

## **NIGERIA: THE CHALLENGE OF CORRUPTION.**

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**Abstract:** In Nigeria, corruption is a major challenge. It is undoubtedly responsible for Nigeria's poverty and underdevelopment. Corruption has been part of Nigeria's socio-political and economic process that has continued to grow despite several efforts to bring it in check. Successive governments in Nigeria have failed attempts to mitigate or eradicate corruption through the establishment of anticorruption agencies and legislations. These efforts failed because they were poorly conceived, dishonest, and enmeshed in Nigeria's political culture of greed, absence of the right personnel, and political will to enforce them. Getting the country out of the chokehold of corruption is the most critical first step toward eradicating poverty and stimulating socioeconomic and political renaissance. To mitigate corruption in Nigeria sustainably, radical institutional reforms in the public service sector would make corruption difficult, dangerous, and unattractive. Again, and most importantly, the administration of justice systems should be truly independent and free from political interference.

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**Keywords:** Corruption, Leadership, Legislation, Poverty, Underdevelopment

### **INTRODUCTION.**

Corruption is the greatest impediment to sustainable development in Nigeria, and ostensibly at the root of its socio-political and economic quagmire. Take away corruption, Nigeria would advance beyond the present development challenges due to its abundant natural and human resources. Nigeria has been classified as the 'poverty capital of the world' no thanks to corruption. Thousands of Nigerians have lost their lives in the scorching heat of the Sahara Desert and on the Mediterranean in search of elusive greener pastures in Europe and America, consequent to the multi-dimensional poverty created by corruption.

It has been described by various scholars as the greatest impediment to Nigeria's prosperity and, of course, the most efficient poverty factor (Wrong, 2009). At the inauguration of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2000, President Olusegun Obasanjo stated, "Corruption in all its manifestations is the greatest single impediment to our national aspiration to enter the new millennium with confidence. Corruption check-mates all vision for a morally strong and all vision for economically prosperous society. Indeed, corruption is an anti-thesis of development and progress".

Essentially, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the salient structures that have facilitated it is the only way to create the much-needed economic resurgence in Nigeria. This is the task that this work has set to

accomplish. Most troubling is the fact that abundant scholarly literature on corruption pre-dating Nigeria's independence do exist but has not been helpful in mitigating the challenge that could be attributed to the vitality associated with it and its spectacular mutations in Nigeria's body politics.

Fighting corruption to a large extent is essentially a civic obligation because the consequences are collateral and far reaching. Remarkably, the ICPC Act (2000) recognizes the collective role of citizens in fighting corruption and made elaborate provisions for citizen engagement in the fight to the extent that citizens have the right to report cases of corrupt conduct both in the public and private sectors. In fact, it imposes a lawful responsibility on any citizen who knows any corrupt act to report the matter; failure to do so constitutes an offence against the law.

Charlick (1997) aptly noted that while corruption is manifest in every society, both in democratic and authoritarian regimes, systematic corruption is a deadly sign that a society can no longer effectively manage its resources for public purposes. However, to Achebe (2008), corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal state, and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed. This was his observation in 1983, yet in 2024, 41 years after Nigeria is yet to even understand the dynamics of corruption, least the framework to tackle it in a comprehensive manner. Sadly, considering our present circumstances, one is tempted to unequivocally acquiesce with Achebe's (2008) argument that Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed.

At independence, Nigeria held many promises for the entire black race and was projected to catalyze Africa's socioeconomic and political renaissance. It ranked ahead of countries like Ghana, India, South Korea, Malaysia, and Singapore, among many others that gained independence from Britain within the same historical time bracket in development indices.

For instance, according to the CIA World Fact Book (2019), the 2019 estimated GDP per capita of South Korea was USD 31,431; that of Nigeria was USD 6,055, and equally, the estimated percentage of citizens of South Korea living below the poverty line was mere 14.4%, whereas the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2019) report indicated that an estimated 40% of Nigerian citizens live below the poverty line of an average of \$381.75 per year. This figure is however disputed by the World Poverty Clock, as reported by Sahara Reporters in its news report of June, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, which put the percentage at 46.5% of Nigerians who live below \$1.9 a day.

Some scholars argue that South Korea gained independence almost ten years ahead of Nigeria; however, this argument may be insignificant considering the devastating Korean War that ensued immediately after South Korea's independence. However, by comparing Nigeria and Ghana, which achieved independence within the same time frame, the report is similar. According to the World Bank Report (2016), Nigerians living below the poverty line constitute approximately 33.1% of the population compared to Ghana, which the World Bank commended for having taken remarkable steps to reduce the percentage of its citizens within the poverty bracket to 13.3%.

Again, placing Nigeria side by side with Singapore, which gained independence from Britain in 1965, five clear years after Nigeria, reveals a similar discomfoting disparity in economic progress. The World Bank reports that the GDP Per capita of Singapore in 2018 was USD 64,581.94, whereas Nigeria was USD 2,028.18 during the same period. According to World Fact Book (2019), Singapore ranks distant 78<sup>th</sup> in the list of the world's oil producing countries and Nigeria 10<sup>th</sup> in the same report. It is equally not arguable that Singapore has very few mineral resources compared to Nigeria, which has large deposits of mineral resources. Then the question could be asked why more Nigerians are poor than Singaporeans. The question is provocative and indeed provides an impetus for this work.

Transparency International is of the view that exposing corruption and holding the corrupt to account can only happen if we understand the way corruption works and the system that enables it. This work accepts this view and adds that the depth of analysis of the salient issues in the phenomenon would equally be helpful in deepening the conversation on corruption, elucidating its character, modus operandi, and, of course, the intricacies in its ecosystem, thereby making research and policy formulation easier for any government that is honestly desirous of fighting corruption. It is my understanding that unless the critical elements of the phenomenon of corruption are clearly understood, any effort to fight it is merely academic or symbolic.

Considering that the nature and character of corruption is complex and far reaching, it therefore demands a deliberate and holistic analysis of its ingredients and the intricate web of manifestation in the body politics of Nigeria for any meaningful progress to be made. Numerous scholars and commentators have published several books and articles on corruption in Nigeria. Some even cynically argued that corruption is a cultural issue in Nigeria or part of Nigeria's developmental process that would disappear at some point. This work, therefore, does not stand of its own but contributes to and reviews the existing literature on the patriotic fight against corruption. The work is structured into five sections, each dealing with a major angle to understanding the phenomenon. The first section dealt with theoretical perspectives to understand the different interpretations of the phenomenon by scholars and commentators. The second attempt to trace the history of corruption in Nigeria or elsewhere where the rains started to beat Nigeria. The third explains how corruption has strangulated Nigeria's development process, or what some commentators termed 'arrested development.' The fourth examines the politics of fighting corruption to find out if it is the appropriate manner to deal with it. In the last section, we attempt to suggest certain steps that could help in the fight against corruption.

#### **THE ANATOMY OF CORRUPTION. (THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE)**

According to Wikipedia, anatomy is a branch of biology that is concerned with the study of the structure of organisms and their parts. The term is loosely used in this context to underscore our intention to dig deeper to identify the salient elements that give life to the phenomenon of corruption. The first step toward x-raying the anatomy of corruption is to obtain an acceptable definition of the phenomenon. However, this is difficult given that corruption is an amorphous social phenomenon, and like an amoeba, it can manifest in any shape or form. It could "happen anywhere, involve anyone, happens in shadows and adapts" which to according to Transparency International (TI) in Adogamhe (2001), takes many forms and is a universal cancer. Its nebulosity essentially accounts for the inability of scholars and policymakers to design holistic and sustainable solutions to such problems.

As a universal problem, corruption has elicited diverse concerns. Considerable literature exists in the phenomenon, each trying to understand and explain it from different and diverse perspectives. Therefore, it would be helpful to examine some of these perspectives to expand the frontiers of our understanding of it and to appreciate the depth of its significance in the everyday life of the people. We could even discover in the process of analyzing these perspectives that encapsulated in these diverse perspectives is a consensus of opinions that corruption is a deviant act that significantly comes into conflicts with acceptable norms in civilized societies and as much as in primitive societies.

The World Bank (2016) report defines corruption as the abuse of public trust for private gain. In this case, it specifically considers corruption within the public context. Begovic (2005) considered this definition too narrow, as it negates the quantum of corruption practiced in the private sector. To him, corruption should be holistically

understood as an inappropriate behavior that is antithetical to social, economic, and political progress. Strangely, Begovic (2005) opines that if a senior governmental official simply illegally appropriates a sum of money from the budget without providing any service or favour to anyone that is not corrupt, then he/she has no legal recourse. On the surface, this perspective may seem strange and a source of confusion as it fails to draw a clear boundary between corruption and crime.

Although, this is a rather strange perspective, it has helped to extend the frontiers of our understanding of the different dimensions of corruption and equally added to the complexity of arriving at an acceptable definition of what constitutes corrupt practices and validates the general argument that corruption is difficult to encapsulate.

Corruption is a form of dishonesty or criminal offense undertaken by a person or organization entrusted with a position of authority to acquire illicit benefits or abuse of power for personal gain. Corruption may include many activities, including bribery and embezzlement although it may also involve practices that are legal in some countries. Political corruption occurs when an office holder or other government employee acts in an official capacity for personal gains (Wikipedia. Sourced at 14:27hrs, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2020). Corruption is dishonest behavior among those in positions of power, such as managers and government officials.

Corruption can include giving and accepting bribes or inappropriate gifts, double-dealing, under-the-table transactions, manipulating elections, diverting funds, laundering money and defrauding investors (Chen, J. 2023). Corruption in the governance process could include nepotism or favoritism whereby certain positions of responsibility are given person unqualified because they come from a certain part of the country or that they are filially related to the appointer (Folarin, S. 2021 pp 377-394). In this circumstance, the deliverables on that job are compromised, and society suffers undue losses.

Corruption according to Ofoeze (2004), is any action or inaction of any person, or group deliberately perpetrated to secure advantages for oneself, a relation, associate, associate group(s) in a manner that detracts from the accepted regulations, morals, and/or ethical standard or code and hence constituting a travesty of justice, equity and fair play” or more an orchestrated scheme to bestow undue privilege on oneself or to anyone in any competitive environment or otherwise for that matter taking one advantage of secured position of authority. This can occur in a public or private setting. A corrupt act consists of any act that undermines the appropriate or stipulated process of transacting, particularly government business, leading to the loss of funds or time for government. Corruption is hydra-headed and can occur in any sector and in any form so long as it is perceived as an abhorrent behaviour. It could occur in the media, in sports, in the judiciary, in medical practice, examinations, and in fact anywhere.

There are also associated activities that lend strength to corruption, and these could be categorized as the ingredients of corruption, which include and are not limited to the mundane issue of age falsification but equally hypocrisy, tyranny, violence against men or property and, of course, blackmail, bribery, and hiding of information among several others. This definition shifts the perception of corruption from simply receiving cash or payoffs, as noted by TI, to focusing also on those who make such payments to secure benefits for themselves and their companies.

Akanbi (2004) was more elaborate in his description of what constitutes corruption to include; the use of pecuniary advantage, gratification, influence peddling, insincerity in advice with the view to gaining advantage, less than full day’s work for full day pay, tardiness and laziness, and failure to report cases of inducement to” appropriate authorities.

Eigen (2000) argued that corruption is a universal cancer. As good and simplistic as this definition could be, it still does not obviate the fact that some actions that may be considered corrupt practices in one society may not

constitute corrupt acts in another. In this case, one may be constrained to argue that although corruption is a universal problem, it is culturally particularistic. This consideration makes it even more difficult for a universal definition or policy on corruption to be contemplated, rather states or societies could develop a definition and policy frameworks that address their corruption peculiarities. These are some perspectives.

Developing a broad definition of corruption has not been successful, even as scholars have appealed for a legal definition that, according to Arora (1993), would not resolve the difficulty. He argued that to give a legal definition would consider main ingredients which include “that a gift or consideration was given, or offered by one party to another party; that the gift or consideration was given, or received, as an inducement rendered in relation to official duties and that the transaction took place corruptly... it is the third component – the question of intent and meaning associated with acting ‘corruptly’ – which poses the most difficulty thus, despite the availability of a legal definition, it remains the case that corruption, by its very nature, is both a normative and relative phenomenon.

Even if we successfully develop a seemingly broad definition of corruption that captures all the ethical, legalistic, or cultural elements that may be considered or invented for the purpose of strengthening its scope, does that resolve the issue of universal applicability? The answer is no because the problem of broad definition will persist.

In Nigeria, according to Amujiri (2002), corruption has become a household word in the minds of an average Nigerian because of its endless and constant mutations in any government in Nigeria. It has become so permissive and enduring or a culture within Nigerian body politics that Amujiri in Awosika (2017) described it as a living stone that lives for ages.

Considering what we know and what scholars and commentators have written about corruption in Nigeria, the contextual definition becomes much easier. In one breath, it could be described as the culture of Nigeria that has not only defined the operations of the Nigerian state but has also been responsible for her underdevelopment and intensified her insecurity. This culture is well tolerated, enduring, aspired to, celebrated, and encouraged by state institutions. The institutions and processes created to tackle the menace have been unsuccessful because the institutions themselves are simply smokescreens or masks the deceptive tendencies of the Nigerian State to deceive its bewildered citizens and international community who appear to be overwhelmed by its level of tolerance.

As a seemingly cultural issue, it is deeply rooted in our values as Nigerians and, of course, in every turn of our national life as a people, both in the public and in the private sector, and even as a level of our homes. In this context therefore, Okeke (2002) description of corruption as bribe, fraud, embezzlement, kickback etc, is rather too narrow as it failed to state that nepotism, disregard to due process to get undue advantage, delayed payment of workers’ salaries, election rigging, contract inflation, under declaration at customs, use of government facilities without paying etc, are all forms of corruption. NITEL and NEPA, Nigerian Airways were some notable government-owned enterprises that failed because the elites that used their services refused to pay for such services, which plunged the companies into humongous debts and eventually their insolvency and death.

In Nigeria, corruption could therefore be aptly defined as deviant conduct within the public and private sectors by individuals and corporate bodies that has hindered the socio-economic and political growth of the State but instead promoted or advanced individual or corporate interest at the detriment of the state. Although all the other definitions espoused in this work are correct, however this definition appears more far-reaching and fits squarely into the context of this work.

Further, to avoid the problem of a universal definition of corruption, societies should be encouraged to isolate and test the frequency and impact of certain deviant elements that constitute impediments in their economic and socio-political processes. The consolidation of these elements would constitute the needed insights to understand and develop a unique, contextual, and practicable definition and policy framework that is particular to the state that works for her. By doing so, we would have successfully sidetracked or eliminated the dominant impediment or excuses for our failures. Scholars should spend more time understanding the social complexities and dynamics of their societies than dissipating energies arguing about a universal definition of corruption that is elusive.

### **HISTORY OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

Tracing the history of corruption in Nigeria is a difficult task. The pre-colonial Nigerian societies could not have existed without some form of corruption of a primitive nature, but attempts by the West to wrongly pin corruption as part of African culture are essentially in denial of their complicity in the sophistication of the phenomenon in Africa. In an article titled “Chronology of Corruption in Nigeria, (Okafor, 2017) quoted colonial authorities as arrogantly positing that Africa’s background and outlook on public morality is different from the present Briton, which he considered as a ludicrous attempt to mask the evils of colonialism in Africa and its hangovers. Accepted that corruption of a primitive nature may have existed in the prehistoric Nigerian societies prior to colonialism, but essentially the ascendancy of corruption to a social malaise became manifest with colonial adventurism. In reality, according to Achebe (1958) “the White man has put knife in the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”.

Corruption in Nigeria is therefore strongly believed to be a colonial legacy that has continued to be encouraged by the West while living in denial of their complicity. To buttress this argument further, a question could be asked: where are the most stolen funds deposited? The answer to this question is unambiguous, as captured in The Cable (26 May, 2021), that a total of \$3.624 billion of the Sani Abacha loot was returned to Nigeria between 1998 and 2020, of course warehoused in Western banks.

The conception and delivery of the Nigerian State is fraught with corruption, or what is described by pre-independence scholars as a structure for the facilitation of capitalist interests and not for a genuine intention of building a prosperous postcolonial nation-state. That colonialism as abhorrently projected by the Europeans as a “civilizing mission” has now been well defined for what it was, simply as that quest for empire expansion, domination, and exploitation of the indigenous peoples.

The formation of the colonial state in 1900 was directly related to the competition in West Africa between mainly British, German and French mercantile capital (Ekekwe E, 1986), and mercantile interest reflected in every segment of colonial structure, nothing was spared including missionary activities. Achebe (1958) captured the craftiness of European missionaries rather dramatically where he posited that, “the white man is very clever, he came quietly and peacefully with his religion we were amused by his foolishness and allowed him stay”.

Therefore, the penetration of capitalist ideology into pre-colonial Nigeria and the manipulation of its social structure for capitalist interest laid the foundation for the culture of corruption or put mildly the perception of the Nigerian state overtime as a mere structure for the facilitation of personal material well-being of any opportune person. So, from the beginning, there was not any patriotic attachment to the Nigerian state; rather, the state existed as a structure for the promotion and facilitation of selfish economic interest of a few, first to the colonist and later to the Nigerian political class.

Recent events have clearly demonstrated that pre-independence leaders could not be eloquently described as patriotic. These political leaders according Ekekwe (1986), perceived “access to and /or control of state

apparatuses or institutions *as* vital for this class in consolidating its dominance and as its members seek opportunities for personal wealth or accumulation of capital”.

Although Ekekwe (1986) was particularly making reference to the agitation for state creation, which he agreed with Nzimiro (1977) and Nnoli (1978) as best understood as class phenomenon, his argument about control of the apparatuses of state for promotion of selfish economic interest of the political elites is still relevant when discussing the pre-independence political elites in Nigeria. Essentially, all those agitations for independence were all smokescreens to mask the desperation of the political class to wrestle political and economic power from the colonial authorities for themselves. This is undoubtedly true, considering the number of commissions of inquiry into several corrupt practices by political elites before independence. According to Ekekwe (1986), this shows better the economic nature of the political struggles in Nigeria, and, of course, the institutionalization of political corruption as a tool for primitive material accumulation and consumption.

There was so much hope when President Olusegun Obsanjo assumed leadership of Nigeria again on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999. The president nevertheless demonstrated that he was prepared to fight corruption, which he rightly perceived as at the root of Nigeria’s underdevelopment. It took his government just sixteen months to sign into law and equally inaugurated the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offenses Commission, which took place on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 and was followed up for less than three years with the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission on April, 13<sup>th</sup> 2003. The two countries have the mandate to investigate and prosecute economic and financial crimes, particularly in the public and private sector.

Okonjo-Iweala (2018), while exposing the monumental fraud in the fuel –subsidy debacle, narrated that the Presidential Committee found subsidy claims for shipments by “ghost vessels” that never supplied any products and for shipments by vessels that were in China and the South Pacific at the times it was claimed they were transshipping off the coast of Cotonu, Benin. These were verified by the Lloyd’s Register, which tracks the movements of ships around the world. She further stated that there were subsidy claims for which there were no shipping documents or evidence of payments for the products in foreign exchange. According to her various overpayments, wrongful claims and breaches of the Petroleum Subsidy Fund guidelines were also detected. The Presidential Committee found that of the N1.3 trillion (\$8.4 Billion) verified, N382 billion (\$2.5 Billion) was fraudulent or questionable and should be recovered from the 107 oil marketing companies whose activities were verified.

Okonjo- Iweala’s narrative was collaborated by Nigeria’s former Governor of Bauchi State, Mr. Isa Yuguda, during a television interview on Channels TV on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, where he stated that as the Chairman of a sub-committee on subsidy between 2008 and 2009, under the economic meltdown, that his committee came across where subsidy claimed on pipelines that never existed...those who claim to pump the products and those that are in the subsidy scam , they just fill papers, invoices and they claim subsidy on it. He also emphasized that Nigeria’s oil behemoth, the NNPC, was deeply involved in the scam.

As a hydra-headed phenomenon, this material case was celebrated and raised tremendous optimism that the culprits would be punished. The Nigerian House of Representatives, headed by Hon. Aminu Tambuwal, was vociferous in his condemnation of the monumental corruption associated with the fuel subsidy regime and subsequently inaugurated a House Adhoc Committee to investigate the scandal. The Committee was headed by one person who claimed to be in the forefront of the fight against corruption and prided himself as the leader of the Integrity Group in the House of Representatives, Hon. Faruck Lawan. The Committee actually invited the

concerned oil marketing companies and scanned volumes of documents. Nigerians waited for the report, but what they got was that the “thief catcher” had been caught on camera stuffing thousands of dollars under his cap from one of the investigated oil marketers. Nigerians were flabbergasted and sadly this tainted the report of the Committee and made it inadmissible. Hon. Lawan was released from prison on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 after serving his five-year term for receiving \$500,000 bribes in the fuel subsidy scandal.

### **CORRUPTION IN COLONIAL NIGERIA.**

Corruption existed in colonial Nigeria. There were several commissions of inquiry set up by the colonial administration to investigate several cases of corruption among the colonial political elites.

According to reports, in 1956, the Foster-Sutton Commission investigated the Premier of the Eastern Region, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, for his involvement in the affairs of the African Continental Bank (ACB). Enyia (2019) noted that the commission discovered that besides not completely relinquishing his interest in the bank as required by law as a public officer, much of the paid-up capital of the bank were from the Eastern Regional Financial Corporation. The report further noted that a loan of over 163,000 Pounds was loaned by the bank to Zik Group of Companies at the lowest interest rate and which he used his influence to facilitate.

In 1962, the Coker Commission found Chief Obafemi Awolowo guilty of corruption. As revealed by Okafor (2017), in 1954, the Western Region Marketing Board held 6.2 million pounds. It had to exist on overdrafts amounting to over 2.5 million pounds by May 1962. A loan of 6.7 million pounds was made to National Investment and Properties Co. Ltd. for building projects, out of which only 500 pounds were ever repaid. The Coker Commission found that Awolowo was responsible for all problems with the Western Region Marketing Board. The Commission sadly noted that Awolowo has failed to adhere to the standards of conduct required for persons holding such a post.

In Northern Nigeria, the case was not different. Omorogiuwa P. in Ekekwe (1986) noted that a loan of 30,000 pounds was made to Waziri of Bornu in 1964, which was ostensibly for mechanized farming and related activities, but it was issued without detailed estimates or appraisal in the same month in which the application was submitted. Again, a 55,000-pound loan was granted to a well-known Northern businessman, Alhaji Mahmud Dantata, in the same month in which the application was received and not applied to the purpose for which it was granted.

These incidences of graft at the highest political levels in the immediate postcolonial Nigeria point to what Ekekwe (1986) posited that corruption is not an issue of ethics or morality; it should be seen instead as one of the technical terms for capitalist accumulation. He further concluded that corruption is part of the values, attitudes, skills, and orientation that are at play for the maintenance of the system. One may disagree with Ekekwe at this point because he appears to have accepted corruption as being functional to the system without indicating that it encapsulates in itself the seeds that destroy the very system it seeks to maintain.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

According to the UNDP, corruption undermines human development. It diverts public resources from providing essential services *to wasteful indulgences*. This condition increases inequality and hinders national and local economic development by distorting goods and services markets. This corrodes the rule of law and destroys public trust in governments and leaders.

At the Retreat for Chief Executives and Chairpersons of Boards of Parastatals on 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2000, President Obasanjo regretted the socio-economic consequences of corruption in Nigeria, where he noted, “Twenty-one years ago, the Nigerian National Shipping Line had 25 ships, nineteen of which had been newly acquired by the outgoing military administration- today there is no Nigerian National Shipping Line, let alone a ship. Nigerian



Airways, which in 1979 had a fleet of over 30 aircraft, today does not have a plane that serves any of its routes. The National Electricity Power Authority, which had installed a capacity of over 5,000 megawatts, by May 1999 was unable to generate more than 1,500 megawatts, and four refineries, which had a combined capacity to meet and exceed our domestic consumption, by May 1999 had become so run down that none of them could operate” According to UNDP reports, the financial and economic costs of corruption are enormous: US\$1 trillion are paid in bribes per year and US\$2.6 trillion stolen through corruption. Together, this sum represents five (5) percent of annual global GDP. (The World Bank Institute, 2021), globally and there were US\$1.8 trillion in illicit financial flows from Africa between 1970 and 2008 (Global Financial Integrity, 2010). These facts are not contradictory and indeed represent the ugly side of institutional corruption in Africa. The consequences of corruption in Nigeria are huge. According to the World Bank’s 2023 country overview, 38.9%, with 87 million people in Nigeria, are living below the poverty line.

Akinwunmi Adesina, a Nigerian and the current President of the African Development Bank at the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary of Nigeria’s former Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, acquiesced with the WB view, where he observed, “Nigeria has gas and crude oil in abundance, yet 86 million Nigerian people live daily without electricity. Today Nigeria is the number one country in the world in terms of the total number of people without electricity” According to him, the IMF estimated that Nigeria loses about \$29 billion annually, or 5.6% of its GDP, due to a lack of reliable power supply. He saw this as a consequence of corruption in Nigeria.

Curiously, Punch Newspaper (July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024) reported that Nigeria’s anti-corruption agency had arrested Nigeria’s former Minister of Power Saleh Mamman by stealing the sum N33.8 billion released by the Nigerian government for Mambilla and Zengeru Power Plant Projects to boost power supply in Nigeria. Notably, many critical multinationals have existed in Nigeria due to the energy challenges causing job losses, which have added to the misery of Nigerians. This is the case in all sectors in Nigeria, including construction and public works.

### **POLITICS OF FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

Fighting Corruption in Nigeria is dangerous, according to Okonjo-Iweala (2018). Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was Nigeria’s Minister of Finance twice. Her team worked so hard to exit Nigeria from the Paris Club indebtedness that fettered Nigeria’s economic growth, and it is to her credit that several landmark economic reforms were put in place that saw Nigeria emerging as the third fastest growing economy in Africa in 2014. Her appointment by President Goodluck Jonathan as Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister of the Economy was not acceptable to certain entrenched interests because her firm remained on due process.

On December 9, 2012, her aged mother was kidnaped in what ostensibly was to put pressure on her to resign. She recounted in Okonjo-Iweala (2018) “your daughter refused to pay oil marketers... the agreement reached at the meeting was how to inflict maximum physical damage on me just short of killing me”. Okonjo-Iweala experiences illustrate the complexity of fighting corruption in Nigeria is a complex fight because of the complex web of lethal entrenched interests.

A new concept has emerged from this confusion and helps scholars to actually isolate the government’s actual intentions in engaging in anticorruption wars. In this process, scholars will be better positioned to evaluate the successes or failures of each administration’s handling of corruption. This is the concept of “politics of fighting corruption”.

The argument therefore, as noted by Okafor (2017) in his article “Corruption in Nigeria: a historical Perspective (1947-2002), that a historical look at corruption in Nigeria demonstrates a pattern of rhetoric against corruption; panels; commissions of inquiry; legislations or institutions which have not helped to end corruption. Nigeria since

independence has experimented with various laws and decrees to tackle the monster on corruption, which have altogether been unsuccessful. In 1956, Okafor (2017) stated that the Foster-Sutton Tribunal Investigated the Premier of the Eastern Region, Nnamdi Azikiwe, for his involvement in the Affairs of African Continental Bank (ACB), and he was found guilty of financial malfeasance and asked to resign. Instead of resigning, he called for election and was re-elected by the people, thereby putting an official seal on the corruption culture. In 1962, the Coker Commission found Chief Obafemi Awolowo guilty of corruption in the management of the Western Region Marketing Board, where large loans were secured by Chief Awolowo and were never repaid. In the words of the Coker Commission “Chief Awolowo without doubt has failed to adhere to the standards of conduct which required for persons holding such a post” Okafor E, (2017). In spite of this, Chief Awolowo still enjoyed the support of his people.

The military regimes of Ironsi, Gowon, and Muritala also established several anticorruption commissions of inquiry. There were commissions of inquiry into alleged corruption in the operations of the Nigerian Railways Corporation, the Electric Corporation of Nigeria, the Nigerian Airways, and the Nigerian Ports Authority. The Belgore inquiry on the cement armada was conducted. The reports indicted several Ministers and top government functionaries. What happened to those indicted in the reports remains a significant question.

In 1999, when Chief Olusegun Obsanjo came into power, Nigeria’s corruption index was one of the topmost in the world, no thanks to the previous regimes that allegedly elevated corruption to a national identity. Within the first four years of his administration, he established structures and institutions to fight corruption. To underscore the priority of his administration, the ICPC bill was the first Executive Bill presented to the National Assembly by the then president. The bill was presented less than three weeks into the life of the administration, specifically in June 1999, and came into effect of 13<sup>th</sup> June 2000. While the Commission was inaugurated on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 and two years later, he established the EFCC precisely on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2003. The vision was applauded, but reports on their activities have not justified their existence; instead, they are entrapped in the same malfeasance. Given the character of Nigerian politics, a democratically elected government cannot effectively fight corruption because political participation in Nigeria is less about public service but more about expectations of material patronage. It is therefore doubtful whether patronage could be dispensed without corruption. Where corruption oil politics, then the state’s moral capacity to fight it is weakened by the simple reason of the process of its emergence, Ake C, (1996), who stated that “is a dilemma”.

In 2015, Muhamadu Buhari, largely perceived among his supporters as a beacon of integrity, was elected President. Characteristically, he campaigned and was elected primarily on his promise to fight corruption, but sadly, his actions immediately he assumed office belie public expectations. He went only against those perceived as political enemies, particularly with regard to the \$2 billion arms purchase funds he alleged was misapplied under Gen. Sabo Dasuki, who was the National Security Adviser during the Jonathan administration. Curiously, certain elements involved in the arms purchase deal sat on the panel set up to review the purchase, and of particular interest was the presence of Gen. Dambazzu as a member of the panel. Also, a DSS report according to (Thisday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2018) revealed that some adhoc members brought in by the NSA to serve on the Committee were later found to be involved in some shady deals, and one was fingered as the head of the members involved in extorting money from suspects under investigation to give them soft landing.

Sadly, and of course, the panel report was never made public because the intention of the panel was perceived as a witch hunt. It was therefore clear that the anticorruption promise of the Buhari administration was a hoax and followed a similar pattern to previous administrations of deliberate deceit and compromise. Several corruption

scandals were uncovered under the administration, and all vision for a morally strong and nothing came out of them because everything was handled in a partisan manner.

The failure of the Buhari administration to fight corruption became manifest when the very critical department of the state for fighting corruption was perceived as being a haven of corruption, given the various allegations of official malfeasance in the Judiciary. The ICPC report specifically indicted the judiciary noting that the “overall justice sector had the highest level of corruption with a score of 63”. It further reported that “the level of corruption in the justice sector was heightened by stupendously high amounts of money offered as bribes to judges by lawyers handling high electoral and other political cases... which the report claimed was about N9.458 billion between 2018-2020 (The Guardian, 26 January, 2021). This is why several highly vexatious election judgments are common in Nigeria. In one typical case, the Nigeria’s Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in one of the election tribunal judgments questioned the rationale for the nullification of the election of Hon. Ikenga Ugochinyere , an activist and one of its candidates in the election and in a release noted that the judgment was “ a setback to our nation’s judiciary and as well rejects in totality these laughable exercise of crudity” (Blueprint, 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2023) and the candidate went further to allege on national television that the judges were compromised with the sum of \$3 million. This allegation was never denied.

Moreover, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Nigeria, Abubakar Malami, faced several allegations of compromise in many anticorruption matters. For instance, a House of Representative panel, according to The Cable (May 26, 2021), raised the alarm over discrepancies in the records of recovered assets presented by various government agencies. The AG specifically demanded explanations from the AG “to the payment of N2 billion received for the prosecution of terrorism suspects; was it supposed to come from recovered funds account” Expectedly, Malami “denied making specific requests from the recovered loot, although he did not deny receiving the said N2 billion from the CBN”. The AG was equally reportedly queried by the panel to come clean on the status of recovered assets, where the “the EFCC said they handed over this number of vessels to your (AG) office, the Navy gives a different number and you have a different number — the same items, different inventories, different figures”. The Attorney General may have explained his involvement, but to associate the Attorney General of the state with this scandal belies the expectations of his office in the fight against corruption.

Again, The Cable (February 5th, 2019) “raised the alarm on the duplication of legal fees in the recovery of \$321 million from Switzerland. The federal government engaged Enrico Monfrini, a Swiss lawyer, in 1999 to help trace, identify, freeze, and recover all looted funds traced to Sani Abacha, Nigeria’s former military ruler. After seven years of work, including investigations and litigation across various countries, Monfrini had traced and recovered \$321 million from Luxemburg banks, for which they received \$12 million. The funds were domiciled with Switzerland’s government in 2014, pending a final request for transfers from Nigeria. However, Malami, rather than writing directly to the Swiss authorities to seek the transfer of funds to Nigeria, engaged Okpeseyi and Adebayo for that purpose for which they were paid \$15 million as “professional fees”. President Buhari did not take any action to address this issue, which validated speculations among Nigerians that his body language was permissive of corruption among his appointees in the spirit of ‘it is our turn to eat.’” Malami was also remarked on alleged dubious ALGON/Paris Club consultancy contract payments to certain persons despite objections from state governors. Sahara Reporters (10th August 2022) raised the alarm that the “total sum of \$418 million promissory note suggested by Malami to be paid is just a tip of the iceberg of what is coming unless he is stopped” which the paper lamented amounted to “massive stealing”.

These were clear cases suggestive of systemic corruption in Nigeria that makes the fight against corruption beyond legislation and institutions but more of the character of personnel saddled with the responsibility of fighting the menace in addition to the political will of the political leadership. Had President Buhari taken the liberty offered by the exposé to set up an honest inquest and ensured that if AG was found culpable and relieved of his position, it would have sent a strong signal that his administration was not permissible to any form of corruption. His weaknesses, particularly nepotistic indulgences and naivety, were significantly exploited by his subordinates to engage in massive corruption, which saw Nigeria's "domestic debt rose from N8.84 trillion as at December, 2015 to N44.91 at June, 2023, while international debt rose from \$7.35 billion in December 2015 to \$37.2 billion in June, 2023" (Debt Management Office, 2023).

Notably, there was no significant improvement in the quality of life of Nigerians to justify the humongous debt. The National Security Adviser (NSA) of the Tinubu administration had lamented that it was "important for Nigerians to know that we (Tinubu) inherited a very difficult situation, literally a bankrupt country, no money, to the point that we can say that all the money were are getting now, we are paying back what was taken, it is serious" (Punch, Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023). One issue stands out in his statement, which is "what was taken". The term taken literally means what was stolen or what cannot be accounted for, which places a moral burden on an administration that won election on the promise of fighting corruption.

Despite the weaknesses in the effectiveness of anticorruption agencies, the National Assembly in 2017 passed the Whistle Blowers Act 2017. While passing the Whistle Blowers Protection Bill, Sen. Bukola Saraki remarked that it was a landmark piece of legislation to fight corruption and protect patriotic Nigerians fighting corruption... the bill will also protect the lives of those who risk themselves to expose corrupt practices"

The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), another anticorruption structure, came into effect in 2018. The Explanatory memorandum of the Act states NFIU "as a central body in Nigeria responsible for requesting, receiving, analyzing and disseminating financial intelligence reports and other information to all law enforcement, security and intelligent agencies and other relevant authorities". The database serves as a repository of financial information for the purposes of investigation by security agencies. The establishment of the NFIU as a separate unit from the EFCC was prompted by pressure from the Egmont Group, an international anti-corruption body consisting of Financial Intelligence Units of the countries for which Nigeria is signatory to its charter. It was criticized as an unnecessary duplication of efforts, as both the EFCC and ICPC and even the police have the power to carry out investigations on financial transactions.

In this context, it could be argued that it is not sufficient to establish anticorruption institutions, which is evident, but the political will is all that is needed to tackle the problem of corruption not only in Nigeria but globally, in which case the leadership should be overtly committed, forthright, and incorruptible. However, what is strange in Nigeria is the pretentiousness of political leadership in fighting corruption, which can be likened euphemistically to "see no evil hear no evil" on the part of political leadership at the zenith.

The cynicism of Nigerians about the anticorruption war could be perceived by their reactions to each new anticorruption bill passed. To Nigerians, there are enough laws to deal with the monster; the duplication of agencies and laws was simply playing to the gallery. Nigerians no longer believe there could be any deterrence to fighting the monster other than the unbiased and resolute political will of the leadership to take right decisions and do the right things on the strength of the available laws other than seeking new ones.

Historically, many concerns have followed the effectiveness of the anticorruption agencies of government, particularly the EFCC, which have equally faced panels of inquiry on impropriety. The Justice Ayo Salami panel

that investigated the EFCC's management of recovered assets made shocking revelations. Punch (July 13, 2020) reported that the EFCC stated 836 as the number of recovered properties in the original returns it made to the President on July 4, 2017...However, in its first returns to PCARA on December 13, 2017, the EFCC short changed the system and gave the figure of 339 thereby failing to account for 497 properties" and condemned the EFCC for "lack of internal control mechanisms/systems within the EFCC and the lack of adequate returns by the EFCC departments and zonal offices as reasons for these discrepancies and inconsistencies by the commission. It also alleged that the suspended EFCC boss neglected or refused to comply with the Regulations on the Management of Recovered Assets, 2019 as he embarked on disposing of some of the properties without regard to extant law. The Directorate of State Security (DSS) alluded to the position of the Salami Panel in its report to the Senate against the confirmation of Ibrahim Magu as the Chairman of EFCC, stating that Magu was unworthy of the office for which he was nominated by the President (Thisday April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018). This explains the cynicism of Nigerians over political leadership pontification of fighting sleaze, whereas the very institutions for fighting the monster could not be perceived as being above board.

There is a seeming consensus among ordinary Nigerians that, going by the nature and character of corruption in Nigeria, it is almost unlikely that a democratically elected government can effectively drive a concerted war against corruption. This argument arises from the fact that in Nigeria, political participation is not about yielding oneself to public service but rather about veiled expectations of material patronage. This is why the expectations of the masses from the political class are greater than service. An Honourable Member of the House of Representatives, Hon. Lado Suleja representing Suleja, Tafa and Gurara Federal Constituency was reported to have shared N50 million with his supporters according to Peoples Gazette, (<https://www.gazettengr.com>). To the constituents, that was their dividends of democracy, and no one of them cared to ask questions how the Honorable Member happened such huge funds. This unholy marriage between politics and corruption in Nigeria has made the fight for corruption a rather daunting task. There is a joke in Nigeria that those waiting for an opportunity to eat and more than those already at the dining table. This is so because there are no institutional safeguards against corruption or judicial consequences.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD.**

This work has sought to elucidate and bring to the fore the history of corruption as eminently articulated by scholars over the past. The case studies of corruption in Nigeria cannot be objectively exhaustive, and sieving or categorizing them could be a challenging exercise because of their complexity and mutations. We discovered in the course of this research that the phenomenon has taken very firm roots in Nigeria's body politics prior to independence, to which it has seemly become a norm and largely perceived by society not as a deviant behavior rather essentially a deviance to refuse to be corrupted.

Equally interesting is the fact that studies have shown that Nigerian society is fully not unaware of the consequences of corruption and the delicate state it has positioned the Nigerian state, particularly as a "poverty capital of the world" and yet believes "Nigeria is slightly indisposed". Again, we also discovered that every government in Nigeria since independence did establish one form of anticorruption legislation, decree, or institution to bring the menace under control, but at each time they failed.

Available evidence has shown that Nigeria has sufficient anticorruption legislation and institutions to eliminate corruption. The reason they failed is what many scholars have suggested could be the unavailability of political will to fight the menace, not due to the lack of laws or institutions. Some fatalists have even opined that the phenomenon is essentially or radically cancerous, and they are eating up the institutions themselves, thereby making the case a hopeless one.

Ilorah (2009) alluded to the generally held opinion that corruption is both a hydra-headed phenomenon and a complex phenomenon; but that does not vitiate the fact that a solution must be found urgently before the Nigerian state is suffocated by the combination of multi-dimensional poverty and insecurity. Although “fighting corruption is dangerous” still does not equally suggest that Nigeria should resign and put the generations of the Nigerian state in perpetual poverty.

The former British Ambassador to Kenya, Edward Clay, had remarked after his frustrations with corruption in Kenya that “we never expected corruption to be vanished overnight... but those in government were now eating like gluttons out of a combination of arrogance, greed and panic” and sarcastically queried if “they hardly expect us not care when their gluttony causes them to vomit all over our shoes” in Wrong (2010). This is the tragedy of a situation where systemic corruption has become a norm, celebrated, and craved for at all levels with impunity. The way forward is not by rhetoric or sloganeering but by a combination of the political will of the political leadership to do a public good, irrespective of whose ox is gored. This must start with a public service and political leadership recruitment process that combines the elemental requirement of merits above nepotism and other extraneous considerations. The political process must equally return power to the people in which they can truly choose political leadership and hold them accountable. In addition, institutions of the state that fight the scourge should be allowed to do their jobs without being manacled by the political leadership. If the above were taken into consideration, then Nigeria would have taken the first positive step toward tackling the menace and setting the country on the part of development.

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