

Prebendalism, Corruption and Misgovernance in a Fractured Society: Till Death Do Us Part in Nigeria

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Abstract

Every society aspires to develop, and create positive opportunities for her citizens to grow and prosper. Nigeria, since its independence in 1960 has not been able to grow and create opportunities for her citizens. One begins to wonder why Nigeria is divided and experiencing stunted growth. This paper, therefore sought to locate the problem in the social structure of Nigeria. Nigeria has been operating under imposed emergent migrant social structures. This new social structure brought to the fore what is referred to as the two publics: primordial and civic publics. The pluralism is arising from the 1914 amalgamation which brought different groups together to compete for limited but essential resources leading to the adoption of prebendalism by various groups which in turn has led to corruption and misgovernance. These variables have kept the Nigerian society from growing in its development trajectory. This has occasioned lack of trust among the various groups and enhanced their desire to get their share of the national cake. To understand this behaviour, the paper was guided by the Attraction- Selection-Attrition theory that explains how and why people adopt allegiance to the primordial public instead of the civic public. This paper concludes that except prebendalism which gives rise to corruption and misgovernance is dealt with, Nigerians cannot benefit from the expected ideal functions of the society.

Keywords: Prebendalism, Corruption, Misgovernance, Fractured society, Citizen's welfare.

Introduction

Following from the Judeo-Christian account of the origin of man and society, human existence started on a small scale. When men began to multiply on earth and the human population began to grow, men dwelt as it were in harmony and singleness of heart and purpose without any intent to accumulate and appropriate resources to themselves. They even attempted building a tower that would accommodate every person at Babel. This unity of purpose led God into confusing their language and scattering them upon the face of the earth (Gen.11:1-11). This incident led to the multiplicity of societies with varying interests and aspirations. Thus, entered personal interests which began with the acquisition of personal properties. The acquisition of personal properties created the desire for personal accumulation of wealth and power both military and political to sustain same. This in turn created an atmosphere of greed and chaos where people began to struggle for available scarce resources and the societies began to turn into “dog-eat-dog” societies.

It was this trend that brought men together into a social contract. John Locke (1690), Jean Jack Rousseau (1762), and Thomas Hobbes (1651) all argued that the aforementioned situation led men into surrendering their rights to the state or sovereign to moderate and mediate between and among men so as to have peaceful co-existence among members of the society. With the passage of time, wars of conquest were fought and distinct societies became fused together. Not all members of the societies had equal access to the various economic but scarce resources available, people began to device ways of outsmarting others in order to have economic and political advantages. This unbridled quest brought about what today is described as corruption. Aidt, (2003), argues that corruption has been a persistent feature of human societies from time immemorial, long being recognized as a threat to the order of country. Aidt further avers that corruption is a vice known to the Egyptians as far back as the 4th century B.C.

What is today known as Nigeria was distinct societies that existed and organized themselves in unique ways for their survival and progress. The equation however changed with the coming of the British colonial masters and the subsequent marriage of inconvenience called amalgamation proclaimed by Lord Fredrick Lugard, a British colonial officer in January of 1914 bringing various autonomous societies of West Africa into what is today called Nigeria. Onuoha & Onwuchekwa (2017), have argued that the foundations of corruption in modern Nigeria could be traced to a number of issues prominent among which is the amalgamation of various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria without any intent or attempt to fuse or integrate them but to create a vast administrative empire divided mainly along ethnic cleavages. This division set the tone for the contestations that have given birth to this hydra-headed monster called corruption that is built around prebendal ideologies and have bred misgovernance since the so-called independence.

Corruption accompanies the discontinuities in the later stages of social evolution when economic differentiation with the attendant integrative mechanisms of money and markets get into full swing (Onuoha, 2011). Hoogvelt (1976), argues that the discontinuities in this evolutionary process may be caused because of the super imposition of advanced differentiated forms of social organization or less advanced or fused forms of social organizations. This is typical of the Nigerian society that has been replete with prebendalism, corruption and misgovernance. Wraith and Simkins (1963), argue that with respect to corruption, there is little that cannot be bought and little extortionable that cannot be extorted. This shows that this canker has permeated the fabric of societal life. The impact of this is so widespread and debilitating that if no genuine effort is made, it will not only bring the Nigerian society to its knees, but will also consume it.

Prebendalism

This is a concept adopted from the works of Weber in his decentralized patrimonial system and orchestrated in the work of Richard Joseph (1983, 1987). The concept prebendalism connotes the systematic conversion of public offices to serve the interest of office holders, and their political, clan and ethnic communities. This reflects the fundamental dynamic of the country called Nigeria and other defracted societies of the third world. This prebendal behaviour could be argued to have arisen in Africa as an outcrop of colonialism and the subsequent social structure that emerged. Peter Ekeh an accomplished political sociologist in an inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan in 1980 contended that colonialism in Africa created a number of social structures one of which could in my opinion encourage prebendalism. The emergent social structures in the opinion of Ekeh (1983), are the transformations of pre-colonial indigenous institutions, migrated social structure and constructs and lastly the emergent social structures in colonialism. This discussion, adopts the third social structure identified by Ekeh – emergent social structures.

Ekeh argues that the inner character of colonialism is best revealed by the social formations that were internally generated by the social forces of colonialism in Africa. They grew with, and in colonialism. These emergent social structures are self-generations of colonialism that emerged to meet societal needs which indigenous and migrated social structures could not fulfill in the new socio-political environment. Whereas the first two forms of social formations represented formal aspects of colonialism, the latter represents the informal elements of colonialism.

Ekeh (1983), further argued and I agree with him that ethnic groups are emergent social structures. In pre-colonial Africa, societies dominated as forms of social organizations where the tribal societies were geographically defined and in which individuals found their complete or whole existence in the realm of values and morality. These were destroyed by the forces of colonialism because the tribes were not compatible with the new and widened existence of the new social order. Tribalism in the emergent order is a construct that defines a behaviour model that is unacceptable in our new poly-ethnic relationships. One must note that tribalism does not have linkages with tribes anymore because acts that constitute tribalism have the atavistic aura of behaviour which is considered appropriate for a past form of existence in the tribal setting but

destructive in modern multiethnic system of social life. This continuum is where prebendalism and corruption are located. Ekeh avers that tribalism is not only unique to modern post-colonial African nation like Nigeria, but was generated in the reorganizations and reorderings that were engendered by colonialism.

This emergent social structure has bred in its wake, a set of amoral values that are anti thetical to the survival of the modern plural society that borders so much on linguistic (ethnic) and religious inclinations. Ekeh (1975), had earlier posited that the emergence of this new form of social structure has intruded into Africa and elsewhere where colonization took place and has created what he referred to as the two publics. He argued that colonialism created two publics. In plural societies he tried to present the distinction between the public realm and the private realm in western political discourse. Ekeh observed that the two realms in western experience are both informed by common underlying morality that is lacking in post-colonial societies. Instead, in post-colonial societies, the public realm is differentiated in two.

The two publics according to Ekeh (1975), are the “civic” and the “primordial” publics. On the one hand, the primordial public operates on societal morality and is therefore bound to the private (ethnic) realms. The civic on the other hand is amoral and devoid of any claim of morality. To Ekeh (1975), the primordial public was the communal political order based on kinship (ethnic nationalism) relations while the civic public derived from the colonial system. He argued that most Africans direct their loyalties to the communal or primordial public which they invested with moral attributes. The “civic” public, successor to the colonial government was regarded as essentially amoral, a sphere from which resources could be extracted to be invested in the communal or primordial public. One can decipher from the argument of Ekeh that lack of trust on the civic public is the fundamental reason for prebendalism, corruption, kleptocracy and misgovernance in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Trust is withheld from the post-colonial state and invested somewhere else –self and ethnic group.

Fractured Society

Most African societies and indeed Nigeria, are multi-ethnic in nature. This the colonial administrators exploited to their advantage at the expense of the indigenous social groups. In many parts of Africa and Nigeria in particular, the colonialists adopted varying measures to administer each ethnic nationality until January 1914, when Lord Lugard, the then governor general made a proclamation amalgamating the various entities to be one political unit. It is worthy to note that the amalgamation was never intended to integrate the peoples of the land, but for administrative convenience. Lugard was clear on this, when on the day of the proclamation of amalgamation he said:

“You are aware that his majesty's government after considerations arrived at the conclusions that it might be the greatest advantage to the countries known as southern and Northern Nigeria that they should be amalgamated into one government conforming to policy and mutuality of co-operating to the moral and material advancement of Nigeria as a whole (Lugard, 1914).”

This amalgamation for policy purposes brought strange bed fellows together and set the tone for prebendalism and subsequent corruption. The policy never envisioned integrating the peoples of the amalgamated societies into a single indissoluble nationhood. As a result, the political and power elites that emerged from the various units saw themselves as competing with the people from other groups and therefore paid more allegiance to their ethnic nationality than the contraption arising from the amalgamation. Hence, there was no unity of purpose which in turn gave birth to the blight of unhealthy competition and corruption. This imposition brought a disconnection between the people and the new economic and political system. This new socio- economic and political system brought in its wake the problem of distrust. Given that most of the social units brought together by the colonial administration had been on their own, when they were now

forced to be one, and given linguistic, economic, political and educational differences, mutual suspicion arose. Groups had embraced the western life and acquired western education at varying levels and hence, the fear of domination crept in and further drove the people apart. This scenario further created fracture or division in Nigeria. It has been very difficult to integrate the peoples of the land into what can be called a nation.

It is in an attempt to suppress the distrust and fear of domination among the ethnic nationalities that efforts have been made to reduce ethnic fear, distrust and chauvinism that certain policy options have been made. Prominent among them being the introduction of the National Youth Service Scheme. The primary purpose was to integrate the peoples of Nigeria. Given the belief that the educated elites are purveyors of change and opinion moulders, it was conceived that when young graduates undergo compulsory one year service among the peoples or ethnic nationalities other than their own, it will create a better understanding among various ethnic nationalities. Another policy option adopted to control the fear of domination by one ethnic nationality is the federal character principle "Quota System". This by statute encourages equal representations among the people or federating states. These two major policy options have rarely yielded little or no dividend as our society is as divided as ever and our political leaders in principle claim to be serving the nation, but in practice see it as a contestation between ethnic groups. They see themselves as serving "the two publics as categorized by Peter Ekeh (1975), that is, the primordial public and the civic public. This in turn strengthens what Richard Joseph describes as prebendalism.

These contestations based on prebendalism in turn creates a great gulf between the various ethnic groups as each group scrambles to get its own fair share of the national "pie". This in turn creates tension, mistrust, corruption and misgovernance in both the sub and super structures of the society. This fracture in the social structure could also be linked to insecurity and religious intolerance in our society. Tilly (2005), however, argues that for there to be trust, which will create integration in a nation state, there are many forms of what he referred to as trust networks that must exist. They are political, economic, religious and criminal networks. Trust networks are seen as being essential in building a nation devoid of social fractures. In trust networks, it is the willingness of its members to place their lives, liberties and properties at the risk of malfeasance by other members of the network. Tilly (2005), further argues that the nature of political rule to a great extent determine how integrated or accommodating the trust networks could be. He argued that in every political system, there exist three essential instruments employed by the leaders to manage trust. These are: coercion, capital and commitment. However, every democratic system employs the use of capital and commitment rather than coercion to achieve compliance. Ekeh (1975), views the absence of trust in "civic public" as the fundamental issue that can explain the failure in Nigeria to establish strong public institutions. The trust that should have been vested in the civic public and hence deepen public good and integration is vested in the primordial public and creates dislocations and fractures that have bedeviled the Nigerian society. This situation has created a monster in corruption that has led to misgovernance.

Corruption

Corruption seems to be the outcrop of the social system which is found in the third world countries and Nigeria in particular. If the social systems function well and the primordial public is eliminated, the attendant growth of prebendalism would be dead. The United Nations convention against corruption (1990) states that:

"Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy, and the rule of law, leads to violation of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish."

A critical look would affirm that all these elements mentioned in the definition are replete in the Nigerian

socio-economic and political system. This have become so ingrained in the Nigerian system that the government has created a number of agencies to fight them (Independent Corrupt Practices Commission ICPC; Economic and Financial Intelligence Unit NFIU), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and recently, a bill to create another agency to manage recovered assets has been forwarded to the national assembly. All these reflect the concern about corruption. The question however, is, has there been any effort to trace the causes of distrust, and prebendalism that gives birth to and sustains corruptions. Until this is done, there will be no remedy as even the people entrusted with the fight are also caught in the web of two publics and prebendalism.

Viewing corruption from the sociological prism, in the opinion of Scot (1975) can be regarded as a process of trade in social rewards. It is a process that entails power being traded for wealth, wealth traded for prestige and prestige traded for power and wealth. It is always in a cyclical continuum. Onuoha (2011), has argued that corruption is any subversion of due process by state actors or members of the society (non-state actors) to achieve selfish ends that are contrary to established norms of goals attainment in other to gain wealth, power or prestige. We must also note that corruption is not just for ones benefit but can be deployed for the benefit of one's primordial public. This virus has occasioned a serious fracture in our society, hence, misgovernance.

Misgovernance

Misgovernance is usually used to show that governance is not being properly carried out. Governance is the exercise of the authority of state through formal and informal traditions and institutions for the common good. Governance is the process or capacity to formulate and implement sound policies and it assumes respect for citizens. The essence of a state is to perform the functions of a normal state. That is, basics of a contemporary human existence: physical security, peace, food, jobs, equal access to education, housing and health care, and public transportation. These are basic necessities of life. Any government that cannot guarantee these is manifesting mis-governance. Any government that is not able to provide the above listed to her citizens is manifesting what can be called mis-governance. In the opinion of Richard (2006), mis-governance is what is referred to as bad or weak governance and which in its most extreme form can be called catastrophic governance.

Due to mis-governance and other issues afore mentioned, Nigerian political elites have adopted prebendal attitude, which is the systemic conversion of public offices to serve the interest of office holders and their political acolytes, clans, and ethnic communities. This creates the fundamental dynamic of mis-governance in a fractured society. For there to be good governance, states must maintain the capability to maintain law and order without relying on the use of excessive force or violence; must expand the supply of fundamental public good and facilitate the emergence of a civic order that goes beyond parochial identities and establishing a system of laws required for economic growth and prosperity of all and overall development of the society. Tilly (2005) avers that in the building of normal states, states should be improved in transformation of relationship between trust networks and public politics. He further argued that political predators and greedy, ethnic chauvinistic rulers create situation for resistance, evasion and dissimulation from trust networks. These in turn create fractures in the social structure of the given state.

Ekeh (1975) however bemoans the situation in Africa, nay Nigeria where the "civic public" has not been able to acquire the level of trust necessary for the transition from coercion to capital and commitment as a primary instrument in governance. This has kept Nigeria and other African countries from evolving from nation-states to nations. Ekeh, further avers that for the systemic mis-governance in Nigeria and Africa and the consequent hollowness and incapacity of state role in authoritative allocation of values and collective good be sharply reduced, the civic public must be deepened. We must note that misrule accentuates distrust. However, distrust among identity groups creates a facilitating environment for misrule. Nigeria as a culturally plural society has been unable to transform into nationhood over sixty years after independence and hundred and seven years

after amalgamation.

Osaghae (2006), argues that the Nigerian state has become weaker, softer, more divided and contested and generally unable to perform the functions of a normal state. It has been argued that the essence of state incapacity in Africa is the failure to build and sustain public institutions that serve and that are accountable to the ever wider public. Efforts must also be made to scale down the influence of the culture of prebendalism and the two publics especially the primordial public that incubates corruption and mis-governance. Qualitative leadership and inclusiveness are the most critical factors that can make the difference between a functional wealthy nation and a failed poverty-stricken nation. At this historic juncture in Nigeria with the rooted divisiveness being experienced, we need our best minds to come together and steer the ship of state at all levels. Nigeria needs leaders who will be unlimited in their vision, audacious in their dreams and possess the capacity to motivate the citizenry to bring out the best in them. Leaders that are not parochial, who can be limitless, resilient, industrious, enthusiastic, creative, courageous and have faith to achieve strong nationhood. Hence there is the need to strengthen the integrity, credibility and transparency of our institutions of governance. If pecuniary interests or primordial considerations of prebendalism, ethnic or religious chauvinism are not substituted by merit and capacity, then Nigeria will still be far from any meaningful developmental trajectory and emancipation into nationhood.

Given that poverty and insecurity are the greatest enemies of human potential as they erode human dignity and incapacitate people caught in their grip from being positive, value-adding participants in the society. Those caught in the poverty trap only constitute a drag on society that puts the society down. When the state through the government expands the opportunities for her citizens to positively express their human potential, it is not doing them (the poor) a favor but is in the overall interest of the entire society. The stability and continued cohesion of a state depend significantly on its capacity to fulfill the material, physical and psychological aspirations of the groups who are the constituents. Once they have cause to believe that the state they belong to, is actually an obstacle to rather than a facilitator of their welfare, such alienated citizens become sources of danger to peaceful and harmonious existence. For the continued existence of the state as a corporate entity, man is instinctively susceptible to fairness, security and economic cum political motivation. As nations make progress in institutional building, political leaders becoming statesmen and not prebendalists, transiting from prebendal orientation to imbibing ethos which will lead to citizens realizing their full potentials. This, will in turn reduce the degree of corruption and mis-governance that has bedeviled this country for over sixty years of political independence. If these steps are not courageously taken, then, the fracture in our society and social structures will be “till death do us part”.

Theoretical Background

A number of theoretical perspectives have been put forward to explain the behaviour of people in any given social, economic or political environment. For this however, the “Attraction-Selection-Attrition” perspective is adopted to explain the phenomena under discourse. The basic assumption underlying the Attraction-Selection-Attrition perspective is that individuals analyse their social environment and adjust their actions accordingly (Schneider, 1975). Most individuals are likely to be attracted and selected into the environment that fits with the tendencies they prefer. Most individuals will likely adapt some of the behaviours, cognition and attitudes to better fit with the social environment in which they live and work. When once you select, you are more likely to remain relevant in the social environment as against fizzling out by those who do not adapt. Hence, people in a prebendal environment where the two publics (primordial and civic) exist are most likely to adapt to the situation which in turn leads to corruption and mis-governance. Thus, as people who experience comparable conditions try to adapt to common environment (Schneider, 1987; Schneider & Reichner, 1983). In other words, one can infer that there is a positive relationship between a given individual's level of anti-social behavior and the level of anti-social behaviour existing in his social environment.

It is necessary to point out that human actions are learned as people interact with one another. Prebendal behaviors and corruption are learned in the context of the environment. When strong similarities exist in a social environment, members' perception and behaviour tend to synchronize. This invariably influences state actors in the contestations that occur in a plural society like Nigeria and then breeds corruption as mis-governance. Salanick and Pfefter (1978), argue that the effect of a particular socio-political environment on individuals' attitudes, behaviours and actions depends on the degree of shared beliefs in such an environment. The anti-social behavior (prebendalism, corruption and mis-governance) behavior of an individual is usually influenced by the attraction and selection of a role model that reflects the groups of social norms like distrust. The Attraction-Selection-Attrition perspective envisions that membership of a group prepares the individual to acquire more accurate perception/attribute of the group. Hence, the person is prepared to adjust to either play the role (primordial or civic, or ethnic card of prebendalism). This attributes which Nigerian leaders manifest have led to deep rooted division, mutual suspicion, insecurity, lack of transiting into a nation and crass mis-governance. This theory therefore captures the mood of Nigerians in leadership positions both at the state and national level and has greatly hindered integration, social justice and economic growth and prosperity as is manifested in the actions of Nigeria's political elite.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The spate of prebendalism, corruption and mis-governance have greatly stunted her growth into nationhood and a prosperous nation that is capable of attending to the needs of her citizens. Nigeria as a nation has failed to successfully transit from mere statehood to genuine nationhood. This can be attributed to the prebendal structure that exist, that has led to state failure by deepening economic crisis, worsening poverty and unconscionable corruption. Nigeria, with an otherwise highly gifted citizenry lay prostrate and impotent as a country rolled relentlessly down the slope of underdevelopment and mis-governance and the steady watch of innately inept prebendal, greedy and visionless leaders.

Any nation that is organized and run in such a way as to constitute an obstacle to the peace, happiness, freedom and prosperity of the individuals and groups that inhabit it is most likely to experience instability and disintegration in the long run. Every nation owes its citizens, both as individuals and component collectivities, a leadership with a clear idea of the purpose of a nation that is attuned to fulfilling its responsibilities to those who find themselves as citizens within its territorial jurisdiction. The very purpose of a nation is to actualize and optimize the potentials of its citizenry. It is to create the enabling environment and empower her citizens to live useful and fulfilled lives, add value to their society and pass on a worthy legacy to future generations. This, prebendalism, corruption and mis-governance all stand against. After six decades of independence, Nigeria requires proactive, purposeful, creative, all inclusive and focused governance from determined leaders to extricate her citizens from poverty and create sustainable prosperity for vast majority of her people.

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