

The Concept of Corruption, its Multidimensional Forms in Nigeria and Islamic Approach towards its Combat

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Abstract

Corruption has been in all its multidimensional forms, the menace that Nigeria has been grappling with, probably since the creation of the nation-state by colonial rulers. The trend of corruption that was supposed to have been long curtailed seems to always be on a growing lane. In fact, the tree of corruption has developed a lot of branches so much so that almost all facets of Nigerian life are imbedded with it. That is why some corrupt acts are not even felt by Nigerians to be regarded as been so. Islam as a religion which cherishes sound values, propagates good morals, inculcates noble cultures and promotes ethics and principles is matchless in its theoretical and practical approach towards the fight against corruption. This article aims at investigating the concept of corruption and its multilayered and multidimensional forms in Nigeria. It finds that almost all the anti-corruption strategies Nigerian leadership has been instituting and applying have been practically ineffective and deficient. Hence, this article tries to prescribe Islamic therapies as remedy and effective measure towards suppressing corruption. It is recommended that Nigeria should re-visit its policies and approach in the fight against corruption and consider incorporating Islamic method, even if mainly to be applied on Muslim public servants.

Keywords: - Corruption, Nigeria, Forms, Islam, Combat

Introduction

Many Nigerians, the rulers and the ruled, the military and the civilians, Muslims and non-Muslims have at various occasions vented their spleen on the notoriety of the country in the promotion of corrupt practices. The degree of worries often expressed by many well-meaning Nigerians over the entrenched cancerous culture of corruption among public office holders would doubtlessly drive a not-so-optimistic citizen to believe that corruption has come to stay permanently and comfortably, and be accommodated as part of usual and commendable, rather than condemnable and frown-at practice. Corruption in Nigeria exists in many manifestations, forms and dimensions. It is hard to exempt any sector in Nigeria that doesn't engage in corruption. The education sector, health sector, labour, business, downstream sector, electricity, communication, aviation, transportation, etc. all are imbedded with corruption. The executive, the parliament as well as the judiciary arms of government have all tacitly institutionalized corruption as the engine of administrative direction. Likewise, corruption is the order of the day in the three tiers of democratic government in Nigeria; the federal, the state and the local governments. The public and the private sectors on daily basis are run on accommodated shoes of corruption. Surprisingly, even religious bodies that are supposed to be frontline fighters of corruption are not exempted.

Several measures have been put in place by different regimes in order to curtail the bedevilling disease of corruption. Both the military and civilian regimes have

formulated a lot of decrees and established agencies and commissions that were shouldered with the responsibility of fighting corruption. Such measures include the 1979 Ethical Revolution, the War Against Indiscipline (WAI), the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), and more recently, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). National and state houses of assembly also have full-fledged committees that investigate and forward suggestions on corrupt practices in the country. However, these efforts by the Nigerian authorities are still viewed as weak, ineffective and produce little or no results. Despite heightened optimism, there is little evidence to suggest that the intensified campaign is yielding the desired result. Worse still is the shocking revelations of the alleged involvement in corrupt practices of all government appointees as heads of the Nigeria's anti-corruption agency, as recent events unfolds. What however, is missing in all the anti-corruption crusades is the consideration of the role of religion in minimising and suppressing corruption. Islam has set a lot of theoretical and practical examples that have proved workable and effective towards ridding the society of the mess of corruption.

This article aims at investigating the concept of corruption and its multilayered and multidimensional forms in Nigeria. It hence, tries to prescribe Islamic therapies as remedy and effective measure towards suppressing it. The essay is divided into four segments; the concept of corruption, the state of corruption in Nigeria, forms of corruption and some of the Islamic measures in tackling corruption. It is concluded with the highlights of major propositions of the essay and a few recommendations.

The Concept of Corruption

A lot of definitions have been given to the term "corruption". The concept of corruption contains too many connotations. Some definitions are general while some are more specific. Some are more encompassing while some are narrow. According to Salihi (2011), United Nations Development Program defines corruption as "the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, etc.". In the same vein, Shat (1999) posits in Almomani that corruption has to do with "utilizing power to gain personal advantage, utility, status, or social position; or to gain some advantages for a group of people or a certain class in a way that breaks the laws and ethics". Another definition is that corruption is "a form of secret social exchange through which those in power (political or administrative) take personal advantage, of one type or another, of the influence they exercise in virtue of their mandate or their function". In the words of Colin Nye, in Almomani, corruption is "behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence".

It can be observed that the various definitions above revolve around "power" as a central element and great facilitator of corruption. In other words, the definitions assume that corruption is perpetrated mainly by those that hold some position of authority. However, there are other definitions that imply that the concept and scope of corruption shall not only be limited to bearers of power or authority.

For example, Mushtaq Khan as cited in Amundsen, defines it as "behaviour that deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private-regarding motives such as wealth, power, or status". According to Vito Tanzi "Corruption is the intentional non-compliance with the arm's-length principle aimed at deriving some advantages for oneself or for related individuals from this behavior".

These latter definitions hence, seem to be encompassing in their attempts to define the concept of corruption. It is good at this juncture, to point out that Islamic perspective on the concept of corruption harbours the last definitions. The Glorious Qur'ān makes use of the word “fasād” and its derivatives in many places to denote acts that deviate from the normal, acceptable, morally sound and socially upright codes of life. This is regardless of whether those involved in the acts emerge from aristocratic, bureaucratic class or they are ordinary citizens. While hierarchy is considered an agent of corruption, it is, in Islam, not a sole determiner of corrupt practices. Even the least powerful constituencies and parties like at individual and collective levels are strongly cautioned against corruption. The scope of the term corruption largely differs with that of the modern corruption theorists especially in Nigeria, in the sense that it is legitimate for leaders to design policies that will allocate stupendous and sybaritic welfare packages for themselves and their families to the detriment of the emaciating masses. In Islam, leaders are always regarded as employed servants of the masses. Therefore, in no way they should devise means of looting from the public treasury or legalize excessive lucrative welfare packages for themselves. In Nigeria like many other countries, out of fear of indictment on one hand, and self-confession of corruptibility on the other hand, leaders especially the executive arm have developed and championed the trend of mounting the back of the so-called ill-consumed clause of immunity, to perpetrate their corrupt practices and get away with it. In Islam however, leaders are always accountable and susceptible to probe, charge, prosecution as well as conviction in an event of their involvement in corrupt practices. We can therefore posit that Islamic concept of corruption can be any act that deviates from the normal, acceptable, morally sound and socially upright codes of life whether at individual or collective level, and whether it is perpetrated by the power bearers or by the masses.

Multidimensional Forms of Corruption

Because there are no universally accepted definitions of corruption, there is also no universally agreed-upon typology of corruption. Corruption exists in multidimensional forms and in many aspects in Nigeria. There are many opinions as regard the forms and types of corruption in Nigeria. Few are presented here.

Almomani (2015) identifies two broad types of corruption:

1. Administrative Corruption which is solely found in the domains of public power holders ranging from the lowest head of a small unit of an organization up to the highest public officer in bureaucracy.
2. Economic Corruption which involves all acts that are related to wealth, finance and other sources of illegal acquisition of wealth. The most notable act of economic corruption is bribery, which is so glued to the term that people use corruption to mean bribery. It is imperative to point out here that while corruption seems to be a more general term that denotes committing any act in the breach, besides perpetrating evil and mischief, bribery appears to be specific in situations when people responsible to discharge certain duty do so on the influence of pecuniary gratifications. The most impressive aspect of Almomani's scope of economic corruption is his inclusion of other capitalistic codes such as usury (riba), economic monopoly, excessive hoarding of wealth as strongly cautioned-at practices. Muhammad (2015) in Salihi (2011), extracts a subtype of economic corruption which he calls monetary.

The United Nation's Anti-Corruption Policy (2001) discusses some forms of corruption which are summarized and briefly analyzed below:

1. Petty Corruption: - this refers to the form of corruption that involves civil servants who are forced to engage in corrupt acts by circumstances of life. They include workers who are underpaid, and have a lot of family burdens. Their

monthly earnings cannot cater for their daily needs. They as such, engage in corrupt practices by accepting pittances as bribes. The best example that represent this form of corruption in Nigeria are security-related organizations like the police, army, customs, immigration officers, etc.

2. Integrity Testing: this is a form of episodic corruption which involves basically honest people that are faced with challenges to carry out no matter how well and clean their hearts are any positive, lawful task without having to pass through corrupt channels.
3. Systemic Corruption involves middle class civil servants who consider corruption as norms of life, and largely depend on it to sustain their lives despite being paid enough to cater for their family needs. It also involves group of persons that have no legal, reliable or substantive jobs. They rather reap from systemic and organized corrupt practices. This group is filled up by many jobless people that serve as agents and have robbed the citizens of their statutory right to access some national services done without stepping on their corrupt shoes. They have strong connections with the bosses at the top of most government establishments.

Other opinion holders like Hernandez (n.d) adumbrate the following types of corruption:

- 1) Political Corruption
- 2) Economic Corruption
- 3) Public Administrative Corruption
- 4) Bribery
- 5) Embezzlement and Theft
- 6) Fraud, etc.

Heidenheimer (1989) distinguishes 3 types of corruption which are; (i) White Corruption (ii) Grey Corruption (iii) Black Corruption.

The State of Corruption in Nigeria

Since independence, Nigeria has been viewed by its citizens as well as external audiences as a great purveyor and promoter of corruption. For example, Adebayo (n. d) asserts that:

Corruption has become a cankerworm, which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. It has established itself in all spheres of the socio-economic and political realms of the nation.

Also Shehu (2006) posits in Adebayo that:

Corruption and fraud as acts of criminal and betrayer of trust, in all their forms and manifestations, have not only been perfected in Nigeria but have become the order of the day, a means of earning a living. Though, not legally institutionalized, fraud and corruption have certainly been tacitly approved and conventionally legitimized. Fraudsters and corrupt public figures have become celebrities just as they have been hailed as heroes. Conversely however, trustworthy and credible persons have almost been ostracized and condemned. The society is far from being upright, normal and balanced, because all sectors of our national life have been penetrated and influenced by fraud and corruption.

In the same vein Egbewole and Imam (2015) lament that:

Corruption is deeply rooted in every facet of the Nigerian polity. It is phenomenon that exists in innumerable forms, knows no cultural boundaries, operates in the private as well as the public sector and defies comprehensive definition.

Transparency International had in 1996, barely three years after it started operation, listed Nigeria in its Corruption Perceptions Index as the most corrupt country in the world. And since then, the country comfortably maintains the position or becomes second with a very slight margin (Daily Trust, Friday, April 18, 2014). Corruption has earned Nigeria a particular notoriety that even other small African countries which themselves are not that so-corruption-free to join the bandwagon in brandishing fingers of blame at Nigeria on its accommodation of corruption. While celebrating his 90th birthday, Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe seized an opportunity to showcase the state of Nigeria's corruption by warning his countrymen not to be like Nigerians who are mostly corrupt. Former British Prime Minister David Cameron (2015) accused Nigeria of being a fantastically corrupt country. Perhaps two people could be regarded as the most uncompromising and undiplomatic in their expression of anger at the entrenched culture of corruption in Nigeria. Adamu Adamu (2015) while driving a tirade on the widespread of ground of corruption in Nigeria concludes that the only level the country has not reached is that it has not yet started to jail officials who refuse to partake in corruption, and there is indication that if the trend continues, this would soon be implemented. Olumhense (2013) accuses that "there is a grand conspiracy in place in Nigeria to protect corruption (Sunday Trust, Sunday, November 10, 2013).

However, with the coming of Muhammadu Buhari as president in 2015, some hopes had been resurrected because of his popularity as incorruptible and the anticorruption credentials for his which he was known for. This was further buttressed by the obvious fact that as soon as he was elected, several corrupt cases were investigated in which a lot of top government officials that served the former regime were implicated. People found some confidence and got satisfied that the days of tolerating corruption are counted.

But as the anticorruption crusade is still being waged, some Nigerians still express doubt on the sincerity and objectivity of the war. Some of these dissatisfactions are merely brazen display of political envy. Yet some are understandably objective. Perhaps, the most concrete justification of such worries is the slow with which the case of those involved in corrupt practices is handled. In this line, Muhammad Qaddam (2016) bewails that: "this unnecessary slow-paced way of doing things also hinders and indeed undermines government's anticorruption drive especially with regard to the investigation of corruption cases and the prosecution of the suspects involved. Besides, the Presidential Advisory Committee against Corruption (PAC) set up by President Buhari more than a year ago has either not finished the assignment, or its recommendations are gathering dust somewhere in the presidency.

Some Nigerians cannot help believing that the war against corruption is facing serious drawback from the very government that rose to power on the mantra of fighting corruption. They describe the war as one-sided, devoid of objectivity and full of in-house considerations. Hassan (2016) alleges that: "the president's anticorruption war is largely one-sided. So when a top member of his party is penciled down for investigation, it is more or less an eclipse".

It can be asserted without any doubt that these grudges are created by many issues involving government officials and functionaries as well as elected and appointed officials who share similar party with that of the ruling power. The fact that Federal government officials have now been engaged in accusations and counter-accusations on allegations but without significant and tangible action by the

Presidency to checkmate the situation, some pessimistic feelings of Nigerians may not be unjustifiable. This is in addition to the lack of will to take appropriate action in relation to the case of bribery collection from contractors by a certain governor which could go down in history as the greatest toleration and accommodation of corrupt practice in Nigeria. This act still misrepresents the country and casts it in bad light in the eyes of Nigerians as well as other outside audience.

Islamic Approach towards Fighting Corruption

Islam being a religion that promotes societal values and kicks against moral deficiencies, has laid down some effective measures that curb the menace of the bedeviling as well as multilayered culture of corruption. Hundreds of Islamic literature are laden with methods, techniques and procedures of combating the menace of corruption in the society in both theoretical and practical terms. Islam, as a wake-up call towards action, makes it clear that corruption is already widespread and rampant, and that it is largely caused by people at societal level as well as individual level. Allah says:

ثُمَّ أَفَاءَ لَهُمْ جَمِيعَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَخْرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ يَخِفُّونَ عَنْ يَدَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ٤١

Corruption has appeared on land and sea with what the hands of the people earned so that they taste some of what they did in order that they return.

Allah (SWT) in many places cautions the Muslims against engaging in evil and corrupt acts. As mentioned earlier, in many verses the Qur'ān uses the word "fasād" or any of its derivatives to command the Muslims to distance themselves away from corruption, because God loathes corruption and doesn't like those who perpetrate corrupt practices:

ثُمَّ أَفَاءَ فِي غِيٍّ فِي قِيٍّ كَالْبَقَرَةِ ٢٠٥

... Allah never likes corruption

ثُمَّ أَفَاءَ لَمْ يَلْهُمُ جَمِيعَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَخْرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ يَخِفُّونَ عَنْ يَدَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ٧٧

... and seek no corruption on earth; lo! Allah loves no corrupters

ثُمَّ أَفَاءَ تَزْتَرُّهُمْ تَرْجَاءَ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ يَخِفُّونَ عَنْ يَدَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ٥٦

And do not corrupt the earth after it has been made fair, and ask Him (Allah) in fear and hope. Lo! The mercy of Allah is near to those who are good.

In order for a society to remain healthy in all aspects of life, Allah explains to us how He enjoined that there should have been among the previous generations a group of people even if minority, who should become an exception and forbid corrupt acts that were prevalent. He says: -

ثُمَّ أَفَاءَ لَمْ يَلْهُمُ جَمِيعَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَخْرِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ يَخِفُّونَ عَنْ يَدَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ١١٦ هُوَ لَمْ يَلْهُمُ

if only there had been among the generations before you, men possessing a remnant (of good sense) to warn (their people) of corruption in the earth, as did a few of those whom We saved from them...

This is certainly a lesson for the present societies to emulate. And perhaps it is within this frameworks government initiative of establishing anti-corrupt agencies can be contextualized. Allah (SWT) in another place shows that if Muslims fight their desire and overcome their interest by totally avoiding fasād i.e. corruption, their reward will be to enter paradise as their final abode. He says: -

ثُمَّ لَكُمْ مِنْهَا مَذَاجٌ مَّا تَشَاءُونَ ۚ وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ كَثْرَتُهُمْ فِي هَٰذَا وَلَا يُفْتِنُهُمْ فِيهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۝٨٣

And as for that abode of the Hereafter, We assign it to those who seek not high-handedness in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who are pious.

Usually, whenever an issue that involves corruption is raised, the first thing that comes to mind is economic, or in more specific term is pecuniary or financial corruption. Allah (SWT) says in this regard: -

ثُمَّ لَكُمْ مِنْهَا مَذَاجٌ مَّا تَشَاءُونَ ۚ وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ كَثْرَتُهُمْ فِي هَٰذَا وَلَا يُفْتِنُهُمْ فِيهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۝٢٩

O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you by mutual consent...

In another surah, Allah (SWT) says: -

ثُمَّ لَكُمْ مِنْهَا مَذَاجٌ مَّا تَشَاءُونَ ۚ وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ كَثْرَتُهُمْ فِي هَٰذَا وَلَا يُفْتِنُهُمْ فِيهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۝٢٧

O you who believe! Betray not Allah and His Messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts.

These verses embody serious dissuasion from a conglomeration of acts that lead to corruption.

The Prophet (SAW) in various occasions showed his companions the harmful effects of corruption towards the social, moral and spiritual state of human beings. His guidance which unfolds in both theoretical and practical terms encompasses the ruler and the ruled. It was reported that the Messenger of Allah (SAW) appointed an official to carry out a certain assignment in a particular community. When the man returned and brought a message for which he was assigned, he brought something and said, this was given to me as a gift. The Prophet got angry and said why won't he stay at home and see if he would be given that gift (bribe) or not. In essence, the Messenger (SAW) was establishing the simple fact that all those kinds of enticers are as well examples of corruption. Gifts for public officials termed as rashwa are also prohibited. At the moral plane, there is "zero tolerance" for bribery in Islam; and Islam rejects any idea that bribery serves as the grease that oils the economic wheels. That was why the Prophet (SAW) said, "Allah has cursed the giver and taker of bribe". In practical terms, during the time of the Prophet (SAW), a noble Qurayshi woman named Fāṭimah al-Makhzūmīyah was reported to have committed a theft and when she was proven guilty, some of the Sahabah sought to intervene in the matter to rescue her from the appropriate punishment. When finally, the intervener Usamah bin Zaid, a young man who was much loved and respected by the Prophet (SAW) met the latter on the case, the Prophet grew angry and said "I swear by Allah if it were Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad who committed a theft I would have cut off her hand". By clear implication, connection of whatsoever type was never an impediment from bringing any erring person to book and making him or her to face the wrath of the law according to his or her crime.

The second caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb used to record the assets of his officials at the time of their appointment and confiscated partly or wholly whatsoever they added while in office on suspicion of benefiting from public appointment. He instructed one of his commanders to adjust the value of gifts offered to him that he had

dispatched to the central treasury against the tax liability of the people, because taking anything more than the stipulated jizya (poll tax) was unjust.

What is obvious in the Islamic approach towards fighting corruption in Islam is its emphasis on boosting the spirit of fear of Allah. The engine of piety is the most powerful preventer of corruption as well as other societal vices. Second to piety, is accountability which can be enforced by strict application and implementation of all punishments on erring parties.

Nigeria has been described as one of the most religious country whose citizens – both Muslims and Christians have strong attachment and respect to their religion. Since Nigeria's independence, rulers have been collaborating with religious leaders in the discharge of their duties and at times to foster their political ambition. Coming from the religious viewpoint has a lot of prospects of combating the menace of corruption. Since elected and appointed officials are subjected to a ritual of a solemn-oath taking by Qur'an or Bible according to the faith of the official, it is justifiably reasonable if religious approach is integrated into the fight against corruption. Islamic method of transparency and pre-assumption and post-service probe as demonstrated during the Prophetic era and the subsequent leadership need to be studied and considered for application on issues related to public trust and responsibility. As such, public officials should declare their assets on assumption of responsibility and when they are vacating office, their wealth should be effectively investigated. Whatever adds up to their legitimate earning should be duly confiscated and returned to the treasury. Above all, they should be properly prosecuted beyond the symbolic drama that the anti-corruption agency is widely believed to have been caught in since its establishment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Corruption as the paper highlighted, has entered the veins and blood of many Nigerians. The rapid accommodation of the culture of corruption in Nigeria has earned the country a particular infamy that supersedes other countries in the world. On daily basis, corruption is developing wings and taking multilayered and multidimensional forms. Despite efforts by different regimes to introduce remedial measures to combat corruption, the malaise is still growing so much so that some Nigerians begin to turn pessimistic.

What is obviously missing in the Nigeria's approach towards its fight against corruption is its refusal to include Islamic approach in tackling the bedeviling cancer. Integration of Islamic therapies is doubtlessly the correct and most workable measure in combating corruption. Hence, the article offers the following recommendations: -

- There is the need for the authorities to see to the promotion of religious values rather than attempting to relegate them to the background.
- Theoretical and practical approach of Islam in fighting corruption should be adequately publicized and taught to Nigerian citizens, especially Muslim public officials. This can be in form of seminar or workshop in which Muslim clerics would serve as facilitators while the officials serve as participants and audience. This should be done with utmost sincerity and beyond the usual ceremonial gathering between well-wishers and politicians.
- The immunity clause that officials at executive level enjoy should be redefined and redressed. It should in no way be an official cover for perpetrating corrupt acts and going scot-free.
- At the end of tenure of office, government officials should be made to undergo an oath of leaving office just as they undergo it when officially assuming public responsibility. Likewise, their assets and wealth should be compared and

evaluated with their declared assets prior to their ascension to power and at the time they hand it over to others.

- There should be consistent and impartial probe and subsequent prosecution and conviction of all officials who are found wanting in relation to a breach of public responsibility.

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- Sūrah al-Baqarah, verse 205.
- Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, verse 77.
- Sūrah A'rāf, verse 56.

Sūrah Hūd, verse 116.

Sūrah Al-Qasas, verse 83

Sūrah al-Nisā', verse 29.

Sūrah al-Anfāl, verse 27.

The Ḥadīth was reported by Bukhārī (2597) in the Book of Gifts and its Virtues and Encouragement towards it, the Chapter on “Not Accepting a Gift due to Certain Reason” and Muslim (1832) in the Book of Leadership, the Chapter on the Gifts for Officials.

The Hadith was reported by Ibn Majah (2313) in the “Book of Judgments”, the Chapter on “Serious Warnings against Injustice and Bribery”.

The Hadith was reported by Bukhari (3732) in the “Book of the Virtues of the Prophet’s Companions”, the Chapter on the “Mention of Usamah bin Zaid”.

Adebayo. Op. cit. (np)