

ETHICAL REVOLUTION AS NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT DETERMINANT

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Abstract

This work argues that the problem of extensive corruption in Nigeria necessitates an ethical revolution. As observed over decades, Nigeria is embroiled in and sinking deeper into the abyss of corruption and moral decadence such that its precarious situation appears irremediable. On numerous occasions, Nigerians have always identified the causes of the problem of corruption and offered solutions to the problem, giving the impression of being determined to solve it all together, to attain lasting development and national stability. However, it is unfortunate that they only pay lip service to tackle corruption. The conflict between their profession and actions amplifies while the nation sinks deeper into anarchy and serious developmental problems that cut across social, political, economic and religious lines. With the nation's social institutions being mostly in crisis, being easily manipulated by self-interested people at the helm of the nation's affairs to the detriment of the majority of the people, things worsen with each passing day. Using the methods of conceptual and historical analyses, this work reflects on the issues involving extensive corruption in Nigeria. Through doing this, it argues for ethical revolution as the panacea for dealing with corrupt practices in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption, Development, Ethical Revolution, Ethics, Social Institutions

Introduction

This work argues that an ethical revolution is essential if the problem of extensive corruption in Nigeria will ever be solved. For decades, Nigeria has been embroiled in and sinking deeper into the abyss of corruption and moral decadence such that its precarious situation appears irremediable. On numerous occasions, Nigerians have always identified the causes of the problem of corruption and offered solutions to this problem, giving the impression of being determined to solve it all together, to attain lasting development and

national stability. However, it is unfortunate that they only pay lip service to tackle corruption. The conflict between their profession and actions amplifies while the nation sinks deeper into anarchy and serious developmental problems that cut across social, political, economic and religious lines. With the nation's social institutions being mostly in crisis, being easily manipulated by self-interested people at the helm of the nation's affairs to the detriment of the majority of the people, things worsen with each passing day. Using the methods of conceptual and historical analyses, this work reflects on the issues involving extensive corruption in Nigeria. It argues for ethical revolution as the antidote to corrupt practices in Nigeria and debates that corruption in Nigeria is made possible by the manipulations of the nation's social institutions by self-interested individuals.

This work divides into nine parts. The first section, the introduction, highlights what to expect in the entire work while section two clarifies what ethics is. Section three discusses moral agency, stating that humans are regarded as moral agents because of the capability of responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Section four conceptualizes ethical revolution as a moral change while section five examines the ethical revolution in Nigeria. Section six explores the historical underpinning of corruption in Nigeria. Section seven looks at certain efforts at achieving ethical revolution undertaken by previous/successive Nigerian governments while section eight examines the reasons for the failure of the efforts. The last part, the conclusion, recapitulates the issues discussed in the work.

A Brief Clarification of Ethics

In everyday language, the term 'ethics' is taken as a synonym of 'morality', or treated as being the same as it, or used as a denotative term for moral issues. Ethics is one of the two theories of value under axiology, the theory that examines the nature, features and criteria by which values are assessed or value judgments are made. The other aspect of axiology is aesthetics, the area of philosophy that studies beauty and works of art, especially how humans evaluate or appreciate them. Being looked at as the same as morality, ethics is regarded as a set of standards or principles for judging human actions as right or wrong. As such, what is ethical refers to a set of social practices, principles, beliefs, traditions, and customs detailing how humans ought to conduct themselves or behave. As a field of human inquiry, ethics is the study of morality, which is the standard of judging human actions as right or wrong (Kant, 1997:7-44; Plato 2008:86-98). It beams searchlight on the assumptions and claims made concerning the principles, standards, beliefs, traditions and customs adopted by people as yardsticks for assessing the rightness or wrongness of human conduct. In its academic sense, ethics has three parts: (i) normative ethics, (ii)

meta-ethics and (iii) descriptive ethics (Tzafestas. 2016:13-15). Being prescriptive, normative ethics deals with norms of human conduct or what is considered morally good or bad. This means that it prescribes, suggests or tells of how humans ought to act or conduct themselves. Metaethics deals with the analysis of the nature, extent, properties and basis of moral concepts and moral values. It equally elaborates on the (inherent) meanings of the concepts used in ethical discussions as well as addresses questions concerning what morality is. Descriptive ethics, which is descriptive, deals with morality as regards non-human agents. Apart from these three, there are applied or infrastructural areas, such as professional ethics or ethics focusing on certain empirical aspects of the existence of human and non-human things. For instance, in its professional usage, ethics is treated as the principles guiding professional conduct. In other applied senses, we have things like animal ethics (Naess, 1980: 313-325), biologics ethics, and so on, which are ethical perspectives adopting ethical theories or principles in their analysis (Sidgwick, 1998: 31-65).

Moral Agency in Ethics

The issue of moral agency is pivotal to ethical discussions. Only human persons are presently regarded as moral agents in ethics. By being called moral agents, philosophers mean that the conduct of persons can be adjudged to be right or wrong while they too are capable of moral judgements. In this sense, there are philosophical debates making distinctions between human beings and persons. Concerning human beings, some thinkers consider humans as non-persons who are neither rational nor reflective. Specifically, Locke (1690: 318) affirmed that someone is considered a person who is “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places.” In this wise, being rational and reflective are considered necessary properties of personhood. By this, they distinguish persons from non-persons. Animals and inanimate objects are, thus, not considered persons while certain categories of individuals that cannot exercise their rational and reflective abilities, due to mental impairment, are equally regarded as non-persons. Locke (1690: 331) also said that a person is, “a forensic term appropriating actions and their merit; and so belongs to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery.” The expression “appropriating actions and they are” obviously refers to judging actions to determine their good sides, which implies a determination of the wrong sides to actions. Also, “intelligent agents capable of law, and happiness and misery” points to being capable of joy and sadness as well as being capable of assessing actions based on moral laws. Going by this, based on the characteristics of being rational and reflective, a person is regarded as a moral agent who can think or reason and act rationally.

Following Locke's description, someone suffering from dementia praecox, senile dementia, or imbecility cannot then be regarded as a person. This kind of viewpoint has formed the basis for determining the accountability of moral agents in the world since moral agents are capable of making moral judgements as well as being held responsible for the consequences of their actions. As such, as exceptions, moral agency is not assigned to children, imbeciles, schizophrenic and mentally deranged persons because certain conditions limit their ability to take decisions well and be responsible for the consequences of such decisions (Vehmas, 2011:158-163). However, with the development of artificial intelligence and advancement in designing robots, questions about moral agency become critically amplified. Apart from the aspect of artificial intelligence, thinkers have been asking whether socially intelligent mammals that are not humans such as dogs, whales, elephants, bottlenose dolphins, apes and chimpanzees, otters, pigs, octopuses, African grey parrots, rats, crows and pigeons are not moral agents on the ground that they take actions and appear to realise that such actions have certain effects (Clement, 2013: 5-12; Vehmas, 2011:156). Though philosophically interesting and thought-provoking, this kind of probe is not part of our concern in this work. However, suffice it to say that viewing moral agents as human agents is good as our working definition in this work as we discuss the ethical revolution in Nigeria. We, thus, hold that all sane Nigerians are moral agents because they can be held responsible for the consequences of their actions.

The Idea of Ethical Revolution

In technological terms, a revolution is the revolving of a certain object at a particular point. Thus, for a thing to revolve is for it has to roll around. However, in political descriptions, a revolution is usually considered a governmental change that involves a lot of violent actions from the people. In this respect, it is the total overhauling of a given political system (Callinicos, 2011: 167-217). Generally, socially, politically, economically, etc, a revolution is the total overhauling of any given system. It is to make a complete change as far as the system is concerned (Burke, 1790: 9-45). When dealing with ethical revolution, we are referring to a moral reorientation or rethinking or paradigm shift that brings about a pleasant moral state that is honourable and promotes mutual assurances and confidence between an individual or a group of individuals and others in society. Thus, an ethical revolution is a total or complete moral change in an individual or a group of individuals as a result of mental reorientation, inward change or change in their thinking patterns, which in turn brings about an overall positive change in society.

Ethical Revolution and Nigeria

The problem of extensive corruption has necessitated an ethical revolution in Nigeria. It is no doubt that Nigeria faces an extensive level of corruption. Over many decades, Nigeria degenerates deeper and deeper into the corruption abyss with the situation looking unsalvageable. Apart from being individualistic, the nation's corruption depth is institutional and endemic (Herod, et al, 1998: 11-12). Nigeria's corruption index is very high. In its 2017 report, Transparency International, a Berlin-based global anti-graft international non-profit agency, rated Nigeria as the 148th least corrupt country in the world out of the 180 countries on the index, which places the country on a score of 27 per cent on the corruption index. In other words, Nigeria was rated very low on the rung of the ladder of the corruption index. This corruption situation has lasted for many decades. In 1997, two decades earlier, Andrew Herod, et. al (1998: 11) grouped Nigeria with the world's most officially corrupt nations. They argued that:

The most spectacular instances of official corruption—misuse of public office for private and/or illegal ends—in recent years have involved states from India to Italy and from Saudi Arabia to South Korea. Long-standing institutionalized kleptocracies include Nigeria, Zaire, and Mexico. Political leaders from Pakistan, Turkey, Japan, Mexico, the United States, and China have fought charges of official corruption in recent years.

This situation of corruption is still the same as today. Unfortunately, despite that there are campaigns or crusades against corruption, because of Nigerians' lack of moral will to fight corruption or act right so that there can be great national development, things worsen by the day. In his "Hypothesis of Corruption", widely regarded as "Jason's Law of Corruption", Onyegbaduo (1988) claims that "The decibel of an average Nigerian's public outcry is directly proportional to his distance from the opportunity to do exactly what he condemns". Thus, the "difference between many a vociferous, sanctimonious and pontificating Nigerian and the villainous, itchy-fingered kleptomaniac is probably the absence of the opportunity to steal." Then, he summed up that "In all probability, should the opportunity occur, yesterday's moral crusader is more likely to crumble and disappear under the weight of corruption." Things have not improved since he made the observations in the late 1980s. Considering the above arguments, the question of how to get Nigerians who are also moral agents to undergo ethical transformation or change subsists.

The Historical Underpinning of Corruption in Nigeria

Nigeria's corruption has many causes that can be traced centuries back. Through the centuries, Nigeria's different tribes were either united or divided along socio-cultural,

political and trade lines. Progressively, the conflicts among them were amplified by their involvement in the trans-Sahara and trans-Atlantic slave trades, colonization and amalgamation by the British. Underlined by these situations, the causes of the nation's corruption may be listed as follows. First are the pre-independence colonial policies. The colonial masters' adoption of policies that inflamed tribal sentiments, heightened the drive for competition and engendered strife diminished other-regarding virtues in Nigeria. For instance, being based on the adoption of different ruling methods within the same nation, which favoured some groups of people above others, the British colonial indirect rule policies created a dichotomy between the peoples of Northern and Southern Nigeria for many years, breeding mistrust among the peoples (Mamdani, 2000: 145-150; Mamdani, 1996: 43-45). In this wise, any group with opportunities act corruptly to favour its people and region without minding the interests of others. Thus, favouritism and nepotism are the order of the day.

Second, there were unresolved colonial (pre-independence) issues worsening the idea of national mistrust. In the past, conflicting nationalist ideologies and orientations between different youth groups in Nigeria led to post-independence conflicts that graduated into Civil War. Thus, the activities of various ethnic nationalist groups, such as the *Egbe Omo Oodua* and the Arewa Consultative Forum (supported by the colonial masters), once polarised the country (Achebe, 2012:43-65; Falola and Heaton, 2008: xxv, 6-9) as the different peoples attempted to engage their different methods of doing things. Besides, the desire for resource allocation and other benefits led to the census conflict of 1963, a corrupt attempt at favouring a tribe. From the census conflict to the political alignments that divided the Western part of Nigeria to the first and second military coups to the thirty months of civil war, incessant takeover and counter-coups, to the democratic era, various forms of corrupt practices and allegations of corruption have prevailed, with the nation's records getting worse each year (Achebe, 2012:101-253). In both the military and civilian regimes, individuals exploit various opportunities to loot the nation's treasury, putting the resources more into private pockets than using them for the common good of the people (Egunlusi, 2018: 247). Massive loot by both soldiers and civilians is still being located in countries where they are kept by former military and civilian rulers.

Nigeria Government's Attempts at Realizing Ethical Revolution

Over many years, long before the categorisation by Herod and his team of researchers that Nigeria is part of the "long-standing institutionalized kleptocracies", either hypocritically or sincerely, Nigerian governments made various efforts to invoke the idea of ethical

revolution and give the people new orientations about how to live meaningfully and imbue good moral standards. These numerous efforts include a. the Ethical Revolution programme under Alhaji Shehu Sagari (1979-1983) (Nwosumba. 2016:45); b. the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) under Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985) (Nwaodu, Adam and Okereke, 2014: 159); c. the Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) (later renamed National Orientation Agency or NOA) created by the military regime of General Ibrahim B. Babangida (1985-1993); d. the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) by Gen Sanni Abacha; e. Human Rights Violations Investigations Commission (popularly known as Oputa Panel) headed by Justice Chukwudifu Oputa under General Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime (1999-2017) (Oputa, 2002); f. the Heart of Africa Foundation and (g) the anti-graft agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), etc., founded by General Olusegun Obasanjo; and (h). the Rebranding Project executed by Professor Dora Akunyili under the Musa Ya'radua and Goodluck Jonathan Regimes (2007-2015) (Amadi, 2017: 1-3).

Ethical Revolution Programmes in Nigeria: The Failings

Unfortunately, many of the programmes directed at achieving ethical revolution merely involve paying lip service to the eradication of corruption in Nigeria. For instance, organs/agencies like the EFCC and ICPC that are established to combat corruption have been alleged to have been used by the governments in power to witch-hunt their political opponents while those who were genuinely guilty claimed to have been witch-hunted for various reasons in attempts to weep up sentiments and gain public trust (Nwosumba. 2016:50-51). However, paradoxically, it is obvious that all the programmes aimed at ethical revolution in Nigeria, to combat the prevalent corruption, failed because of the same corruption they were instituted to tackle. In other words, extensive corruption within the systems or the institutions designed to fight them rendered the corruption attempts futile and, in some cases, with the individuals at the helms of affairs in those institutions being discredited for being corrupt themselves (Ibietan, 2013: 45; Ifidion, 2002. 116). Thus, even though people talk about eradicating corruption, their conducts deny that they take the efforts at achieving this seriously or consider them as important. Considering this, even though the efforts were usually backed up with good paper works in most cases, the implementations of what is written as the procedures for achieving a corruption-free national system are fraught with many irregularities that are also dominated by corrupt practices. In the past, there were talks of the detection of administrative violations of 'due process' as a means of holding corrupt politicians responsible for the consequences of

their actions of looting state treasury, but that has changed. 'Due process' has become the tool of the politicians to loot heavily or extract national resources into private pockets to realize political strategies, live large at the expense of the people governed and calculate how to secure the future for their unborn generations. In all these, consideration of benefits does not centre on the self-interest of the masses but the political class and their cronies who use the people as willing tools to realize both their self-interest and selfish interests. As discussed by Onuigbo and Eme (2015: 26),

The process of extracting resources and public money is used for power preservation and power extension purposes and usually takes the form of favouritism and patronage politics. It includes favouritism and politically motivated distribution of financial and material inducements, benefits, advantages, and spoils. Techniques include money and material favours to build political loyalty and political support. Power-holders can pay off rivals and opposition and secure a parliamentary majority. By giving preferences to private companies they can get party and campaign funds, and by paying off the governmental institutions of checks and control they can stop investigations and audits and gain judicial impunity. Furthermore, by buying loyal decisions from election commissions and by buying votes they can secure their re-election.

As further argued by Eze (2015: 235), citing Olusegun Obasanjo, "...until 1999, Nigeria had practically institutionalized corruption as the foundation of governance. Hence institutions of society easily decayed to unprecedented proportions as opportunities were privatized by the powerful. This process was accompanied, as to be expected, by the intimidation of the judiciary, the subversion of due process, the manipulation of existing laws and regulations, the suffocation of civil society, and the containment of democratic values and institutions. Power became nothing but a means of accumulation and subversion as productive initiatives were abandoned for purely administrative and transactional activities. The legitimacy and stability of the country became compromised as citizens began to devise extra-legal and informal ways of survival." Unfortunately, apart from the fact that the situation remains the same, the above reveals the extent of the insincerity or lip service of power holders and executors of the decisions that cripple the national anti-corruption agenda.

Essential Paths to Realizing Ethical Revolution and Development in Nigeria

From the foregoing, certain things must be taken seriously if there will be an effective ethical revolution that will ensure lasting development in Nigeria. First, there is a need for a comprehensive moral education (Plato, 2008: 86-98). Since Nigerians are moral agents,

they should be tutored on the essentiality and mastery of good conduct. This education, which should be genuine, should be through intensive campaigns involving the print, information and electronic media and physical enlightenment and training in schools, markets, etc. It is common knowledge that people often act corruptly and contrary to the laws of their nations when they are untrained, uneducated and uninformed about what their societies consider moral and as the criteria of morality that can eliminate corrupt practices and uplift the standard of their countries in the comity of nations. People act corruptly when allowed to operate by their standards of morality against the common good of their societies.

Second, legislative acts are required to fill the gaps that people can exploit to act corruptly in the nation. The lawmakers must address the problem by enacting laws that are driven by the common interest which the people can easily understand and obey (Simm, 2011: 556-559). Third, good and virile legal systems must be instituted to administer justice and hold people responsible for the consequences of their actions and punish offenders without treating anyone as untouchable (Miller, 1976: 22; Fox, 2000: 1-13). For instance, the idea of plea bargaining, which is adopted only to favour the members of the Nigerian ruling class, in which some steal a very huge amount of money and were told to give back a fraction of this without complete recovery of the loot with the interests and produces emanating from them, harden Nigerians against developing the mind for accountability. Thus, as this trend thrives, everybody, especially the upcoming politicians and other members of society, considers it good to steal from the national treasury since only a fraction will be required to be reinstated while the offender goes scot-free. In contrast to this trend, the poor ones that stole things as little as chickens spend many years in prison for their offences while the big thieves walk free or were allowed to run their jail terms concurrently for a few weeks to a few months. Unfortunately, it is common for the governments under which they commit those offences or new governments to give them state pardons for political reasons while the poor bear the blemish of stealing all their years, without pardon (Udofa, 2018:113-115). This situation has heightened scampering for political offices to be relevant such that the spate of corruption builds up on daily basis with new schemes being adopted. If there is no strict, strong and effective judicial system, the trends may never be curbed. Proper judicial procedures should be ensured that can lead to confiscation and recovery of all ill-gotten wealth rather than entertaining the idea of plea bargaining.

Fourth, the government must develop a good and enviable system of rewards. By making provisions for rewards for those who do well, and rewarding them, good moral standards will be promoted. As such, the nation's national honours should not be given to those who have negatively affected the development of the nation, such as the looters of its treasury.

Holders of national honours who violate national trust through corruption should have such revoked. Pardons should not also be given to corrupt people (Udofa. 2018:114). The nation's laws on pardons should be rigid enough to allow for proper scrutiny by those in government and the public to ensure that an erstwhile offender, who once harmed the nation, has completely reformed and deserves a pardon.

Fifth, people in Nigeria's governments, at all levels, must be ready to keep oaths of allegiance to (defend) the constitution and implement its policies without discrimination or prejudice. Sixth, the nation's anti-graft agencies should not run based on sentiments. As such, their leaders should be chosen men and women of proven integrity who can truly stand against corrupt practices. Seventh, appointments to government offices should be by merit rather than political reasons (Pojman, 1997:549-553; Lamont, 1994: 45-63 and Daniels, 1978: 207-233). Appointing politicians that donated heavily towards political campaigns or helped political office holders to get to power as members of cabinets or heads of governmental agencies is a means of perpetuating corrupt practices. For many years, this is the order of the day. On arrival at those offices, their first agenda is usually to recover or recoup the expenses incurred in putting their cronies into power by all means, heavily violating accountability, public interests or the common good. Every nation that develops does so by committing the things that make for its development into the hands of technocrats and competent people who can achieve great progress. The bane of the Nigerian fight against corruption, in its desire to achieve development, is its inability to allow competent hands to run its economy and national policies. Rather, power-drunk and corrupt politicians who know next to nothing about development are put at the helm of affairs. They, thus, become square holes in round pegs and drive the nation hard into the abyss of corruption and underdevelopment rather than help it to be corruption-free and well-developed (Eegunlusi, 2018: 245-248). Given this scenario, there is no way proper individualistic and national development can be ensured. The nation needs to block all loopholes that promote corrupt practices to ensure that all individuals and the nation at large develop properly, with mutual trust enhanced among the citizenry and national development actualized in the interest of all.

Conclusion

This work discussed ethical revolution and the theoretical and practical ways of achieving it in Nigeria. It debated that ethical revolution cannot be achieved in Nigeria by mere lip service but that the nation can only combat its state of prevalent corruption through a complete mental reorientation matched with appropriate strategies, actions, effective state

policies and virile legal systems. This is when corruption can be well combated to ensure that the nation becomes a good place for all, through promoting the welfare of all and ensuring great national and individual development. Besides, it suggested essential steps that can be taken to ensure that ethical revolution is achieved so that Nigeria can properly develop.

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