

Democracy, Corruption and Legitimacy Crisis in Nigeria under the Obasanjo Administration

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Abstract

Democracy is today the most fashionable system of government the world over. This is because of its avowed commitment to democratic ethos of participation on the part of the people and accountability to the people by the elected leaders. This paper examines in a historical and analytical manner how wanton corruption in a polity can engender legitimacy crisis and in turn vitiates democratic efforts. It argues that the nature of the formation of the state and in particular the amalgamation of 1914 smacks of the fundamental corruption as the bane of Nigeria's legitimacy crisis before and indeed under the Obasanjo administration. It concludes that there is the need to fundamentally restructure Nigeria along the spirit and letters of federalism. Unless this is done successive regimes in Nigeria cannot escape the challenges of legitimation.

Key Words: Democracy, Corruption, Legitimation, Legitimacy Crisis

Introduction

In its classical form, democracy presupposes the rule by the people. It is a system through which the ruled confers legitimacy on the ruler. It is premised on the principles of representation, participation and accountability. Democracy implies a system of government in which every individual participates in the process of governance either maximally as a member of the majority, or minimally as part of the minority (Owolabi; 1999: 6). In any true democracy, the right of the people to participate in the process of governance must therefore be emphasized.

Apart from the aforementioned, regular, periodic, free and fair elections, the existence of the rule of law, a party system, tolerance of opposition and the guaranteeing of fundamental human rights, are the very constitutive elements of any truly democratic systems. In Nigeria however, flowing from the violent creation of the colonial state and the refusal of the political class to transform it at independence, the patron-client politics that is endemic within the polity makes the conduct of elections, neither free nor fair, they are not only massively rigged with impunity, fundamental human rights are abused, opposition is not in any way tolerated, while individuals and groups play the politics of winner takes all, the loser is scorned and loses everything even sometimes his life.

The consequence of all these is the gradual erosion of the confidence of the people in the political system, especially when corruption in its entire ramification is fingered as the cause(s) of such erosion. This, to say the least has serious implication for democracy and the legitimacy of government within the state. The aim of this paper is to examine how corruption vitiates democracy and in turn engenders legitimacy crisis. Our tentative assumption is that the higher



the degree of corruption in any society the higher the legitimacy crisis prevalent in such society since corruption thrives on the perversion and subversion of established norms, values, rules, regulations, and procedures.

The rest of the paper is therefore divided into five parts. Part one, deals with the theoretical and conceptual overview, part two, discusses the consequences of corruption, part three, examines the Nigerian State, Corruption and the Legitimacy Crisis and its implication for political and economic development, part four, takes a look at what is to be done, while the last part deals with the conclusion.

Theoretical and Conceptual Overview

Theoretically speaking, there appears to be no consensus among scholars on what democracy actually is; and two reasons have been adduced for this. The first is that democracy has become another word for political decency and civilization. It has become a moral concept of some sort or even an honorific title. Put differently, most regimes lay claim to democracy not because they are inherently democratic or committed to its ideals but because it is fashionable or expedient to do so. In this instance, it is used for regime survival.

The second reason is because of its ideological connotation. In this wise, the ideological struggle between the socialist and the capitalist has generated a situation where regimes are conferred with the democratic title not because of its participatory tendency but mainly because of its ideological persuasion (Owolabi; 1999: 4). In spite of this problem of conceptualization, Eghosa Osaghae (1992:41) argues that

-----all versions of democracy share one fundamental objective: how to govern society in such a way that power actually belongs to the people. In this connection, there is a general acceptance of the classical elements of democracy as enunciated by the liberal-capitalist and even hard-core Marxist especially now that the strongholds of socialism are succumbing to pluralistic pressures.

The point Osaghae is making is that fundamentally, the concern of democracy and its proponents is hinged on the need to establish government on the popular sovereignty of the people as against the rule by a few privileged and the nobles in the society. In conceptualizing democracy, the original essence and realities of democracy cannot and must not be thrown overboard because the participation of the people in matters that affects them lies at the very root of democracy. However, because of the complexities of modern day government and the size of the polity which does not approximate the Greek- City state of Athens, where the idea of popular sovereignty originated, compels participation by representation. It must also be added that representation without accountability to the electorate cannot guarantee the end result of democracy which is the ultimate good life for all within the polity.

Callaghy, (1986:42) in his own submission, describes democracy as a “fragile creature dependent on the slow consolidation of legitimacy and the development of political culture which supports the rule of the game. It can easily be killed not just by tradition or economic factors but by the conscious action of political agents” the emphasis here is that, democracy needs the people to survive, and for it to be successfully practiced the people must be involved in the process of governance. This is the only way to guarantee the survival of democracy.





In a more rigorous conceptualization of democracy (Solaro; 2001:165) avers that the essential idea of democracy is that the people have the rights to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their action. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens. He further identified four faces of democracy which included popular sovereignty, rights and liberties, democratic values and economic democracy. In order for democracy to thrive Solaro (2001:166-188) argues that it must rest on three fundamental principles which are the; *the rule of law*, which implies that the power of the state must be limited by law and that no one is above the law; *inclusion*, means that democratic rights and freedom must be for everyone. They must not be denied to specifically targeted elements of the population, such as women or minority groups and *equality*, means that democratic rights and freedom must be accorded to everyone on an equal basis. No group in the society should have fewer democratic privileges than other groups. The critical question here is that do any of these principles apply to the kind of democracy we practice in Nigeria?

Broadly speaking however, two variants of democracy are discernable. These are the Direct and Representative variants of democracy. The direct form of democracy is a situation where all adult citizens participate directly in making authoritative political decision for their community, while the representative form ensures the citizens participation and governmental accountability through indirect methods such as elections. It must be pointed out that representative democracy is the most popular and widely practiced variant of democracy in the world today.

Meanwhile, for elections to be properly conducted in a representative democracy, political parties play a very cardinal role, this is why Robert Dahl (1989; 221) argues that three essential conditions are necessary for democracy to function and these are; a) extensive competition by contestants including individuals, groups or parties for government; b) political participation that provides the choice for the electorate to select candidates in a free and fair elections; and, c) civil and political liberties that enable the citizens to express themselves without fear of punishment.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that for a society to be truly democratic it must imbibe the principles of participation, accountability, political openness, transparency, freedom, equality, respect for human life and fundamental human rights.

Legitimacy refers to the basis for, the rationale and, the seal of or the acceptance of authority. This is in most times constitutional or legal. Max Weber developed the popular ideal-type of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal types of authority and legitimacy (Onuoha; 1999:39). In the same vein, Ninalowo (1999: 8-11) identified the Constitutional Enacted Legitimation, the Extra-Constitutional Mode of Legitimation and the Socio-Political Mode of Legitimation. He asserts that 'the constitutionally enacted legitimation-producing process stipulates in no unmistakable terms, the rights, and privileges of various actors within the state and civil society'. It can therefore be argued that the conflict that ensues between the rights and privileges of various actors within the state and civil society is at the very root of the legitimacy crisis in Nigeria.



Extended further, Lucian Pye (1971: 136) defined legitimacy crisis as a breakdown in the constitutional structure and performance of government that arises out of differences over the proper nature of authority for the system. A legitimacy crisis can thus take the form of a change in the fundamental structure or character of a government, a change in the source from which it claims to derive its ultimate authority or a change in the ideals it professes to represent (cf. Onuoha; 1999: 41)

Four major causes or sources of legitimacy are discernable in the extant literature on legitimation or legitimacy crisis. Onuoha (1999:41-42) specifically identified conflicting or inadequate basis for authority as one source of crisis. This is a situation where religious or primordial loyalties are in conflict with that of the state to the extent that people reject the authority of the state. The second source of crisis occurs when there is an excessive and un-institutionalized competition for political power. This is a situation in which the competition for power becomes in the words of Ake (1996:7) a situation where;

The winners in the competition win everything, the losers lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing and nothing, better than winning. Thus, everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics which does not know legitimacy or legality only expediency. This politics is not conducive to political stability, the rule of law or to democracy, because it is constituted as warfare (Ake;1996, p.7)

The third source of legitimacy crisis arises when leaders formulate ideologies in order to get to power but fail to meet the objectives. The failure to redeem such promises will raise questions that border on legitimacy. The fourth and final source of legitimacy crisis “is the dysfunctional socialization processes”. The socialization content during decolonization process in most African states becomes relevant here.

However, it must be noted that all crisis whether of identity, participation, penetration, or distribution ultimately culminate in a problem of legitimacy, because in one sense, all crises raise questions about legitimacy. In this connection, how does corruption vitiate these lofty democratic ideals? Can democracy thrive in a corrupt environment? In what ways can corruption engender legitimacy crisis? Just like the concept of democracy, the concept of corruption has been viewed from different perspectives; however, in concrete terms, “corruption or corrupt behavior, involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit. It therefore involves the perversion of rules or a change from good to bad. The Wrapper’s Collins Dictionary of Sociology (1999:88), defines “corruption as the abandonment of expected standards of behavior by those in authority for the sake of unsanctioned personal advantage”. But for the purpose of this paper, the definition of corruption by Khan becomes very apt,

Corruption is an act which 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 (Khan, 1996: 12)

There exist quite a number of hypothesis and perspectives on the nature, causes and consequences of corruption in most countries particularly African countries. Scholars have

analyzed the concept from political, sociological and economic perspective in a bid to understand the root cause(s) of the dreaded social problem. The explanation of corruption from economic point of view focuses majorly on the idea of “rent-seeking hypothesis” which is essentially a situation where public officials have wide discretion in allocating scarcity of goods and/or services due to either artificial or natural means (Bhagwati, 1982, Mauro, 1996, Mullei, 2001: 44-45). Paolo Mauro (1996, p. 16) in his contributions argued that;

Since the ultimate source of rent-seeking behavior is the availability of rents, corruption is likely to occur where restrictions and government intervention lead to the presence of such excessive profits. Examples include trade restrictions (such as tariffs and import quotas), favourist industrial policies (such as subsidies and tax deductions), price controls, multiple exchange rate practices and foreign exchange allocation schemes, and government – controlled provision of credit

Campos and Edgardo (1991) identifies two different types of “rent-seeking”. There are “Competitive rent-seeking behavior and “cronyism”. Cronyism is a more economically expensive form of rent-seeking that is common in many developing countries. Cronyism is a situation whereby the state-owned monopoly enterprises are captured by favored elite which sometimes spell doom for such countries. In the same vein, OlasupoAkano (2005:70) observed that the nature of economic policies of government could generate or escalate the problem of corruption. Viewing corruption from liberal perspective he maintains that wide spread corruption may be impelled by the nature of the economic policies that are not market-oriented or market-friendly.

Olopoenia (1998:21) situates the concept of corruption within the context of bargaining for political power as the product of an exchange relation in the process of a competitive power contest. He notes that corruption is fundamentally a “patron-client relationship” with the state playing the role of “patron” who allocates rights to private agents (clients), while the share from the rents is given back to the state. In this kind of relationship, where “political settlement” becomes the norm, the balance of power may produce two types of patron client arrangements. These are – patrimonial political settlement and clientelist political settlement.

Of importance to this analysis is the clientelist political settlement, here, property rights (allocated) by the state are weakly-defined and are contested by well-organized social groups who are able to challenge the rights being enforced by the state. In this instance, the basis of legitimacy of the state is weak as a result of challenges from its clients and their social groups.

From the social perspective, the analysis of corruption is premised on the fact that it is a social problem embedded within the social structure of the society. Corruption is viewed as a violation of moral code or normative standard within the society. Similarly, Osoba (1996) opines that “corruption is an anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermine the authorities to improve the living conditions of the people” (Osoba, 1996:20).

In his own contribution, Olurode (2005), observes that corruption becomes endemic when “the rising expectation is profound and many have become more money and materially



conscious”. He blames this, on the faulty socialization processes in which individual abandoned the norms, the generally approved means of realizing the valued societal goals but seeks other means (perversion of the norms) that is easier for them. He however, notes that:

In these days in Nigeria, most have been socialized into believing that unless they bribe their ways through any socio-economic or political transaction, the desired goals would be elusive (Olurode, 2005, p.24)

In line with Olurode’s postulation, Ndiulor (1999) observes that the “obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation of (ill-gotten wealth) by the general public are among the reasons for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria” (Ndiulor, 1999: 30). Meanwhile, the political perspective on the nature and causes of corruption focuses on the concomitant effects of the failure of the state to fulfill the expectations and aspirations of the masses. In a situation of enduring structural inequalities in the distribution mechanism or reward system there is tendencies for a drift to a state of normlessness and rulelessness or systemic anarchy” (Merton 1968). It centres on the inability of the state to transform input into expected output”, thereby failing to meet the rising expectations and aspirations of the people. As noted in the Newsletter of the Political Finance Project of Socio-Economic Rights Initiative , SERI (2006) Political corruption appears to be the fountain, the source and the unmovable mover of other corruption and once it is allowed to flourish, there will be extreme difficulty in tackling other manifestations of corruption.

The forms or the nature of political system and the type of regime equally determine the dimension and the intensity of corruption. It has been observed that ‘the nature of administration and tenure or “length of tenure” and uncertainties about the tenure (possibility of a counter coup de’tat) could have accounted for the massive pillage and plunder of public treasury under different military regimes in Africa. (Johnston, 1997, Olson, 1993, Cooledge and Pose-Ackman, 1997).

Similarly, apprehension of elected politicians about whether or not (and how soon) a military take-over of government would truncate their tenure in office, particularly in an environment where electoral competition is very intense, violent and expensive, drives them into political corruption.

In Nigeria, however, the character of the state and its principal actors’ general belief about the use of political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth and socio-economic status, in a hopelessly bad economy account for the brutal and intense struggle for the control of political power. It has therefore sustained corruption, particularly in high places.

The Nigerian State, Corruption and the Legitimacy Crisis

There appears to be an emerging tendency among scholars to down play the character of state in the understanding of socio-political phenomenon in post-colonial social formations. The position of this paper is that as long as the state remains the defining character of any society, its origin, and orientation, characteristics, attributes, and its degree of autonomy becomes a critical *desideratum* in analyzing, understanding, and proffering solutions to the myriads of problems



afflicting these social formations. It is in this connection, that the nature of the Nigerian society and the character of state become very relevant in understanding the nexus between corruption and legitimacy crisis.

However, the Nigerian state can best be described as the violent creation of her colonial master; it was therefore a law and order state, whose primary interest was the exploitation of the resources of the colonized people. In doing this, they deliberately and callously disarticulated and distorted the indigenous modes of production of the economy, forcefully integrated the economy into the world's capitalist system as a weak and dependent partner, and created a national bourgeoisie lacking in vision with no productive base.

The elite and political class created by this process, found it convenient to inherit the exploitative and oppressive apparatuses of the state at independence, without any agenda for its transformation. This provided a veritable platform for the capture of the state as a means of survival. How then does this character of state engender corruption and the yet to be settled legitimacy crisis? Would Nigeria have fared better in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) if the character of state had been otherwise?

It is in this connection, that this paper argues that, corruption is embedded in the origin of the Nigerian state right from the amalgamation of the Southern and the Northern protectorates to form what is today known as Nigeria. Familoni (2005:39) submitted that it is political and administrative corruption to merge two geographical entities that would otherwise have nothing in common.

It is therefore not surprising that shortly after political independence, corruption was nurtured and elevated to state 'virtue' permeating the entire fabric of our national life such that there was no regard for societal norms cherished in these societies before the advent of colonialism. As indicated earlier, there was the deliberate disarticulation of societal values with a view to entrenching an amoral value system akin to the one prevalent in Europe. This resulted in a situation which, Ekeh (1975) describes as, the disjuncture between the state and society under colonial rule, (which) prevails in the public realm, and this gives rise to corruption, abuse and exploitation of public office to serve private ends, ethnicity and reliance on patron-client networks for legitimacy.

The point being made here is that the state in post-colonial social formations and indeed in Nigeria grew apart from the society and was made to serve the interest of the colonial masters. It was thus related to as an "alien" institution whose well-being they care less about. This perhaps explains why when political office holders embezzle public funds; they do so with impunity, believing that what they have stolen is their own share of the national cake which belongs to an imaginary "alien".

Another character of the Nigerian state with serious implication for our analysis is the nature of political contestation for power occasioned by the fact that the political elite and the ruling class had no productive base; they therefore relied on the state as the platform for securing their material wellbeing and believing that access to the state is access to stupendous wealth. This is compounded by the *rentier* nature of the state particularly after the discovery of oil with its devastating consequences on the people especially those in the oil producing areas.



Electoral competition is therefore, played at a zero-sum level without any regard for the rules of the game. The controversies usually generated by disputed electoral outcomes since independence to date with serious allegation of monumental political corruption manifesting in electoral rigging (stuffing of ballot boxes, over bloated voting register, special treatment of voters and election officials, disappearance or destruction of ballot boxes, etc); distortion or doctoring of results; lack of discipline in the form, spirit and implementation of the election process; and excessive monetization of politics in general (IDEA: 2001) are all at the root of the legitimacy crisis we are all witnessing today.

This crude nature of political contestation in Nigeria also account for the series of violence which attended electoral outcomes thereby providing justification for military incursion into politics. Unfortunately, however, the military has not fared any better in correcting the societal ills upon which they seized power. Rather, the Nigerian military especially under the regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha, instituted corruption in all its ramifications. Corruption was elevated and treated as if it has become the 'fundamental and directive principle of state policy'. This without gainsaying has further deepened the crisis of legitimacy under the military.

Another crisis of legitimacy occasioned by political corruption was the criminal annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which was adjudged, the freest and fairest election in the annals of Nigerian politics by General Babangida. This singular act, driven by greed and personal ambition of the then military head of state thwarted the political aspirations of the people through the expression of their popular will. It goes without saying, that actions like this negate the principles of democracy as elucidated in the first section of this paper.

It is against this background that the people looked forward to the 1999 election with a lot of hope, that at least for once the legitimacy crisis which has trailed all successive regimes would be permanently settled. Unfortunately, again, this hope was dashed, going by the wanton allegation of electoral irregularities and monumental corruption which trailed the election. This has affected governmental policies and increased the alienation of the people from governance during the first tenure of the then president General Olusegun Obasanjo whose mandate, it can be argued was not derived from the people. The regime was therefore, unaccountable to the people. Also, the seeming imposition of successive head of state by the outgoing one has often exacerbated legitimacy crisis in Nigeria.

The scenarios depicted above rather than abate, became worse during the 2003 and 2007 elections. Indeed, agencies of the state such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Police, even the Judiciary and other relevant apparatuses of the state, that ought to be unbiased, became active collaborators in the colossal political corruption which attended the outcomes of the election.

The current instability in Anambra, Ekiti, Oyo, Bayelsa, and Plateau states, the serious corruption allegation between the former President and his Vice, and the series of shameful corruption scandals involving senior members of his administration and Peoples Democratic Party government are all eloquent testimonies to the above assertion and clear manifestation of legitimacy crisis in Nigeria.



Although, recognizing the evils of corruption and its destructive effects on the nation, the former President, General Olusegun Obasanjo vowed in his inaugural speech on May 29, 1999 to tackle corruption in Nigeria, he said inter alia that: Corruption will be tackled head-on. No society can achieve its full potentials if it allows corruption to become the full blown cancer it has become in Nigeria; and he vowed that, there will be no sacred cows in his attempt to stampout corruption in the society.

Contrarily, the several accusations and counter accusations between the president and his Vice President, Atiku Abubakar and the latter's involvement in the Halliburton scandal negates the above promise and this seriously eroded the legitimacy of the regime. For instance, Obasanjo himself was accused of corruption, abuse of office and diversion of public funds for his personal aggrandizement and private use. In specific terms, Vice President claimed that:

There is a big linkage between Chief Obasanjo and Otunba Fasawe contrary to the claims the President has made. There are cheques worth over 100 million Naira issued to IBAD Nigeria Limited from Fasawe's MOFAS' TIB accounts. There are also payments made to the Obasanjo Africa Leadership Forum and to Obasanjo Campaign Organization (Tell; 2006:29)

From the foregoing analysis, it has been clearly established that the character of the Nigerian state breeds and encouraged corruption which in turn vitiates democracy by the alienation of the people from governance, lack of accountability on the part of the ruling class and the inexplicable docility on the part of the people.

Our contention is that unless the people (civil society) are genuinely and consciously mobilized against corruption, the activities of government agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Other Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) may not yield the desired positive results. Their seemingly unimpressive records support this assertion. According to Nuhu Ribadu, former Chairman of EFCC, who was removed under controversial circumstances,

(Only) 82 persons have been convicted for Corruption, MoneyLaundering, Advance Free Fraud, Pipe Line Vandalism and Terrorism, with some of them involving top Government functionaries. While, ICPC Recorded 68 cases for which 144 persons were charged to court for various offences between 2001 and July This Year. (Tell; 2006:31)

This miserable record is certainly unacceptable given the country's unenviable record as one of the most corrupt country in the world. What then are the consequences of corruption and how does this engender legitimacy crisis in Nigeria? It is the answer to this all-important question that is the focus of the next section of this paper.

Consequences of Corruption on the State and Implications for Legitimacy crisis

The socio-economic impact of corruption is far reaching. Corruption reduces the quality of public infrastructure and services, thereby affects the quality of life of the people (Mauro,



1997). The kick-backs and other forms of bribe taking particularly in unorganized corruption will equally affect the “private investment and economic growth. It also has negative effects on growth, reduced level of investment, because it adds to investment risk” (Lipset and Lenz, 2000, Mauro, 1979, Dike, 2002).

Corruption equally distorts the composition of government expenditure and thereby seriously affects the economic performance of a particular administration. “Corrupt politicians may be expected to spend more public resources on those items on which it is easier to extract large bribes and keep them secret” (Mauro, 1997). Large and not too easy to manage projects, usually referred to as white elephant projects, such as National Stadium, Airports, unnecessary road-dualization or highway, rail-road etc. make fraud, kick-backs, over invoicing etc. easier and rewarding.

The effect of corruption on the nature of underdevelopment was aptly reflected in the UNDP report, as stated inter alia:

...corruption in government increases poverty in many ways. Most directly, it diverts resources to the rich people, who can afford to pay bribes, and away from the poor people, who cannot. But it also skews decisions in favor of capital intensive enterprises (where the pickings are greater) and away from labor intensive activities more likely to benefit poverty. It reduces tax revenues and thus the resources available for public services ... more generally, corruption eats away at the fabric of public life leading to increased lawlessness and undermining social and political stability ... (UNDP 1997: 101)

Corruption has also been described as perversion and debasement of public morality. It has almost become a mode of life to the extent that children demand reward before they can take part in household chores. In her work, Elizabeth Drew, (1999:61) asserts that corruption “has led good people to do things that are morally questionable, if not reprehensible”. The effect of corruption on the political orientation, political culture, particularly, the money culture in politics globally cannot be over-emphasized. Drew, (1999), observes that “it has changed the employment patterns in Washington, it has transformed polities; and it has subverted values”. From the empirical observation, scholars have observed that “on average, countries that are more corrupt tend to be more political unstable” (Mauro, 1996).

Also, corruption had made politics a big business in Nigeria, because anything spent to secure a political office is regarded as an investment; where by the people feel that they must be bribed before casting their votes. It has-equally affected the electoral process and election funding in Nigeria.

Corruption erodes the civil and political right of the masses. It compounds the problem of low level of political participation and encourages political apathy, as a result of disappointment, frustration and violence that normally attend electoral fraud and political corruption that characterized every transfer of political power. Furthermore, it subverts the democratic principle by denying the masses political authority or sovereignty. It is only the rich who could afford the expensive electoral competition, could stand for elective offices. Corruption widens the gab between the state and the civil society. The purportedly elected



officials are not the true representatives of the people as the election will not reflect the choice of the people.

The main instrument of hegemonic oligarchy by elite in Nigeria is corruption. In all the political parties, the zoning of political offices, even before the election, reflects the lack of regard for the preferences and choice of the people. For instance, Obasanjo had been “appointed president”, even before he was released from prison, despite the fact that PDP lost the election in his home state. The overall effect of corruption on democratic system is devastating. It denies the people all opportunities, rights and privileges offered by democratic governance, in terms of full participation in governance, sustainable development and eventually reaping what is called the dividends of democracy.

While at the same time, corruption makes it impossible for government to be accountable to the people. Consequently, it inevitably leads to unending crisis of legitimacy, and as a result the state relies primarily on violence in order to maintain laws and order as well as implement policies and programs of government. This confirms the assumption “that the more legitimacy a government enjoys the less violence it employs in the running of the affairs of the state”

What is to Be Done

The legitimacy crisis in Nigeria stems from the character of the state and the ruling elites. It is in this connection that we call for the total transformation of the state beyond its present decadent, dependent, irresponsible and unresponsive nature. One way of doing this, is the democratic renegotiation of the forced amalgamation of 1914 which is the very foundation of political corruption. This would also eradicate the warfare like political contestation which has been the bane of our democratic enterprise since independence.

Another issue to be addressed is the dependent capitalist and the monolithic nature of the economy, which breeds unemployment, underdevelopment and poverty. The rentier nature of the economy also breeds corruption since the polity receives the bulk of her revenue from rents and not from taxes. This makes accountability difficult on the part of government and increases the docility on the part of the people. Indeed, if the huge sums of money embezzled by public office holders were to come from the taxes paid by the people, it is doubtful whether our people would remain as docile and indifferent as they seem over the years. We therefore call for the immediate diversification of the economy with a lot of emphasis on agriculture. This would provide employment and stem the tide of poverty in the country.

There is the need to inculcate the right democratic ethos in our people from infancy. Cardinal among this democratic ethos is; the principles of tolerance, political participation, accountability, respect for the dignity of human life and the rule of law. It is therefore suggested that this be included in the curriculum of primary and post primary schools throughout the country. The society and indeed the people must be alive to their responsibility of holding public office holders accountable for the stewardship in office. The people must shun political apathy, docility, indifference and crass indulgence. In the words of Ake (1996: 16)

We are submissive to those who have power over us as we are oppressive of those who are weaker than we are. We corrupt those who are stronger by allowing them every indulgence, including the liberty to abuse us. We have no will to resist power, our





inclination is to worship it. We think nothing of submitting to all manner(s) of indignity to get those in power to notice us or throw us some crumbs. Even without crumbs, we still ache with desire to please them.

It is in this direction, that we suggest a vibrant civil society that can stimulate political consciousness with a view to enthroning a legitimate, independent, strong, responsive, responsible and effective state. Finally, transparency in governmental functions, activities and all financial transactions is a critical desideratum for the enthronement of sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper examines the legitimacy crisis in Nigeria. It argues that corruption vitiates democracy in that it denies the people all the opportunities, rights, and privileges offered by good and democratic governance and in turn, erodes the authority of government. It manifests in legitimacy crisis. The paper posits that central to the legitimacy crisis in Nigeria is the nature and character of the State. We argue that since the state is a colonial creation, it is compelled by its origin to undermine democracy, engender and nurture corruption, truncate democratic aspirations and alienate the people. The paper concludes that the total transformation of the state along genuine democratic path is the only condition that can ensure the fulfillment of the social contract between the state and the people, manifesting in the realization of its fundamental objectives of delivering the greatest number of good to the greatest number of people.

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