together on the grounds that all human phenomenons are truly socio-cultural (Hogan, 2006).

The question that comes to mind is, to what extent is corruption a human phenomenon truly socio-cultural? How much influence do society and culture have over the tendencies to be corrupt? To what extent can we say that corruption is a learned behaviour? These are some of the questions that this paper attempt to address. To achieve this, this paper is divided in to four sections, introduction, theoretical framework, and established cases of corruption, socio-cultural content and context of corruption, conclusion and way forward.

Theoretical Framework,

Theoretical framework of this work is anchored on the Differential Association theory of Edwin H. Sutherland (1883-1950). Sutherland's criminological contributions can be considered the first truly sociological effort to explain crime. The Differential Association theory is based on nine (9) principles. The principle that criminal behaviour is learned provides the basis for differential association. People are not "born to be bad" nor do they invent bad behaviour. They are taught how to behave, or mis behave in a social context (Brain, 1959).

The second and third principles of differential association specify that criminal behaviour is learned primarily with significant others such as parental influence in child rearing illustrate widespread endorsement of these points. Such statement as "Do as I say, not as I do" "if you cannot beat them, join them" provide a learning platform that may eventually lead to criminal behaviour.

The other principles of differential association are well thought out in the theory. However for the purpose of this paper the second and third principles of differential association is emphasized "criminal behaviour is learned primarily in interaction with significant others such as family and friends" and in the case of this paper also colleagues in the work place.

To relate this theory to the study, corruption as a criminal behaviour is a learned behaviour definitely with "significant others". You must be sufficiently associated with corrupt people to learn the art of corruption and sufficiently perfect the art. It is a common saying in public and private places in Nigeria that "if you can't beat them, you join them" meaning if you cannot stop corruption you join those who are corrupt. Joining meaning, learn the art of corruption and perfect it. There are stories of those who have gone into public offices with a hope of effecting a change only to come out more corrupt than those they actually went to change. This suggests that the sojourner in the public office provided a learning environment for corrupt behavior. In this vein, we also look at our socialization process. If a father who's earning is not up to two hundred thousand (N 200,000) Naira in month, gives each of his two children in the university fifty thousand naira (N 50,000) each only as pocket money to go to school in a month and live large at family front certainly above his means. This father who lives above his maybe teaching the children to learn how to live above their means. This process of subtle

socialization may eventually lead to competitive tendencies in the children latter in life. Though the differential association theory has been severally criticized, it has provided an insight into understanding that criminal behavior can be learned in a social context.

Established cases of corruption in Nigeria

The political bureau set up by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1980s provided a broad characterization of corruption in Nigeria. To the bureau, Corruption pervades all state of the society. From the highest level of the political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village. It's multifarious manifestation include the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks; fraud and false falsification of accounts in the public services, examination malpractices in our educational institutions including universities; the taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs for administering justice, and various heinous crimes against the state in business and industrial sectors of our economy, in collaboration with multinational companies such as over-invoicing of goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling. At the village level, corruption manifest it's self in such forms as adulteration of market goods or denting of measures to reduce their contents with a view to giving advantage to the seller (cited in Ogunyemi & Al-Bishak, 2011:4).

Certainly, this is a long list of items and behaviors that can be refer to as corruption in Nigeria. Going through this characterization, two things come out clearly, that corruption is a learned process and that corruption certainly has its roots in our socio-cultural upbringing. Since corruption is traced from the highest to the lowest, from urban to rural, from the educated in a public office to the non-educated in the market selling grains with dented measures, the question is when did this become part of our socio-culture?

As far as Ayoade (2011) is concerned corruption has grown from an art to the point of doctrine. Putting it in historical perspective Ayoade argued that from the first Republic, it has been customary for politicians to surreptitiously canvass for support by pleading that communities should abandon the politics of confrontation and join the mainstream. In the early 1960s the Yorubas were wooed with such bread and butter strategies. Such campaigns proceeded by computing how much the Yoruba lost being in opposition. The implication is a life of ease and sharing of national cake, as it were (Ayoade, 2011:38).

Ayoade (2011) cited other cases of corruption in Obasanjo's regime, which includes the sumptuous self-remuneration by the National Assembly that forced former president Obasanjo to say that it cost N 250 million to maintain a single senator annually. In reaction to Obasanjo's accusation the former Minority leader (Hon. Ali Ndume) said that president Obasanjo lacked the moral right to complain because he is the godfather of corruption. This paints a picture of

corruption in the high places in Nigeria also breaking the ethnic and religious divide. This picture is further painted by Ogbu (2011) in his paper “Political will and war Against corruption” in this paper he discussed how General Obasanjo abrogated the corrupt practices Decree no 38 of 1975 to discontinued General Murtala Mohammed’s anti-corruption programme.

Other cases of corruption in high places are: the former Governor of Kano and former Minister of Defense, Rabiun Musa Kwankwaso’s N 850 million state funds misappropriated, former Minister of education Professor Fabian Osuji, bribing members of the National Assembly with N 55 million, former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun for embezzling over N 14 million belonging to the Nigeria police some other reported that Tafa Balogun embezzled N 13 billion. Whatever the differences in the amount embezzled by Balogun, a case of corruption has been established against him.

Further to this Adegboyega (2011) argued that, a onetime speaker Mrs. Patricia Olubunmi Etteh used N 648 million for the up grading of her official residence which led to her resignation as speaker of the house of representative. Mrs. Etteh is not alone in this train of corruption in high places as her successor Mr. Dimeji Bankole was charged to court for acquiring loans from banks to the tune of N 10 billion and other charges of contract inflation amounting to N 88 million (Fagbenle, 2011)

These are mouth watering amounts embezzled through corrupt practices in high places. There is certainly no one who had held a public office who has not been accused of one corrupt practice or the other. To where do we put the blame? Who should be held responsible for all these failed hope and aspiration? This work certainly looks the direction of our socio-cultural content and context.

The Socio-Cultural Content and Context of corruption in Nigeria

There is something wrong with our conception of the Nigeria society within its content and context. What is today call Nigeria was a plethora of various nationalities (ethnic groups) many which had little previous contacts. With the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba as the majority, Nigeria has over 371 ethnic groups usually called minorities (Alubo 2011).When the country was amalgamated in 1914, the issue of citizenship or sense of belonging within the new geo-political space was not adequately addressed. The extent to which all the component units feel part of the whole, alienated and disenfranchised is one manifestation of this challenge (Alubo 2011).

To a great extent, corruption can be explained within the context and content of these component parts which make up the Nigeria state. It can be reasoned that since these components units do not feel part of the whole, any opportunity at the center is seen as an opportunity for the ethnic group which the man at the center represents. Outside of self aggrandizement and greed which pushes many into corruption, the need to loot as much as

possible to save for the raining days and champion the cause of one's ethnic group seems so plausible to this paper.

Within the content and context of our socio-culture also is the culture of extended family relations. In the agrarian society, the nuclear family is fused into the extended family with uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, half brothers, half-sisters etc all fused together to form one big family. This arrangement was so beautiful within the agrarian economy. But with colonialism, eventual institution of paid employment and capitalist economy this beautiful arrangement is translating into social crisis and inter-alia corruption.

A worker who is on a fixed salary certainly has limit of number of people he can cater for. But here is a worker who probably enjoyed the extended family relation when he was schooling. The Uncles and Aunties, who contributed while in school, will now expect him to pay back as a worker by taking care of an Uncle's son and or an aunt's daughter including his own nuclear family. To be able to survival the worker will look beyond his salary. Most at times these other sources of funding the short fall from his salary end in corrupt practice. So he was pushed by culture and society to keep afloat and maintain the status quo. Closely related to this is the introduction of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in the wake of the economic crisis experienced in the 1980s by most sub-Saharan African countries including Nigeria. SAP introduced a galloping inflation, destroyed local industries, increased the number of unemployed people, with the devaluation of the naira, life became very difficult for most Nigerians on fixed salary as a result of galloping inflation. Hence income augmenting strategies became a viable option including indulgence in corruption, in fact corruption became institutionalized, that even government institutions bribe each other making corruption a culture because societal values were thoroughly eroded and bastardised (Oshiomhole 1996). Culture is here by held responsible for some of the corruption cases in Nigeria. It should be noted that these are not the only reason for corruption in Nigeria. But the paper focused on the socio-cultural factor.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

The paper established corruption as a problem in Nigeria society as it is perpetuated by the low and the mighty in society, the Differential Association theory is used in this paper established the fact that corruption is a learned phenomenon, the paper also emphasized the fact that lack of commitment to the Nigeria nation arising from the nature and manner of the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates which gave undue advantage to three major ethnic (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) groups over and against several others is one of the reason for the citizenship crisis which force people to commit all kinds of crime against the state. The paper also sees the extended family sustained in the agrarian economy as near in practicable in

a colonially induced capitalist economy that preaches individualism. The economic crisis in 1980s that led to the establishment of SAP helped in institutionalizing corruption and erosion of societal values.

As a way forward the paper recommends in a short-term, the need to encourage those who enrich themselves through corrupt practices to invest the loot in Nigeria by establishing industries to grow the economy through employment generation and the rest.

In long term the paper recommends the re-organization of the economy to reflect our socio-cultural context and content certainly capitalism that emphasis individualism does not reflect our society and culture. If the economy is organized along the socio-cultural context and content what we see today as corruption will disappear as there will be no need for ethnic champions who will loot to champion the cause of their ethnic groups. Also it will reduce self-aggrandizement and greed as people's basic need will be minimally met and there will be no absolute poor, who will be looking for "saviours" in those who loot our resources on the "behalf" of their ethnic groups.

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