

RETHINKING AFRICAN HUMANISM AS A PANACEA TO CORRUPTION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

Corruption is a universal phenomenon, a global challenge which has debilitated the growth and development of many countries, especially developing nations. It has impeded the general and holistic welfare of their citizens making them to live lesser than human. However, the level of corruption in Nigeria is alarming; manifesting itself in diverse forms particularly in the form of gift-giving in exchange for favour, injustice, nepotism, bribery, kickback, embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds among others. The magnitude and effects of these are diverse forms of social menaces which have collectively succeeded in ranking Nigeria the 144th corrupt nation out of 175 countries, according to the 2018 corruption Perception Index reported by Transparency International. Understanding that corruption is cankerworm to any national advancement, various administrations of government devised different strategies and measures to combat corruption. Yet, the problem keeps aggravating because those strategies fail to take cognizance of African's worldview to solve the problem of Africans. It is against this backdrop that this paper adopts critical method to show that African humanism is rich and dynamic to solve the problem of corruption in the contemporary society, for it gives credence to the dignity and welfare of man and emphasizes the need to eliminate corruption which is injurious to human life. The paper concludes that African Humanism a paradigm which takes roots in African culture and identity is important in fashioning solutions to the myriads of Africa's problems and challenges of corruption.

Keywords: African Humanism, Panacea, Corruption, Contemporary, Society

Introduction

The advent of British colonialism in 19th century in Nigeria marked the extent and character of corruption in pre-Nigerian Hausa societies. The colonialist introduced systemic corruption on a grand scale across much of sub-Saharan Africa. The denial of indigenous values, standards, checks and balances and the pretensions of western

structures undermined the well-run bureaucracy was hitherto existing in African continent before colonialism (Wraith and Simpkins, 1963 & Smith, 1964).

Colonialism contributed to the prevalence of corruption across sub-Saharan Africa in several ways. The introduction of indirect rule by colonial masters turned leadership in Africa into a corrupted enterprise where instead of holding power in trust for the people, the rulers held power in trust for the colonial authorities. Government became an antagonistic platform for forcefully extracting obedience from the people. In several instances, the dregs of the society, the rejects, the ones that hitherto had no say in the community were promoted as warrant chiefs by British authorities. Individuals without character who demanded money in exchange for manipulating the colonial masters enthroned corruption at the highest rank of governance. The people saw bribery as a quick access to the most basic human rights and to escape punishment for the serious crime committed against their citizenship (Ibid).

In Africa, corruption is an adaptation of the traditional cultural practice of gift-giving in exchange for favours. The corrupt practice is caused by the obligation to cater for one's family and help the needy in the societies. However, Africans distinguish gift-giving and other forms of social exchanges from bribes and corrupt practices. Gift giving is made part of modern transaction where the real intentions to infringe and pervert rules may be concealed by continuity with an old custom. Although corruption remains a global challenge to the quest for development and welfare, it is a recurring theme in the African discourse (Otite, 1983).

In Nigeria, the adverse effect of corruption is complex and bedeviled by economic deprivation, underdevelopment, bad governance, political violence and ethno-religious and communal crisis. Nigeria is blessed with human and natural resources. It is the largest oil producer in Africa and the sixth largest in the world. However, despite its material wealth, Nigeria has been rated as one of the poorest countries in the world with poor Human Development Index (UNESCO, 2006 & NPC, 2006).

Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria have evolved various measures, policies, and programs to combat the menace of corruption, the most important of these measures according to Ijewereme (2013) are Murtala/Obasajo's Jaji Declaration/confiscation of assets illegally acquired by Nigerians of the 1970s, Shagari's Ethical Revolution to fight corruption through the introduction of code of conduct for public servants of 1981, and the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) by the Buhari/Idiagbon administration in 1984 and the ethical and social mobilization crusade by the Babangida regime in 1986 as well as WAI and Corruption (WAI-C) by Abacha's administration in 1994. These efforts were largely cosmetic and remained at the level of rhetoric, and did not result in any significant change. Similarly, in recognition of corruption as the worst problem of Nigeria when Obasanjo came to power in 1999, his government immediately

put in place different anti-corruption institutions to curb the problem. These include among others, the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Recently, the Buhari government also introduced Whistleblower policy where the members of the public feed government information about any public office holders for their ill-gotten wealth while in office.

Ironically, all the measures devised to fight corruption in the past have not yielded any positive result. Yet all the measures have proved to be ineffective. The perpetrators will always devise a means to beat any measure employed. This, therefore, makes it necessary to call for the rethinking of African Humanism to fight against corruption in Nigeria.

Corruption in Contemporary Society

Corruption is derived from the Latin verb, *rompere* which means ‘to break’ (Abdul-Ismail, n.d). The Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines corruption as an act of dishonesty especially using bribery or an immoral or wicked act. This definition focuses essentially on the moral aspects of corruption. Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary sees corruption as a dishonest or illegal behaviour especially of people in authority. This definition looks at both the moral and legal aspects.

Without doubt, corruption has permeated the African society and anyone who can say that corruption in Africa has not become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in the continent (Achebe: 24).

Corruption as a concept is the political transaction that is akin to the human behavioral act of lying. (Robert: 10). Corruption abounds everywhere in the African countries, it has been tagged the major cause of poverty and conflicts. He pointed out that the origin of corruption in Africa is from the government and big businesses Robert: 50 which include the ancient African leaders who sold their children to slavery within the Arab and European countries. Corruption is a phenomenon that involves several aspects. It has been commonly noted that most definitions of corruption is based on the idea that a corrupt act means the abuse of a trusted power in order to gain. Examples are embezzlement of funds, bribery, *clientelism*, etc.

Nye: 417 define corruption as a deviation from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary exercise of certain types of private regarding influence. This includes such behaviour as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in position of trust); nepotism (appointment by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private regarding uses).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) defines corruption as “the abuse of public office through the instrumentality of private agents, who actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit.

The World Bank (1997) defines corruption as “the abuse of public power for private benefit”. The Transparency International defines corruption as behaviour on the part of officials in the public sector, whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves, or those close to them, by the misuse of public power entrusted to them. Although the definition of the Transparency International is very descriptive, it focuses only on the public sector. But there is corruption in private sector with negative consequences for the whole of society.

(Amundsen: 7) opined that corruption is most usually taken to mean “the receiving or offering of money or other clear advantages in return for contracts, not being obliged to discharge an obligation, obtaining a job for which one is not qualified, sidestepping justice, leaping ahead of a queue, and so on.” Deducing from that definition, it could be said that corruption is anything done in an abnormal manner with intention of taking undue advantages of certain situations.

The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Act, 2000, defined corrupt acts to include “bribery, fraud and other related offences”. The Vision 2010 Committee defined corruption as “all those improper actions or transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgments and position of trust”. For example, personal benefit through patronage and nepotism, for example the theft of state assets or the diversion of state revenues. This is a very wide ranging definition, which delineates some of the acts of corruption.

Otiite defines corruption as the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. This is a broader definition, which looks at the moral aspect as well as the distortion or twisting of procedures. The Corrupt Practices and other related offences Act, 2000 defines corruption to include bribery, fraud and other related offences like gratification.

In the aspect of economic, corruption is seen as a necessary means to an end especially when nations with very weak political institutions are involved. Most government officials and civil servants sometimes embezzle and save some financial loots because they are not sure if the next coming government will favour their continued stay.

Corruption is rapidly becoming part of the African countries, in fact, it is our second nature. Today, it is not only a vice but gradually becoming a way of life in every sector of the society. From political circles, business board rooms, educational institutions, health sectors, agricultural sectors, judicial sectors. It is imperative to note that man’s

insatiable desire, greed, poverty, unemployment, quest for power, low workers' wages, to mention a few are the causes of corruption and there are several solutions to curbing corruption which includes political, economic development and the creation of a stable middle class among others. Corruption is a moral problem, which has contributed to the perpetuation of societal ills that continues to ravage the entire African continent, the fact remains that it is cancerous because once it is tolerated; it can consume the entire economic existence of human beings. It therefore becomes imperative to look inwardly at the African social values especially the African humanism which considers human feelings and actions to alleviate the ills of corruption.

Types of Corruption in Nigeria

Different countries see corruption in different perspectives as corruption may be different dimension in one territory and geographical location to another. Political corruption in Nigeria takes different forms such as embezzlement, contract sum inflation, , acceptance of gratification and undue influence, bribery; fraud; nepotism rigging of elections; manipulation or falsification of financial records; payment for favorable judicial decisions, misappropriation and conversion of public funds for personal gains; procurement scam, forgery and perjury, et cetera (Azelama, 2002; Ijewereme, 2013; Waziri, 2010).

Budget Paddling Corruption

This is a form of corruption where management of a public organization connive with governing council or board minister/commissioner to bribe some members of the legislature to approve inflated estimate for the institution during budgeting. In a situation where the budget is already approved, the management is expected to give tips or gratifications to the government functionaries whose duty it is to release money to the institutions (Azelama, 2005).

Electoral Corruption

This form of corruption is perpetrated during election period. The politicians use money inducement to win the heart of electorate through buying of votes. They use political thugs to intimidate agents of opposition parties, snatching of boxes and stuffing of ballot papers at the Polling units. It involves manipulation of voters' register, brigandage, and all manners of electoral violence leading to killing and maiming of people (Idada & Uhummwuangho, 2012).

Favoritism

This is a form of corruption where a public servant gives undue preference or favor to his or her friends, family, and anybody close and trusted in recruitment, promotion, and so on. This form of corruption is common among politicians in which their cronies are given preferential treatment.

Nepotism

This is another form of corruption where favouritism and tribalism are used by public office holders to favour his blood relations and kinsmen. The principle of federal character where everybody has equal right to distribution of public wealth is jettisoned. A public officer prefers his or her relatives and family members or friends in awarding contracts, job recruitment, promotion, appointment to public positions, thereby ignoring the merit principle. It also includes exemption of once relatives and friends from the application of certain punitive laws or regulations, and this may disrupt esprit de corps and trust. (Amundsen, 1997; Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, 2010).

Ghost-Workers Syndicate

This is another form of corruption where non-existing workers are manipulated as real workers. The management of a public organization deliberately inflates the payroll by including fictitious names to get more subventions for salary. The excess is siphoned by the members of management in connivance with some members of governing councils or boards.

Effects of Corruption

- Lower investment
- Reduced economic growth
- Exposing the country to currency crises
- Increased inequality and high poverty rate
- Increased unemployment
- Underdevelopment and poor basic infrastructure
- Insecurity of lives and properties
- High cost of goods and services
- Mistrust and suspicion
- Political instability and poor governance
- Undermines democracy
- Unfair resource allocation

Conceptualizing Humanism

The concept Humanism stems from man devotion to man. It is the devotion to human interest and the work and dignity of man. Humanism is a way of looking at the world which emphasizes the importance of human beings –their nature and their place in the universe (Dodds: 384). This definition was further stressed in the Harver world Encyclopedia as an attitude of mind which stresses the dignity and importance of man (Kanu: 3). Humanism rests on man's dignity, integrity, self worth and morality to mention a few.

Humanism has simply been referred to as “human-beingism –that is, devotion to the interests of human beings which rejects discrimination and re-affirms the spirit of cosmopolitanism, the spirit of international friendship, brotherhood and passionate concern for fellow human beings throughout the globe (Azenabor: 2). It is a philosophy that is regarded as the belief that human beings should be accorded respect and compassion. It is indeed an attitude of the mind that gives priority to man and aims at improving human welfare and condition.

Azenabor (2014) gave five explicit examination of the term Humanism based on the sense it’s being used. First, the ethical sense, where humanism means belief that human beings should be accorded compassion and respect. Second, the sociological sense, these social structures are best viewed as product of human accounts. Third, is the historical sense, indicating periods when man became the centre of scholarly attention. Fourth, humanism can also suggest the sovereignty of the human as opposed to the divine or supernatural. The fifth sense is that of placing primacy or value on human essence or nature.

The idea of humanism came up from the heart of Karl Max theory. Marxian idea of philosophy portrays that there must be a connection between philosophy and societal problems. It is worthy of note that humanism is a world-idea, it is everywhere and it has its peculiarities within each world and among its people that is to say, American, European, African, etc. our main focus in this work is African Humanism, it is clear that Humanism is a theory that is based on self-worth, values and dignity of man. What then is African Humanism? African humanism is a brand of philosophy that is overtly humanistic in its characteristics; it is centered more on man than on God. The African humanism has the welfare of the human person as it’s major attributes. According to (Egbunu: 13), the human person is seen as the center of the universe and the creations are posed to serve human purpose. He therefore explained humanism as a philosophy which extols not only the good of the human person in general but includes the good of the African person as the purpose of all actions.

(Oraegbunam: 244) made it clear that African humanism is an attitude to life which extends to every aspect of life that includes the social, religious, political and ethical life. This is because in all forms of African life man occupies the central position, this therefore means that man is at the center in the order of beings in the world view of Africans and that also shows that man benefits from the beings below and above him. It is pertinent to note here that every genuine humanism must focus on the development of the human.

The truth about humanism in Africa is that it portrays the priority of humans over the material and all other economic considerations. African humanism has been defined by so many scholars and philosophers alike. (Kanu: 2) posited that Humanism is the devotion to human; it stands as the cultural foundation of the African society. African

humanism centers more on religion and belief. The African man is religious and therefore focuses on the dignity of human life (Kanu: 5).

It was (Obioha&Okaneme: 22) that pointed out that the African humanism is heavily theistic. It covers their beliefs about man, God and the universe. The virtue of African theistic humanism lies on the fact that Africans believe in God's existence and that their fellow humans are God's image like them. These virtues have impacted positively on the existence of man and his overall well-being. Humanism is also concerned with the achievement of good society, that is to say that the adoption of humanism will help to achieve a sane society devoid of corrupt practices (Obioha&Okaneme: 22).

The idea of human affection is part and parcel of Africa's religiosity, the sacredness of life, sympathy, communalism, moral ideals are all attached to religion. The religion of the Africans inspires a very high dedication which centres on human relationship. Morality and religion cannot be separated when discussing African humanism as they are interrelated. Therefore, a morally upright man will tend to avoid all forms of social vices including corruption as they are supposed to be against his belief.

Rethinking African Humanism as a Panacea to Corruption in Contemporary Society

African humanism is regarded as a value system that portrays humanistic outlook of the people and their society. In our contemporary society, some cultural values have served as an enhancement to the dignity of man; hence, the need to restore them is highly imperative.

(Kanu: 20) observes that African humanism is more of a religious belief than political, economic or even social procedure. The African man is naturally religious and his focus is clearly on the dignity and interest of human life. This picture clearly depicts that African religion abhors immorality. These immoral acts include but not limited to sexual abuse, murder, suicide, treason and all forms of corrupt practices which are against humanism. For an African, anything that is morally good is what befits a human being. It is this thing that brings dignity, contentment, respect and joy to man and his immediate society. Corruption would lead to opposite of the above virtues.

Given that the African humanism has a religious backing and undertone; many questions have risen as to why there is poor moral value presently in Africa. (Kanu: 5) observed that colonialism and capitalism are the major causes of the degenerating African humanistic value system. It is this colonialism that has depersonalized the sensuous life of man that his sense becomes subservient to crude need. (Ucheaga: 125)

Another economic issue with Africans is the uncertainty on employment. There is a high unemployment rate in Africa and this has brought about corrupt practices or ways for people to get the few available jobs. Economic insecurity has brought about lack of adequate social welfare programmes, political uncertainty, high unemployment rate, lack

of property rights all contribute to create a scenario where corruption is seen as the only option.

The solution to these problems is internal. There is need for Africans to look inwards and re-activate their traditional values of African humanism to solve the problem of corruption.

Nkrumah rightly puts it this way "our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people" (Nkrumah: 78). Since humanism promotes the treatment of humans as Gods images by their fellows, it means that it will reduce all kinds of abuses, neglect, oppressions, afflictions, marginalization and all forms of corrupt practices. No doubt, these anomalies are what bring about social unrest not only in Africa but in other parts of the world.

The traditional African life is essentially social and fully human as they live in fellowship with their fellow human. All the social vices like corruption, bribery and many more can be traced to the break down in social conscience.

By rethinking African humanism, African societies will not only be going back to their roots but will also be eroding so many ills and vices that have ravaged the continent for many years of which corruption is spectacular.

Conclusion

It has been clearly observed that the humanistic value system is gradually decaying. It is evident that western colonialism nearly caused a complete erosion of the African cultural path.

The point buttressed in this paper is that Rethinking African Humanism which is one of the cultural values of the Africans has an important role to play in solving cases of corruption in Africa. Corruption is a deadly cancer that has ravaged and still ravaging the society, it is gradually becoming a way of life which does not enrich the society. The cultural values of Africans have been relegated to the background and as such lots need to be done.

It is therefore imperative for Africans from every walk of life to play a meaningful role in both the restoration of African values, systems and philosophies. This is to be done in order to revive the humanness that the African continent lacks.

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