
Pre-colonial African Socialism and Anti-Corruption Values in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

African socialism especially as expounded by the former Tanzanian President Julius K. Nyerere signifies a set of ideas and principles, as well as attitude of mind inherent in traditional African society that distinguishes it from other kinds of socialism. It is rooted in the belief that Africa has always contained much indigenous socialism some elements of which include communal ownership of land, the egalitarian character of society, and the extensive network of social obligations that led to considerable cooperation. This paper draws heavily on Nyerere's concept of 'Ujamaa' and a synthesis of sociological theories to examine elements of African cultural values and perceptions in practice during pre-colonial times that could serve as potential tools for combating corruption in Nigeria. Data for the paper were derived from extensive and critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature on culture and corruption. The analysis interrogated the influence of colonialism, capitalism and globalization on African culture especially their past communalism and egalitarianism and more importantly how the misapplication of these foreign cultural values contributes to higher levels of corruption in Nigeria. On the basis of the findings, the paper argued that pre-colonial African socialism offers opportunity for dealing with corruption by creating an atmosphere of hard work and self-sacrifice on the part of individuals for the benefit of the society at large. It recommended not just a resuscitation of these highly prized communitarian values through cultural reorientation but also practical steps by the government to create employment opportunities, tackle poverty and reduce inequality in the Nigerian society.

Key Words: *Corruption, Africa, Socialism, Culture, Values.*

1. Introduction

Pre-colonial African societies from their basic organization shared certain communitarian cultural values and practices that could serve as potential tools for combating corruption in Nigeria. Elements of such values and norms of conduct include the altruistic philosophy of the African being his brother's keeper, the moral philosophy of live-and-let live; the moral respect for elders and the worth of man as

against the worth of material wealth; community fellow-feeling as reflected in the communal ownership of land (or the non-ownership of land by individuals on a private basis), and the extensive network of social obligations that led to considerable cooperation (Nyerere, 1969; Sofola, 1973; Okolo & Odekunle, 2014). This cultural ethos not only make pre-colonial African societies uniquely socialist, but they also are the attributes that make us our distinguishingly respected African selves and of which Sofola (1973) admonishes us to systematically document, propagate, maintain and preserve.

The failure of Africa to continuously propagate, maintain and preserve its cultural heritage especially the value placed on promoting collective interest of the community/society as against the pursuit of selfish individual interest in the face of impinging, aggressive cultures of the outside world (particularly the influence of colonialism, capitalism and globalization) is widely regarded in the literature as a major reason for the unprecedented high level of corruption and low level of development on the African continent (Ekeh, 1975; Ngwakwe, 2009; McLaughlin, 2013; Odekunle, 2014; Egwu, 2015). In the specific situation of Nigeria where due to the influence of colonialism, capitalism and globalization, grand and gargantuan corruption became the norm rather than the exception, and corruption actually intervened between economic growth and development (McLaughlin, 2013; Odekunle, 2014; Transparency International, 2023), it is clear that appreciable progress and success in the on-going war against corruption for the souls of our people can only come about if the place of those erstwhile cultural values and practices in the society are closely examined.

Further, despite interesting revelations in the literature that there is a close connection between culture and corruption (Sandhotz & Taagepera, 2005; Hooker, 2008; McLaughlin, 2013), not much attention has been given to exploring how anti-corruption policy making can benefit from the dominant cultural ethos in vogue in pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Instead, emphasis has been on creating legal/judicial institutional safeguards which have failed in yielding the desirable results due to inherent challenges with law enforcement in the country (Enweremadu, 2010; Enweremadu, 2012; Transparency International, 2023).

This paper attempts to answer the overarching question of how to resuscitate relevant aspects of pre-colonial African socialism and appropriate its values into the process of anti-corruption policy making in Nigeria? In answering this question, the next section clarifies the meanings of the twin concepts of culture and corruption as well as the nexus between the two, while section three reviews the common theme in the literature on African socialism especially as it affects corruption and corrupt practices. Section four analyses how colonialism and the post-colonial development

strategies adopted by the indigenous politicians as well as globalization cardinally changed the structure of Nigerian society leading to the emergence of a 'culture of corruption' while section five explained how to reconstruct the Nigerian culture in line with the spirit of pre-colonial African socialism for eventual victory in the ongoing war against corruption. In the final section, the paper concludes that most Nigerian traditional cultural values that have been abandoned were in line with the spirit of African socialism as articulated by J.K Nyerere. The philosophy promoted a lot of humanistic values that are antithetical to corruption and therefore should be resuscitated in Nigeria.

2. Culture and Corruption

Culture and corruption are two important interrelated concepts underpinning this paper. As employed here, culture refers to a people's typical way of thinking, feeling and acting underpinned by shared values, norms, beliefs, morals, and dispositions as well as historical realities learned, experienced and transmitted from generation to generation in the course of socialization. This conceptualization draws on popular understanding of the concepts in the social sciences where culture is portrayed as having to do with the way a group of people or society live, behave, and interact with each other in specific situations over time (Tylor, 1958; Sofola, 1973; Ginsberg, 2004; Bar, 2015). Culture is all encompassing and includes “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1958, p. 1). It is often learned in the course of social interaction and is transmitted from one generation to the next through language and symbolic meanings (Sofola, 1973; Grisworld, 2004). Culture as Bah (2015, p. 19) summarized “is a way of life underpinned by shared values, attitudes, and dispositions”.

Corruption is commonly understood as the abuse or misuse of public office or entrusted power (by heritage, education, marriage, election, appointment or whatever else) for personal or private gain (Ohiorhenuan, 2015). Like culture, corruption has to do with series of social practices and habits which involves some measure of fraud; confers unauthorized benefit on a person and operates against stated procedures or rules (Ngwakwe, 2009). It is most commonly seen amongst government officials or managers and can take the form of bribery, embezzlement, extortion, networking, under-the-table transactions, manipulation of the election result, money laundering, and more (*The Economic Times*, 2024).

According to Odekunle (2014, p. 54) corruption is:

Any act or deliberate omission, in the realm of public or corporate functioning, which gives illegitimate/or illegal benefit or advantage to the individual and to

the detriment of the collective/public/corporate interest of the group, community or nation.

This paper draws on the above definition as a conceptual framework but emphasised that in the context of Nigeria's pluralism, the illegal benefit or advantage derivable from the 'act or deliberate omission' may also extend to members of the ethnic, regional, religious, or gender group to which the corrupt individual belongs to the detriment of collective national interest and in violation of stated procedures or rules as encapsulated in the country's constitution. This conceptualization is useful because it goes beyond the narrow view of corruption in terms of monetary or financial improprieties to encapsulate other forms of corrupt conducts that are incidental, causal and/or consequential to the financial type (Odekunle, 2014). The addition to the definition draws attention to conducts that on the surface, and often from the point of view of the perpetrators aim to promote primordial group or collective interest but are actually detrimental to the collective interest of the civic public within the context of the Nigerian state (Ekeh, 1975). Beyond embezzlement and bribery, corruption in Nigeria manifests in many other forms including influence peddling, nepotism, patronage, theft of state assets or the diversion of state revenues which could range from petty corruption through grand corruption to political corruption (Ohiorhenuan, 2015). Corruption would also cover but not limited to policy/legalized corruption; political/electoral corruption; administrative/bureaucratic corruption; professional/occupational corruption; and artisan/work-place/routine corruption (Odekunle, 2014).

Ohiorhenuan's (2015) characterization of corruption in Nigeria indicates that corruption has become the name of the game, it pays those that indulged in it and it rules most decision-making processes in the country (Ohiorhenuan, 2015). Unfortunately, despite repeated promises to fight corruption and end this 'game' by the last Muhammadu Buhari led administration; there is no evidence to suggest that corruption is declining in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2024). On the contrary, certain actions of the government including the recent granting of presidential pardon to 159 convicted criminals including some corrupt former governors who were convicted at a very high cost to the anti-graft agency- the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (*Premium Times*, 2022) are suggestive that those were empty promises and corruption remains the name of the game and it continues to rule decision making processes in Nigeria today.

Several theoretical and empirical studies have established a close connection between culture and society on the one hand and corruption on the other (Merton, 1938; Smelser, 1973; Engels, 1978; Sandholtz & Taagepera, 2005; Hooker, 2008;

McLaughlin, 2013). Both functionalist and Marxist Sociologists for example share “the close fit assumption” about the relationship between culture and society (Grisworld, 2004, p. 10). Culture from a functionalist point of view, provides the values that direct the social, political, and economic levels of a social system while, cultural products, implicit or explicit, from the Marxist perspective rest on an economic foundation (Grisworld, 2004).

One example of a theoretical statement with functionalist flavour that illustrates the close connection between culture and corruption is derived from Rebert K. Merton's theory of social structure and anomie (Merton, 1938). According to the theory, when a society creates a disjuncture between its culturally defined goals and the institutionalized means of attaining the goals, corruption is imminent. On the other hand, Engels (1978) drives home the point from a Marxian perspective that the social institutions under which a people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live are conditioned by the production and reproduction of immediate life. And therefore, a society (such as modern capitalist societies) that “changed all things into commodities, dissolved all inherited and traditional relationships, and in place of time-honoured custom and historic right, sets up purchase and sale... should expect a higher level of corruption (Engels, 1978, p. 92). It is hardly surprising therefore that Nigeria which apparently, have abandoned its time-honoured custom and values with respect to ownership and control of the major means of production continues to perform woefully on the global corruption perception index in the last decade with the country scoring only 25 on a scale of 100 and ranking close to the very bottom of the pyramid in the most recent corruption perception index (Transparency International, 2024).

Sandholtz and Taagepera's (2005) study suggested that corruption is not just the product of immediate material incentives, but is also powerfully influenced by cultural orientations that are acquired through socialization in a society's historical heritage. Their assessment of the influence of communism on corruption levels is that the command economies of the communist era created structural incentives for both demanding and offering illicit private payments to the point that corruption became an aspect of culture. They further argue that the transition toward democratic political forms and market-oriented economies did not – indeed, could not – obliterate corruption in post-communist societies. This was because on the one hand, cultural orientations change slowly, lagging behind even the most comprehensive political and institutional shifts, while on the other hand, the process of privatization itself opened myriad opportunities for corruption, especially since the administrators of the former system frequently devised and managed the privatization schemes.

Conversely, Hooker (2008) viewed corruption as an activity that tends to undermine a cultural system. Because cultures operate in very different ways, different activities are corrupting in different parts of the world. Based on analysis of real-life situations in Japan, Taiwan, India, China, North America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Korea Hooker (2008) distinguished actions that structurally undermine a cultural system from those that are merely inefficient or are actually supportive. Activities such as nepotism or cronyism that are corrupting in the rule-based cultures of the West may be functional in relationship-based cultures. Behavior that is normal in the West, such as bringing lawsuits or adhering strictly to a contract, may be corrupting elsewhere. Practices such as bribery that are often corrupting across cultures are nonetheless corrupting for very different reasons. The perspective offered in Hooker's study provides culturally-sensitive guidelines not only for avoiding corruption but for understanding the mechanisms that make a culture work.

Finally, McLaughlin (2013) examined the role of culture in determining how much corruption a country should have by comparing the issue of corruption in some of the least corrupt countries (Scandinavia) in the world and in some of the most corrupt countries (Africa) in the world. McLaughlin (2013) argued that cultural variables such as power distance and masculinity play a role in determining the level of corruption and also help in shaping a country. Furthermore, it is argued that the more a country's cultural values surround the idea of assertiveness, competitiveness, etc. (traditional masculine values), the more corrupt the country will be. It is also believed that as the power distance within a country increase, the corruption will also increase. This means that countries experiencing egalitarian views will be less corrupt than countries that have a significant gap between superiors and subordinates.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that culture and corruption are closely intertwined in the sense that corrupt practices are derivatives of cultural systems or are largely influenced by cultural values and norms of a given society. A society that values material acquisitiveness and individual achievement at the expense of good human relationships and collective achievement may only be inviting high level of corruption. Conversely, behaviours that are considered as corrupt in rule-based cultures such as the west may be considered normal in relationship-based cultures such as Africa simply because of differences in the value-system of these different societies.

3. Pre-Colonial African Socialism and Corruption

Pre-colonial African socialism pertains to the communitarian principles and values upon which traditional African societies were built. These principles and values imbibed in the course of socialization, upbringing and personality development are what propel the African to exhibit peculiar African virtues such as natural goodness, humaneness, friendliness, moral reservation towards the exploitation of others and a spirit of apologist (Sofola, 1973).

The dominance and commonality of these cultural values and behavioural patterns in pre-colonial African societies is the reason why many African leaders believed that Africa was inherently socialist in structure and in its social organisation and that the key to Africa's development is rooted in its cultural heritage (Mohan, 1966). From Julius Nyerere's philosophy of "Ujamaa", through Kwame Nkrumah's agenda for "social revolution" and Leopold Senghor's "negritude" to Kenneth Kaunda's "Zambian humanism", it is easy to discern a strong faith among past African leaders in "African socialism" as a remedy to the myriad of challenges (including corruption) that has hindered development on the African continent (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003).

African Socialism as defined by Tom Mboya refers:

"to those proven codes of conduct in the African-societies which have, over the ages, conferred dignity on our people and afforded them security regardless of their station in life... to universal charity, which characterized our societies, and to the African's thought processes and cosmological ideas, which regard man not as a social means, but as an end and entity in society" Mohan, 1966, p. 232).

Similarly, Nyerere (1969, p. 512) argues that

"Socialism... is an attitude of mind. In a socialist society, it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern which is needed to ensure that the people care for each other's welfare". Further, for Nkrumah (1964) socialism includes "the restitution of the egalitarian and humanist principles of traditional African life within the context of a modern technical society serving the welfare needs of all its peoples," Mohan, 1966, p. 232).

Based on these conceptualizations, African socialism is almost if not totally synonymous with the African traditional culture. The "traditional" foundation of this

culture as widely regarded in the literature is the organic relationship between the individual and the community as well as the supreme importance of religion in Africa. In practice, these are the very basis and source of “hard work”, “public-spiritedness”, and “self-sacrifice” which African leaders continually urged upon their peoples (Mohan, 1966).

For the purpose of coherence, this paper draws heavily on Julius Nyerere's (1964) concept of “Ujamaa” to analysing those pre-colonial African cultural values and practices that can interact with corruption either as an enabler or a potential tool for combating corruption in Nigeria. The choice of Ujamaa out of the varieties of African socialism is influenced by the author's understanding that the concept nicely responds to the common concerns of African leaders in the literature on African socialism which include the problem of continental identity (a concern with creating and fostering national unity within the framework of a modern and efficient state); the crises of economic development (a concern with promoting rapid economic development within their countries); and the dilemmas of control and class formation (a preoccupation with political stability which to them was synonymous with their own control of political power within their respective countries) (Friedland & Rosberg Jr. 1964; Mohan, 1966).

Regarding the problem of continental identity, Ibhawoh and Dibia (2003) have observed that Nyerere's philosophy of Ujamaa was rooted in traditional African values and had at its core the emphasis on familiness and communalism of traditional African societies. “Ujamaa” or “familiness” according to Nyerere (1969, p. 515) “describes our socialism...Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of 'society' as an extension of the basic family unit”. His main argument is that Africa has always contained much indigenous socialism elements of which includes the communal ownership of land (or non-ownership of land by individuals on a private basis), the egalitarian character of society (or the low degree of stratification), and the extensive network of social obligations that led to considerable cooperation. The existence of these traditional elements is held by Nyerere to represent indigenous socialism.

Ujamaa represents not only the traditional African attitude of mind that values the pursuit of collective interest over selfish individual interest but also stands “opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man” (Nyerere, 1969, p. 151). Within its framework, capitalism as a mode of production is inappropriate and “unnatural” to Africa because it fosters the seed of corruption. In the words of Nyerere (1969, p. 513):

Acquisitiveness for the purpose of gaining power and prestige is unsocialist. In an acquisitive society, wealth tends to corrupt those who possess it. It tends to breed in them a desire to live more comfortable than their fellows, to dress better and in every way to outdo them... This visible contrast between their own comfort and the comparable discomfort of the rest of the society becomes almost essential to the enjoyment of their wealth – and this set off the spiral of personal competition – which is then antisocial.

On the other hand, the egalitarian and communitarian nature of precolonial African societies promoted rich cultural values that were antithetical to corruption. “When a society is organized that it cares about its individuals” Nyerere (1969, p. 514) writes: Then, provided he is willing to work, no individual within that society should worry about what will happen to him tomorrow if he does not hoard wealth today. Society itself should look after him, or his widow, or his orphans. This is exactly what traditional African society succeeded in doing... Nobody starved, either of food or of human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possess by the community of which he was a member. That was socialism. That is socialism... Its concern is to see that those who sow reap a fair share of what they sow.

Apart from linking African socialism with communitarian African cultural heritage thereby responding to the question of continental identity, Nyerere's Ujamaa also identifies with economic development which in the view of this author is a major requirement for success in the on-going crusade against corruption in Nigeria. Economic development can only be achieved when everybody- the government and the people get to work. The concept of work is very central to understanding African socialism. Nyerere (1969) vehemently argues that in traditional African societies everybody was a worker. There was no other way of earning a living for the community. Political promises, propaganda, and deception with actually adding value do not bring development. He explained the strong sense of security that African societies gave to their members as well as the universal hospitality on which they could rely in terms of hard work on the part of individual members of the society.

Nyerere (1969, p. 518) argued that “... every member of society, barring only children and infirm contributed his share of effort towards the production of its wealth”. To him, there was no such thing as socialism without work. This is how Nyerere made the point:

“Not only was the capitalist, or landed exploiter, unknown to traditional African society but we did not have that other form of modern parasite – the loiterer or idler, who accepts the hospitality of society as his 'right' but gives nothing in return! Capitalistic exploitation was impossible. Loitering was an unthinkable disgrace”. (Nyerere, 1965, p. 513, emphasis in the original)”

Thus, within the framework of Ujamaa, contemporary socialism will grow out of the African communal past and not class conflict. As a matter of facts, Nyerere denies the relevance of any concept of class in Africa, arguing that Africa never even had a word for “class” in their indigenous dictionary or language (Hill, 1975).

Finally, Nyerere's Ujamaa also rests on the primacy of traditional African society as a way out of the problem or dilemma of control and class formation at independence (Friedland & Rosberg Jr., 1964). To Nyerere, traditional African society should serve as a guide to the present not simply because it is indigenous but because it is intrinsically good and has demonstrated that it can provide the essentials, both materially and psychologically, of good life. The people must be reminded of their past communalism and egalitarianism. The attitude that makes us respect the elder in our former society, for his age and service and to view the land including the elder's wealth as a gift of the gods dedicated to the welfare of all must be revived and preserved. To adequately achieve this, Ujamaa requires that the traditional attitude of mind which characterizes the extended family must be projected outward to incorporate not only our communities, the African continent, but all of mankind. This according to Nyerere is the only logical conclusion for true socialism.

Laudable as the arguments in favour of African socialism as a panacea to the problem of corruption appears, it has been subjected to various criticisms. Mohan (1966) for instance has argued that most of the elements of the African cultural heritage are attributes of primitive societies – non-African as well as African and that Nyerere's affirmation that in this society “the limits of responsibility between the individual and society” in which he lived were “not very clearly defined” points to a characteristic of “underdeveloped” societies, and a major obstacle to their development. However, Mohan is quick to add that African leaders were aware of this problem which is why they continually exhort their citizens to be “public-spirited”, “conscientious”, and “mindful” of the “public trust” and it is for the same reason that Nyerere in particular urged that the same socialist attitude of mind which, in pre-colonial days, gave to every individual the security that comes from belonging to a widely extended family, must be preserved within the still wider society of the nation. Furthermore, as Nkrumah (1967) notes, what socialist thought in Africa must recapture is not the structure of the “traditional African society” but its spirit, for the spirit of communalism is crystallised in its humanism and in its reconciliation of individual advancement with group welfare.

Falola and Adebayo (1999) have argued that the African extended family institution only intensified the patron-client relationship between the poor and the

rich, and that extended family system sometimes served to keep the poor down, “made them complacent, prevented them from identifying their patrons properly as their oppressors and rising against them, and preserved the class structure in favour of the dominant elite” (p. 62). Furthermore, Afisi (2009) has argued that African socialism, like Marxist-Leninism, is characterised by non-recognition of individual will to self-actualization. The imposition of socialism on contemporary African societies in the view of Afisi is contrary to the natural right to freedom from interference, the right to exercise manifold abilities, the individual's aspiration for a purposeful life, his/her desire to avoid pain, and his/her passion for the acquisition of personal property and for the attainment of distinction. A counter to this argument would be that the same attributes of human nature that Afisi emphasized such as the individual's passion for the acquisition of personal property and for the attainment of distinction can be seen to be antithetical to Africa's cultural value system and largely responsible for corruption in Nigeria.

Finally, Ibhawoh and Dibua (2003) argued that beyond its socialist rhetoric, Ujamaa shared the same premise and fallacy, of developmentalism that has propelled and constrained successive development initiatives in Africa. In their view, the Ujamaa's commitment to the modernization paradigm resulted in a situation where improving the conditions of the peasants meant alienating them from their cultural and social realities in favour of transplanted western ways of life. However, they appreciate the fact that the Ujamaa experiment was unique in the paradoxes it reflected, in its inward orientation and in its attention to social equity and distributive justice.

4. Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, Globalization and Corruption in Nigeria

Several studies agree that colonialism cardinally changed the social structure of African societies including Nigeria, by destroying its communitarian cultural values and practices thereby contributing to the emergence of 'a culture of corruption' in post-colonial Nigeria (Hooker, 2008; McMichael, 2008; Igboin, 2011; Shekwo, 2013; Odekunle, 2014; Sylla, n.d.; Ohiorhenuan, 2015; Egwu, 2015). One example of the ways by which colonialism altered the basic organisation of the Nigerian society is by internationalizing capitalism and with their cheap products, capitalists destroyed the handicraft industries of developing countries, and forced them into the production of raw materials (Smelser, 1973).

Hooker (2008) explained high level of bribery in Africa in terms of 'cultural disruption' arising from colonialism and globalization just as Sylla (n.d.) sees corruption in Africa as a new phenomenon that stems from the collusion between the colonial heritage and the African indigenous culture during colonial era. According

to Igboin (2011, p. 101):

...Colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed deadly blow on African culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of such values as *rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism and oppression* [emphasis added]. Colonial rule disrupted the traditional machinery of moral homogeneity and practice. The method of moral inculcation was vitiated, which resulted in the abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic depersonalization of the African and paganization of its values.

Over sixty-three years after independence, this legacy of colonialism has lingered on the post-colonial Nigerian social structure and corruption has become one of the most pressing problems afflicting the country (UNODC, 2019). Corruption became institutionalized in the mid-eighties when “individual interest” was elevated over and above “collective interest” (Odekunle, 2014, p. 57). And “it is this current ethos” as Odekunle (2014, p. 57) argued:

“That is responsible for the virtual decimation of our “ideal” values, demanding/encouraging/rewarding as it were, wealth without value-added work; consumption without conscience; position/office without integrity; business without ethics or morality; politics without principles; even religious worship without manifestation of associated beliefs.”

This corrosive ethos and more of their kind have increasingly become the new normal in Nigeria of today. Corruption in present day Nigeria has become more systemic and remains a major obstacle to attainment of the 2030 sustainable development goals. Estimates show that in the post-independence era, corruption has cost the Nigerian economy more than \$550 billion and in 2021 alone, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) recovered at least \$750 million in local and foreign currency linked to corruption and fraud (*World Justice Project, 2023*). Furthermore, a 2019 survey on bribery and other forms of corruption indicates that almost a third (30.2%) of Nigerian citizens who had at least one contact with a public official in the 12 months preceding the survey paid a bribe to, or were asked to pay a bribe by a public official which is suggestive of the prevalence of the problem in Nigeria (UNODC, 2019).

The normalization of corrupt practices in the country has resulted in a situation where life without corruption was likened to a disease because many saw it as the right thing to do and only fools did not indulge in corruption (Shekwo, 2013). Post-colonial Nigeria is described as “a country where “honesty is a serious crime punishable by ridicule and exclusion from public limelight” while dishonesty is rewarded with financial benefits, economic opportunities, career progression, and

ascension to exalted political positions (Shekwo, 2013, p. 180).

Ohiorhenuan's (2015) insightful analysis also reveals that corruption in Nigeria has become ingrained in people's "mental maps", and accepted simply as (unwritten) standard operating procedure in everyday life. "Because we accept it as "the way things are", corruption expands and reinforces itself in parthenogenetic fashion, creating the culture of vice that Nigerians have mostly resigned themselves to" (2015, p. 111). The situation is so bad that the only thing that is still working in the country today is corruption.

The sovereignty of the state has since been challenged and almost completely usurped by non-state armed groups such as boko-haram, bandits and herdsmen whose destructive activities have recently intensified. As a result, the security architecture has been overwhelmed and almost collapsed due to lack of discipline, planning, and strategy. The economy of the country is currently in shambles with escalating inflation and rising cost of living, while tertiary education like secondary and basic education is at the verge of collapsing with frequent strikes due to unresolved industrial dispute between the government and the various university workers unions. Furthermore, the energy and gas sector is in serious crisis as the government continues to borrow money in trillions of naira to fund its fraud-ridden fuel subsidy. The removal of the subsidy by the present government without putting adequate social support programmes in place has only worsened the plights of the masses. All these negative indicators are in some ways associated with the high level of corruption in the country.

Corruption in post-colonial Nigeria is further complicated by the destructive effect of globalization on the consumption pattern of individuals. The expansion and rejuvenation of capitalism towards the end of the twentieth century, facilitated by what Castells (2009) called *informationalism* succeeded in transforming the world into a global village. Globalization as McMichael (2008) observes accelerated development along the path of insatiable consumption of dwindling resources and connects lifestyles across the world of producers and consumers, but did not give equal opportunity for all countries to benefit from its blessings. "While over three-quarters of the world's population can access television images of the global consumer, not much more than a quarter have access to sufficient cash or credit to participate in the consumer economy" (McMichael, 2008, p. 1). The inability of individuals to reconcile between the ideas and habits foisted on the society by the global economy and their objective reality significantly contributed to the tendency towards corruption in Nigeria. Because globalization is ultimately experienced locally, our consumption pattern is increasingly determined by distant producers. In this regard, it is important to note that "as we consume the experience of distant

producers, so they produce our experience” (McMichael, 2008, p. 13).

Another post-colonial factor that worsens the problem of corruption in Nigeria is the character and attitudes of the ruling elites and their ethnic followers. Egwu's (2015) discourse on ethnicity as technology of power renders a narrative of the self-destructive inclination of the Nigerian ruling elite and its various ethnic fractions. The Nigerian ruling elites is characterized in the narrative as petty bourgeois in orientation and lacking the discipline of its counterpart in Europe and North America that is entrenched in capitalist production. According to Egwu (2015), the bourgeois class in Nigeria is “fated by the historical path of its emergence through and within the state, to seek to capture state power at all costs as instrument of primitive accumulation” (p. 12). From the perspective he offers, monumental corruption in Nigeria should be understood as a direct consequence of the phenomenal situation of elite capture of power and resources, fueled by oil-based accumulation and undergirded by vast networks of patron-clientele relationship that are ethnic-based. This is “reinforced by the patterns of horizontal inequalities (along ethnic and regional lines) set in motion by capitalist modernization and increasingly accentuated by the ascendance of market ideology” (Egwu, 2015, p. 32). These are just a few analytical illustrations of how colonialism, capitalism, and globalization significantly contributed to the erosion of African socialists' values in Nigeria thereby complicating the problem of corruption.

5. Towards Resuscitating Anti-Corruption Values in Nigeria

Nigerian traditional cultures contain elements of African socialism that could serve as tools for dealing with corruption that should be resuscitated. These include the sacredness of human life and the emphasis on wholesome human relations among people; high value on communal living as reflected in the communal land tenure and ownership; high sense of morality and the emphasis on good character; the high value placed on hard work, personal sacrifice, accountability and transparency among others (Sofola, 1973; Igboin, 2011). These traditional cultural values are the factors which the average Nigerian like his counterparts in many other African countries from his/her birth onward has imbibed and internalised in the course of his/her upbringing and nurturing (Sofola, 1973). However, as Igboing (2011) notes, these values have been vitiated by colonialism, the post-colonial capitalistic development project of the elites and more recently, by globalization. In order to succeed in the ongoing war against corruption, these erstwhile cultural values must be resuscitated and appropriated into the process of anti-corruption policy making and implementation in Nigeria.

If we take the high sense of morality and the emphasis on good character as one example of Nigerian traditional cultural values, we will immediately realise that

across many ethnic groups in Nigeria, character has always been “the very stuff that makes a man's life a joy simply because it is pleasing to God the Almighty” (Sofola, 1973, p. 120). According to a Yoruba proverb, *Eni bimo ti ko niwa, Oluware fi abe jo na* i.e. he who ever begets a child that has no character is at a great loss (Sofola, 1973). There is also a Hausa proverb which says, *hali zanen dutse ne*, meaning character is a mark on a rock, therefore it cannot easily be erased.

Secondly, if we take the value placed on hard work as another example of traditional Nigerian cultural value we will also remember that virtually all Nigerian families, communities and societies place high value on hard work. Okpoko and Ibeanu's (2005) study of Igbo civilization in precolonial times for example indicates that the honor and social recognition that a man received often depended on the number and size of yams in his barn. The yam was the index of wealth and status, and titles such as *Di-ji* and *Oji ji eme* were conferred on individuals who excelled in the number and quantity of yams. Their analysis of the complex political systems (classical segmentary lineage, segmentary council, and monarchical systems) that developed in Igboland demonstrates that:

“The Igbo socio-political culture recognized the importance of individual achievement and skills, and individuals of proven abilities, who excelled in commerce, farming, oratory, or wrestling could rise from humble backgrounds to high offices... The emphasis place on popular participation in the political process, especially of male members at different levels of the segmentary organization, ensured that it would be difficult for an individual to claim executive authority” (Okpoko & Ibeanu, 2005, p. 199).

As a young boy growing up in the context of an extended family, I remember how my father (which to the English man was actually my uncle) used to encourage us to be hard working and endure hardship for a better tomorrow. One of the ways through which he inculcated this value in us was through the use of proverbs. One of such proverbs in Mwaghavul says “*Gu la loop ki yaghal kin diyesham a dte'el a piya*” meaning the person who always agrees to be sent on errands often turns out as a man of good fortune. Another Mwaghavul proverb says *paa jyel kyam mpa lalu kurom kas*, meaning suffering has never turn a son into a slave. Such proverbs were quite instrumental in shaping our attitude to work based on the understanding that there is dignity in labour and hard work pays.

One final example of Nigerian traditional cultural value which I find interesting but also controversial relates to the sense of altruism practiced by many people in the past. Sofola (1973) talked about a motor magnate of Ijebu-Ode, the late Shoye, who was known to have dismissed any driver of his many passenger lorries who, after

plying the roads for about five or six years did not possess a lorry of his own with which he earns his own private money so that he too could be rich. Based on Sofola's explanation:

It was not that Shoye felt that he had paid the drivers high enough for them to save enough to purchase their own lorries... Rather, in his altruistic belief and encouragement, he meant that the drivers should have been underreporting their daily takings from transportation trips and should have kept some for them, this time through his own connivance at what to a western man would be a case of gross cheating. Shoye's attitude emanates from the Yoruba African's belief that a Richman should be the source of success of other would-be rich men (Sofola, 1973, p. 121).

Ultimately, such attitude promotes egalitarianism and helps to reduce wealth disparity and income inequality in the society. The extension of such basic traditional family values to the social and economic life is what we found in such guiding principles and life philosophies encapsulated in Nyerere's version of African socialism. The basic contention here is that the traditional cultural values of most Nigerian societies such as value for character, morality, hard work, self-sacrifice, and the extended family system are in line with the spirit of pre-colonial African socialism as discussed and therefore are potential tools for dealing with corruption.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Pre-colonial African socialism is an opportunity for dealing with corruption if its principles are faithfully practiced or if the principles are applied consistently by every member of the Nigerian society. Being an attitude of mind and not necessarily tied to the possession or non-possession of wealth, African socialism readily appears to be the solution to the problem of corruption in Nigeria especially because it presents us with an opportunity to examine the interplay of ideas and action and in this respect; it goes beyond the parochial concern of the continent with economic development.

The role of African socialism in reducing corruption level in Nigeria is best understood in relation to capitalism. Capitalism from the point of view of African socialist like Nyerere is defined not simply as private ownership of the economy but as the kind of human relationship that individual ownership can produce. Similarly, African socialism is not necessarily about communal ownership of the means of production but more importantly on the kind of human relationship that a sense of common ownership of the wealth of the nation can produce. It is the kind of concern for the common good, general welfare, collective achievements, selfless services, hard work by everyone, hospitality and egalitarianism that Ujamaa emphasizes that makes it a better culture for development, reduction of corruption and improving security and not the way in which wealth is produced.

As a culture, African socialism helps in creating an atmosphere of hard work and self-sacrifice on the part of individuals for the benefit of the society at large. It gives no room for parasitism. As Nyerere (1964) argues, in traditional African societies the dictum is 'treat your guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe!' And in actual fact, the guest was likely to ask for the hoe even before his host gives him one. Thus, it is this sense of responsibility on the part of every member of society that is required for corruption to be a thing of the past in Nigeria. It is the idea of individual sacrifice for the larger collectives which African socialism implies that makes it a very good tool for anti-corruption in Nigeria.

If only the political class particularly those elected and appointed to serve as leaders will be selfless in their services to the nation and family members ceased to be self-centered in their dealings with one another, and if this attitude is extended to the larger Nigerian society; and provided everybody maintains the highly prized attitude of hard-work, then we can hope to experience a better society where corruption is at its ebb. The solution to the problem of corruption is all about changing the way we think, the way we judge, and the way we treat each other in line with the spirit and philosophy of African socialism. Changing attitudes in this direction requires much more than a cultural reorientation through the family, school, mass media and the civil society. It has to be anchored on practical measures taken by the government directed at creating jobs and reduction of poverty, reducing horizontal and vertical inequality, and accountable leadership with a view to regaining the confidence of citizens in the Nigerian project and reawakening the spirit of patriotism in the average Nigerian citizen.

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