

# Nationalities, Identities and Terrorism

## The Nigerian Experience



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*Published by*

**JOHN ARCHERS** (Publishers) Ltd.  
40 Ojerinde Quarters, Jiboye, Apata  
GPO Box 339, Dugbe, Ibadan

© 0803 4476 916, 0805 833 6156

e-mail: johnarchers@yahoo.co.uk  
archers\_books@hotmail.com

[www.johnarchers.org.ng](http://www.johnarchers.org.ng)

*in collaboration with*

**Society for Peace Studies and Practice Oyo State**

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First published 2013

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ISBN 978-978-52024-8-9

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# 18 Mainstreaming Culture Into Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Campaign

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## **Introduction**

Corruption has been identified as one of the factors militating against the development of Nigeria. A few years back, Nigeria was ranked by Transparency International as the second most corrupt country in the world. In 2006, when the country ranked 26th in the World Corruption Index, it was felt that, at last Nigeria was beginning to record successes towards curtailing the menace of corruption and that the international community was beginning to see to her in that light. Perhaps, the improved ranking was in recognition of institutions and agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) that were put in place to check corruption. These notwithstanding, it is clear that corruption is not only endemic but also pervasive in Nigeria. Such is the pervasiveness of corruption that it could be boldly asserted that there is no segment of the Nigerian society that is free from it.

Though institutions such as EFCC and ICPC have been established, yet policemen and women openly extort money from transporters on Nigeria's highways. In some cases, parents are made to "buy" admissions for their children and wards into public schools – both secondary and

tertiary institutions. There have been cases of judges compromising their highly exalted positions by accepting gratification in order to pervert the course of justice. The bribe for budget scandals which at various times rocked the National Assembly and involved the Ministries of Education and Health is a clear pointer that both the legislative and executive arms of government are not only into corruption but also partners in it. The Press, the watchdog of the society and the fourth estate of the realm is by no means free from corruption. For instance, to get fair and favourable media coverage, "brown envelopes" as gratification in monetary terms have to be given to journalists. Government parastatals and agencies now include it in their budgets for public events and tag it "press public relations". The Customs and Immigration Services are alleged to be neck deep in corruption. So far, we have viewed corruption as if it is bribery and the acceptance of undue gratification alone. It goes far beyond it as will be shown in subsequent parts of this paper. This paper is structured into eight parts as shown below. Part one is the introduction and it addresses the general nature of corruption in Nigeria. The second part is an attempt to answer the question, "What is corruption?" It also focuses on the many facets of corruption in Nigeria and the third part puts corruption in an historical perspective. Parts four and five interrogate corruption in the political class and in the military respectively. The cost and consequences of corruption constitute the sixth part, while part seven brings to the fore how culture could be used to curb corruption. The eight and last part is the conclusion and suggestions on the ways forward.

### **What is Corruption?**

Corruption has been defined in various ways by different people. Khan (1996:2) sees corruption "as an act which deviates from formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private – regarding – motive such as wealth, power or status". He continues that "corruption is the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity" (Khan, 1996:2). However, Lawal (2007:1), offers a concise, yet insightful definition of corruption as a "conscious attempt or deliberate diversion of resources from satisfaction of the general interest to that of self (personal) interest" (p. 3).

From the two definitions, it follows that the university lecturer who demands favour for the award of marks to a student is involved in a case of corruption. Even the primary school teacher or any civil or public servant who uses official time for the enhancement of self-interest is also into a form of corruption. The list is actually endless. Though instances have reduced, but time was when teachers in tertiary institutions exploited their students through the sale of handouts. In the hospitals and in both private and public sector establishments, the story indicates that corruption is everywhere. The worrisome questions: Why is corruption so common in Nigeria? Are there sets of norms and values in Nigeria which support corruption? With these, it is important to put the discussion in an historical perspective.

### **Corruption: Historical Perspective**

One of the consequences of colonialism was the incorporation of the Nigerian economy into the global economic system. Another was the monetisation of the economy by which human labour was paid for in monetary terms as wages. With colonialism, Nigerians were employed into the colonial civil service and were paid wages which were not commensurate with their efforts or with what their expatriate counterparts were paid. Nigerians were also witnesses to the fact that the profits which accrued from their labour were appropriated by the colonial master and transferred to their home country. This state of alienation under colonialism encourages Nigerians to cheat the government when and wherever possible. The belief was that, afterall, it was "their" government and not "ours" Therefore, the relationship between the Nigerian workers and the colonial masters was not just a master-servant relationship, it was characterised by exploitation. For instance, while the Whites lived in the splendor of the Government Reserved Areas (GRA), the Nigerian workers lived in shanties and in squalor.

Unfortunately, it would have been expected that the demise of colonialism would have marked the end of corruption. That was, however, not to be. Instead, it became aggravated. The Nigerian elites who fought and won independence for Nigeria and inherited the colonial civil service did nothing to change the status quo. Rather, they also inherited the high wages that were earned by the whites, including their



sundry allowances such as allowances for dogs, which most of them never owned. As a result, Nigerian workers continued to feel alienated even after political independence had been won. This situation could have also been a ploy by the departing Whites to perpetuate alienation and antagonism between the élite Nigerian worker and those at the lower rung of the ladder. Beyond the civil service, evidence abounds to show that the political class was equally corrupt. The Foster Sutton Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the African Continental Bank (ACB) owned by the former Premier of the Eastern region, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, showed that Zik (as he was popularly called) had diverted the resources of the then Eastern Region to his privately owned bank. Similarly, the Coker Commission of Inquiry showed that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the former Premier of Western Region, equally diverted the funds of the Western Region Marketing Board for his personal benefits.

Corruption by the political class in the first republic was so visible that Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, one of the architects of the January 1966 coup, in his broadcast announcing Nigeria's first military coup, referred to them as ten percenters who have made Nigeria a laughing stock in the comity of Nations.

The purge of the Civil Services of 1975 and 1976 by the Murtala Mohammed administration also served to heighten corruption. With the purge, many civil servants were retrenched without notice and unprepared. Majority of them had to vacate their official quarters and had no places to go. Consequently, civil servants began to work and plan for the "rainy day" through "fair" or "foul" means,

We have pointed out how the mindless and haphazard purging of the civil service by the military in 1975 and 1976 contributed to the growth of corruption in Nigeria. Yet, that is not all about the role of the military in worsening an already bad situation. For instance, following the collapse of the Gowon administration, the succeeding administration of Murtala Mohammed tried political office holders and found that many of them were corrupt. It is also known that many military officers who held public offices had corruptly enriched themselves. Though the military comes as a corrective regime it ends up enmeshed in corruption. Another point to note is, because of its control and monopoly of the means of coercion, it becomes difficult to check corruption in the rank and file of the military from without. We shown examples from the civil and public service, political class, the judiciary, the military

and the educational sectors, but the private sector is equally corrupt as the scandals in the banking and other sectors show.

Another example is found in a publication in France titled, *French Weekly* of May 1997, as quoted by Ayittey (2002), published a list of eleven former African Heads of State and their loots while in office. Out of these, two former Nigerian military leaders were included. While General Sanni Abacha was listed as having \$20 billion in foreign accounts, General Ibrahim Babangida stacked way \$5 billion, also in foreign accounts. Additionally, the military dominated and monopolised the political scene of Nigeria for a long time and contributed towards the institutionalisation of corruption. Also, because the military operates outside the rule of law, it is always difficult to check corruption in the military within the ambit of the law. It is, however, saddening that the country's performance in terms of probity and accountability has not fared well under the current democratic dispensation. It could be argued that in some instances democratic governance in Nigeria since May 29, 1999, has further exacerbated the scourge of corruption. It will be recalled that there was the bribe for budget scandal involving some ministries and department. Instances of inflated contracts have also been recorded. Events in the Education and Health Ministries reported by the press best illustrate this scenario. The most disturbing is corruption that is associated with the electoral process. Instances where voters were "paid" or more appropriately bribed to vote for particular candidates abound. Corruption in the electoral process is worrisome because free and fair elections have serious implications for democratic governance and national development. The flawed electoral process means that the wrong people will be in office and in power and may not be able and willing to drive development. There is also the issue of "godfatherism" where an individual installs a particular person, for instance as governor on the condition that regular financial returns will be made to him. Good examples of this scenario include that of Oyo State under Rasheed Ladoja and Anambra State under Chris Ngige. As a result of the above, some states were unable to pay the salaries of civil servants for several months and even years. They were also unable to carry out projects that would impact meaningfully on the people. The so-called "godfathers" had placed their selfish interests over and above public interest.

### Cost and Consequences of Corruption

A lot has been said and written on corruption and its implications for national development, but its continued manifestation indicates that more scholarly study of its costs and consequences will be worthwhile. Lawal (2007:3) enumerates extensively the cost and consequences of corruption which could be classified into three: economic, social and political Mauro, (1995) as quoted by Lawal states that, corruption hinders economic growth by militating against direct foreign investment. Most foreign investors with the awareness of the state of things in Nigeria will not want to invest in a corruption-infested economy. This jeopardises employment opportunities and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A corollary to the above is, because of corruption, foreigners and even some Nigerian businessmen and women prefer to set up businesses in neighbouring African countries, particularly Ghana. Good examples are Cadbury and Michelin. The open reason may be that the cost of doing business in Nigeria is high but beneath this is corruption. Cadbury has moved to Ghana and Michelin to Algeria but they maintain skeletal offices in Nigeria. The situation also leads to a waste of the meager government resources which find their ways into private pockets. There is also an abundance of evidence that corruption is the cause, in many instances, of poor service delivery. When a particular amount of money has been earmarked for a project and a substantial part of it has found its way into private pockets, the project will have to be executed with the available funds which will be inadequate, thus leading to poor service delivery.

The social consequence of corruption are no less severe or unsalutary. Corruption breeds cynicism. Most Nigerians have come to believe that it is not possible to become rich except if one is corrupt. As a result, people who became rich through their genuine efforts are also branded as corrupt. Therefore, it undermines or leads to a perversion of social values such as integrity, honour, hardwork, service, probity and accountability. On the contrary, it elevates such vices as greed and materialism. An inevitable consequence of corruption is that it deepens poverty. Of all categories of people, it affects the poor the most because they cannot enjoy social amenities and are not empowered to resist corrupt government officials.

The political consequences of corruption are also worthy of note. It erodes government legitimacy. A corrupt government is not accountable to the people and therefore has no legitimacy. It can equally lead to political and social upheavals. Corruption cannot be totally divorced from the crisis which Nigeria is encountering in the Niger Delta area of the country. There are allegations that money meant for the masses are diverted into private pocket by leaders of the Niger Delta. History has shown that there is an extent to which people can endure hardship, especially in the midst of plenty, before resorting to violence and social upheavals. The example of the French revolution is a good case in point.

### **Using Culture to Curb Corruption**

It is clear from the above that corruption is the greatest hindrance to development. It has thrived for so long because there has been no genuine commitment to its eradication. Before now, the legal and judicial systems were used to handle cases of corruption. In addition, commissions of inquiry were set up to investigate corruption cases. Unfortunately, these measures proved disappointingly ineffective. The outcomes of commissions of inquiry are hardly ever made public. In cases where they are publicised and white paper issued, it is to the effect that the accused and suspected corrupt officials have been exonerated. For the avoidance of doubt, let us recall the case of James Onanefe Ibori, former governor of Delta State and the corruption charge brought against him by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). In Nigeria, James Ibori was allegedly jailed in Abuja for stealing but was later discharged and acquitted only for him to be found guilty by a London court. At the time of writing, he was serving a prison term in London. When he assumed office as governor of Delta State, his election was challenged on grounds that, as an ex-convict, he was not qualified to hold the office of the governor of a state. The high court which sat in Abuja could not ascertain the exact identity of the Ibori that was jailed. It took a London court to state that James Ibori was the same Ibori that an Abuja high court had jailed. This judicial pronouncement came after he had served two terms. Though it has not been researched into, this writer believes that most of the people who have been so outspoken against corruption may not be sincerely committed to the anti-corruption

crusade. It is even believed that some of those who complain about corruption do so because they do not have the chance of benefiting from it. Though the constitutional provisions for sanctions on corruption have been further reinforced with the setting up of agencies like the EFCC and ICPC, the nagging question is, how equipped are these agencies in terms of resources and empowerment to check corruption?

Both the EFCC and the ICPC operate as apron strings of the executive and their chief executives are also appointees of the President. It is actually believed in some circles that an agency such as the EFCC, in spite of outward posturing of anti-corruption, is actually an instrument for muzzling opposition. What is required is autonomy in terms of the appointment of key officers of anti-corruption agencies and also their funding. These should be the prerogative of the National Assembly. An intriguing development is that these establishments (that is the EFCC and ICPC) are also said to harbour corrupt officials. According to Ibrahim Lamorde, the current chairman of EFCC some officials of the commission are facing corruption charges.

Another cause for the very limited success achieved in the fight against corruption is the weak institutions, particularly the legislature and the judiciary. Where the judiciary delays in the dispensation of justice and the legislature defaults in its oversight functions, corruption continues to thrive. In fact, the boldest attempt at fighting corruption came in 1999 when the ICPC and EFCC were established. Unfortunately, those who set up these agencies have also been fingered and suspected to be corrupt. For instance, former President Olusegun Obasanjo set up an administrative inquiry that found his deputy, Vice President Atiku Abubakar, to have corruptly enriched himself. On his part, the then Vice President Atiku Abubakar presented to the public documents that his boss was also corrupt. It shows that there is a missing gap in the crusade against corruption and the gap can only be filled by exploring the people's traditional and shared way of life, which is generally referred to as culture. It is the totality of the ways of life of a people.

Simple as the above definition may appear, it covers the whole area of culture as given by the British anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor (1865:4) when he defined culture as "that complex whole, which includes shared ideas, knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and

any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". This definition also agrees with that of Klyde Kluckhohn as quoted by Okpo Ojah (2001: 38) that "culture is the total ways of life of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group . . . that part of the environment that is the creation of man".

The bottom line is that no one comes into the world with any culture. No one standing alone has culture. Therefore, culture is shared and learned. It is the aggregation of all the acquired attributes of man by which he imposes order on the forces around him. To a large extent, culture defines the ideal norm by setting the standards of what is right and wrong. Within an area, it is also culture which determines values as things or ideas to which people attach importance.

The primary values in the Nigerian traditional setting are accountability, honesty, love, respect, hardwork, the value of a good name and integrity. A look at the contemporary Nigerian society shows that family ties are fast breaking down and communal ties and values are also fast disappearing. The dilemma is that while we are moving away from our traditional values we have not successfully acquired the foreign and particularly the western values of our dreams, and it is this that explains the tragedy of Nigeria's cultural confusion and disorientation. It has been shown that under the original traditional Nigerian communal system, cheating, bribery and corruption were very minimal. The individual was not just a part of the larger society; he was an equal stakeholder. It is against this background that Williams (2007), advocates a national reorientation that will incorporate a return to our traditional communal mode of living. The war against corruption should start from the family. It is within the family that cultural values of honesty, contentment, hard work, transparency, and moderation are inculcated. More often than not families are very close to their children. If every child is made to place a premium on family name and made aware that corruption damages family reputation, they will grow up into adults who will abhor corruption. Parents should probe to know the source of everything owned by their children. The possession of items that could not be accounted for should be strongly sanctioned. Children should know that wherever they go, whatever they do, they are carrying their family name along. Therefore, their actions could have either positive or negative consequence on their

families. This writer, like most people of his generation can attest to the fact that, as a child he was taught that, good name is better than riches, honesty is the best policy and others.

Religion is an integral part of culture and it has a strong influence on peoples' ways of life. In Nigeria, the dominant religions are Christianity and Islam, yet experience has shown that, because these are secondary religions, Nigerians and indeed most Africans who profess them outwardly still secretly resort to aspects of African Traditional Religion. The argument is that the absence of the hold which religion is supposed to have on people has encouraged corruption. While not advocating recourse to African Traditional Religion (if it would not be done voluntarily), it is still necessary to mention that in some circles, while most Nigerians would swear falsely to the Bible or Koran, none would do such with *Ogun*, *Sango* or *Ogwugwu*.

Though it is true that both Christianity and Islam have made positive contributions to the overall growth and development of the Nigerian society, it is also true that the total neglect of our traditional religion is to our own peril. After all, the Asian Tigers have succeeded largely because they have woven their development efforts around their cultural heritage. Though these societies are not free from corruption, it exists at a very minimal level. Part of the national reorientation that is being recommended is a change from our values and the current culture of materialism to one of sincerity, hardwork and honesty. In this crusade, communities, towns, villages etc. ought to sanction their sons and daughters found to be corrupt while occupying public offices. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case. Once an indigene has "made it", he or she becomes a very important personality (VIP), an instant celebrity irrespective of the source of the affluence. There is need for a return to our indigenous concepts of the "good man" which the Igbo call *Ezigbo Madu*, the Yoruba *Omoluabi*, and the Hausa *Mutimin Kirki*. The Tiv, Itsekiri, Bini, Ibibio etc. also have similar concepts.

The issue of corruption should also be a challenge to religious leaders in the country. There have been instances where people stole public funds and made huge donations to their religious bodies. In some quarters, to justify corruption, the view has been expressed that public fund is nobody's fund. This view is wrong and should be corrected. Nigerians

should begin to imbibe the mentality that public fund is for all Nigerians and should not be mismanaged. It is only possible to use religion to fight corruption if religious leaders are themselves not corrupt.

Apart from the strictly cultural factors in the fight against corruption, it should be known that corruption thrives for two other reasons. The first is the opportunity to be corrupt, while the second is the opportunity to escape punishment. The cash economy in Nigeria is a factor which creates an opportunity for corruption, while the weak institutions create the opportunity to escape punishment. If these are changed, corruption will reduce drastically. For this reason, the current directive by the federal government on e-payment for all public service transactions is a welcome development. On the second issue, which deals with sanctions, the proposal in this presentation is that agencies charged to fight corruption should be well funded, made independent and fully empowered to discharge their statutory duties.

The war on corruption on a cultural platform should focus on the beliefs and values of the people. The effort should be geared towards the evolution of a society where honesty, transparency, modesty of tastes and values, are guiding principles. This is not to suggest that corruption would be completely eradicated but it could be reduced drastically. For instance, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) could sponsor programmes on radio and television for the purpose of influencing people's beliefs and values against corruption. Such programmes should also highlight the evils associated with corruption. The use of the mass media is important bearing in mind their capacity to influence, for good or bad, the behaviour of people. In the same vein, Nollywood, instead of producing films which promote and project foreign cultures, could be commissioned to produce films on the unsalutary consequences of corruption. The bottom line is that we need a sustained and aggressive enlightenment programme. Odoemena captures it succinctly in the following words.

We have national enlightenment programmes and jingles on television, and radio on HIV/AIDS, payment of tax, drug abuse and trafficking and even that on fuel subsidy removal but I have yet to see any on corruption (2012:16).

For an enduring result, the target should be the youth and children



who are the leaders of tomorrow. Anti-corruption should be incorporated into the school curricula at all levels of our educational system. This must start at the primary to the secondary levels and above. At the tertiary level, it must be part of the General Studies Programme. Churches and Mosques should not only criticise and condemn corruption; they should incorporate lessons on corruptions into their teachings.

## Conclusion

We have seen in this paper that though corruption is endemic and widespread in Nigeria, it is not in the character of Nigerians to be corrupt. It is also very clear that there is no Nigerian culture (like most other cultures in the world) which encourages corruption. Rather, there is emphasis on hardwork, honesty and integrity. To that extent, the war against corruption could be won, but it requires a lot of sacrifice from the leadership which has to show more commitment to its eradication. The inclusion of anti-corruption studies as a way of influencing values and belief systems will be a welcome development. Therefore, there is need for value re-orientation, religious and cultural revolution, and the incorporation of Nigerian communal lifestyles into the anti-corruption war. These will go a long way in curbing the menace of corruption in Nigeria. In this respect, top civil servants and all those aspiring to hold offices in both the public and private sectors should be appointed on the recommendation and with the support of their communities. In essence, if they are found wanting and corrupt, they should know that they are trying to bring shame and dishonor to their societies. By extension, it means that the national reorientation being canvassed should be extended to traditional and community leaders. Since corruption is a worldwide phenomenon, its total eradication should not be expected, but with culture as platform it is possible to reduce it to the barest minimum.

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