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## The State, Bureaucracy And Corruption In Nigeria

Dare Arowolo

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## Introduction

The transformation of societies to capitalism has introduced complexity into activities of man. Once capitalism transformed the traditional way of life, factors such as effectiveness of competition, freedom of movement and the absence of any system of social security compelled the state to assume responsibility for the protection and welfare of the individual (Jacoby, 1973:147). To help the state achieve this, it has become imperative to have a seeming standing power evolving from, but placing itself above, the society. Such power that alienates itself more and more from the society is being exercised on behalf of the state by certain institutions, structures and agencies, the bureaucracy being the most important (Arowolo, 2004:2).

As government's activities record an unprecedented range of tasks, state apparatuses have become massive and continue to grow. The complex nature and differentiated functions of government call for the need to have well-trained officials to administer and manage the complexity and differentiation that characterise government's business. To this end, government employs unprecedented numbers of people to deal with an unprecedented range of tasks and specialisation.

The overbearing power of public bureaucracy makes it the guide and direction of totality of government's business and activities. Bureaucracy now becomes almost 'omnipresent' and 'omnipotent' in the handling of all the business activities of governments both the implementation and, surprisingly, formulation of public policy- a situation which strengthens the bureaucracy and widens its sphere of operation. This observation is in line of with the view of Krieger (1987:1) that 'bureaucracy is a form of government, government by officials, characterised by tendency to meddle, to exceed its proper function'.

In a situation where bureaucracy is involved in every stage of policy process, there is indeed tendency to behave extra-constitutionally and act beyond ethical framework that guards and guides its official conduct.

Generally, the efficiency or otherwise of bureaucracy is a function of the environment in which it operates. It goes on to reason that Nigeria's public bureaucracy is inefficient and corrupt because it is influenced by its environment; it is influenced by its environment because its environment is overwhelmed with and characterised by lack of strict adherence to rules, ethics and standard norms that dictate the tone and tenor of moral conduct in public offices.

In Nigeria, corruption has been identified as the bane of urgently needed development in the country. Corruption remains the greatest threat to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and even to the continued existence of the Nigerian state. Corruption inhibits socio-economic development and denies equitable distribution of wealth and makes sure some sections of the country, which are considered 'ethnically disadvantaged' to remain worst off in the distributive arrangement of national resources. Corruption has proved ubiquitous mixing with individual blood and societal life, where

officials not only personalise public office but also personify it. The work ethics has been severely undermined by the get-rich-quick syndrome from corruption. Onimode (2001:3) noted that 'not only the officials were corrupt but corruption was official, and 'lootocracy' became a new diatribe for the governance on the continent'.

## Conceptual Framework

It becomes germane to conceptualise the three major analytical concepts namely: the State, Bureaucracy and Corruption, to achieve deeper understanding of the major thrusts of this paper.

### The State

The state is a politically organised body of people inhabiting a defined geographical entity with an organised legitimate government. It can also be defined as a political association with effective sovereignty over a geographical area. The state, according to Lenin (1976:9) 'is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without. It is a product of society at a certain stage of development'. It can also be defined 'as a well-defined geographical and sovereign territory with human population and government' (Ajayi, 1997:69). The state in this respect is autonomous and authoritative, as it secures obedience through its authority and legitimacy. While we know that the state is an outgrowth of the society, which has its origin intrinsically from the society, it is however surprising the upsurge of almost unlimited power of the state. From the perspectives of the social contractors (Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau), the state is the product of a contract between the citizens and the government established to serve their interests and ensure their liberty (Ajayi, 1997:69).

There was no disagreement among Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Lenin on the overbearing power of the state. The states in Africa are instruments of oppression because of their legitimacy crisis. African state is authoritarian, self-seeking and parochial. African state is alien to the civil society since it is a forced arrangement that did not emanate from the conscience and consent of the African peoples and their societies.

As a result, most African states rather than having their taproots emanating naturally from the African society, they are indeed European impositions and relics which emerged from above the society and not from within it. The external root of African states is the basis of their legitimacy crisis, where people view their respective states as alien to them and are also alienated from their states.

### Bureaucracy

The word "bureaucracy" stems from the word "bureau", used from the early 18th century in Western Europe not just to refer to a writing desk, but to an office, i.e., a workplace, where officials worked. The original French meaning of the word bureau was the baize used to cover desks. The term bureaucracy came into use shortly before the French Revolution of 1789, and from there rapidly spread to other countries. The Greek suffix – kratia or kratos – means "power" or "rule" (Wikipedia, 2007, 1; Oluya, et al, 1998, 51-52).

Bureaucracy is the structure and set of regulations in place to control activity, usually in large organizations and government. It is represented by standardized procedure (rule-following) that dictates the execution of most or all processes within the body, formal division of powers, hierarchy,

and relationships. Inferred from the above definitions of bureaucracy are its salient characteristics which include the following:

§ Body of non-elective government officials ;

§ An administrative policy-making group;

§ Government characterized by specialization of functions, adherence to fixed rules, and a hierarchy of authority;

§ A system of administration marked by officialdom, red tape, and proliferation;

§ A well-defined division of administrative labor among persons and offices;

§ A personnel system with consistent patterns of recruitment and stable linear careers;

§ A hierarchy among offices, such that the authority and status are differentially distributed among actors; and,

§ Formal and informal networks that connect organizational actors to one another through flows of information and patterns of cooperation.

## Corruption

Corruption in Nigeria is often believed to arise from the clash or conflict between traditional values and the imported norms that accompany modernisation and socio-political development. Barley (1966, 720) argues thus: 'corruption, while being tied particularly to the act of bribery, is a general term covering the misuse of authority as a result of considerations of personal gains, which need not be monetary'. In Nigeria, many people see corruption as a practical problem involving the 'outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism and the granting of favours to personal acquaintance' (Harsch 1993, 33). Corruption has broadly been defined as a perversion or a change from good to bad. Specifically, corruption or corrupt behaviour involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (Dike, 2008, 4). Corruption is efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit (Lipset & Lenz, 2000, 112-114).

Kwame (2000:451) has argued that 'corruption is prevalent in societies where integration is low and socialisation poor such that recognition of the common national interest is not pervasive enough'. Generally, corruption is a form of social behaviour that is particularly characteristic of societies, which are based on production for private accumulation.

The Nigerian civil service derived its extractive orientation from colonial bureaucracy. British administration was established to serve the parochial interest of the colonial masters. Expectedly, after independence, the Nigeria's public bureaucracy saw the extraction as a legacy and continued with it. The civil-politicians who were not superior to the inherited public bureaucracy decided to use the already 'pathologised' bureaucracy as a tool of self-enrichment.

This was aggravated during the military regimes as the Nigerian civil service became inept, corrupt

and highly indisciplined. It became a prominent partner in kleptomania that characterised military administration. Through the bureaucracy, the political leadership under the military used the public service as machinery for acquiring and appropriating wealth and privilege (Adetoye, 2001:90). With this, inefficiency and other corrupt practices saw public service as their home of abode.

### The Nature and Characteristics of Corruption

Much research has been done to determine the nature and character of corruption. In this academic enquiry, corruption is divided into political corruption and bureaucratic corruption

**Political Corruption :** This takes place at the highest levels of political authority. It occurs when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit political leadership. It can also include purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election. This practice has almost become a norm in Nigeria's political processes. Votes are either bought with money or secured through thuggery, intimidation of voters and violence. Electoral victory is no longer determined by one man one vote rule, but is largely determined through the level of intimidation and federal connection.

**Bureaucratic Corruption:** This occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of politics. This kind of corruption has been branded low level and street level. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, police stations, immigration offices and other public offices.

Other forms of corruption include: bribery, fraud, embezzlement, extortion, favouritism, nepotism, etc.

### Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

The question that readily comes to one's mind is: why is corruption prevalent in Nigeria? The causes of corruption are myriad; and they have political and cultural variables. Some evidence points to a link between corruption and social diversity, ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, and the proportions of country's population adhering to different belief systems (Lipset and Lenz, 2000). Studies also note that corruption is widespread in most non-democratic countries, and particularly, in countries that have been branded 'neo-patrimonial, kleptocratic and prebendal' (Dike, 2008, 4). Thus, the political system and the culture of a society could make the citizens more prone to corrupt activities. However, we shall focus on the fundamental factors that engender corrupt practices in Nigeria. Some of the factors include:

- 1) Great inequality in distribution of wealth;
- 2) Political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth;
- 3) Weak and ineffective rules system;
- 4) The weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanisms; and
- 5) The absence of a strong sense of nationalism (Ndiulor, 1999, 17).

## 6) Excessive love for material things.

The lack of or total disregard for ethical standards throughout the agencies of government and business organizations in Nigeria is a serious drawback. According to a scholar, 'ethics is action, the way we practice our values; it is a guidance system used in making decisions'. According to him, the issue of ethics in public sector (and in private life) encompasses a broad range, including a stress on obedience to authority, on the necessity of logic in moral reasoning, and on the necessity of putting moral judgement into practice (Bowman 1991). Unfortunately, many officeholders in Nigeria (elected or selected) do not have clear conceptions of the ethical demands of their position, even when they have such are brazenly disregarded. Other factors are poor reward system and greed; Nigeria's reward system is, perhaps, among the poorest in the world. Nigeria is a society where national priorities are misplaced; meritocracy is discouraged while mediocrity is promoted.

The Nigerian extended family places enormous pressure on the civil servant, forcing him to engage in corrupt practices and nepotism. Bureaucrats are believed to exploit their public positions to generate benefits for themselves, their families, and their ethnic or social groups. In Nigeria, the civil service employees view public service as an opportunity for self enrichment; hence incompetence and inefficiency among the public servants have been given as one of the causes of corruption. Pervasive and chronic poverty, extremely high levels of material deprivation and severe inequalities in the distribution of resources have been advanced as major determinants of corruption in Nigeria (Osoba, 2000, 473; Arowolo, 2004,64).

The emergence of the military in the political decolonisation of Nigeria, as an important force in the allocation of resources has further distorted income distribution and elevated corruption. Also, contributory is the weak foundation upon which the Nigerian state is built. The state actors capitalise on the 'softness' of the state to enrich themselves at the expense of political and socio-economic development of the country. The political leadership (representing and acting on behalf of the state) collaborated with the bureaucracy to plunder Nigeria resources for personal gains. This is easily sustained and tenaciously maintained as a result of the poor judicial administrative system. The judiciary was made and forced to be dependent. The dependence or over-dependence of the judiciary is a calculated attempt to render it a toothless bulldog that cannot 'bite' corrupt officials. Where deterrent is lacking, corruption is promoted (Kwame, 2000,451; Arowolo, 2000,65).

### The Nigerian State and the Bureaucracy: A Nexus of Corruption

Understanding the nature of kleptocratic relationship between the Nigerian state and the public bureaucracy demands an employment of public choice theory. Public choice theory contends that the rules that are ultimately aimed at regulating and conditioning the relationship between entrepreneurship and bureaucracy on the one hand and between groups and individuals on the other should be an outgrowth of the society (Mbaku, 1992, 249). The theory emphasises public input in rules governing individuals and the society. Once constitutional rules have been selected and adopted, and a government established, political conditions will try to use government to redistribute income and wealth in their favour (Mbaku, 1992, 249).

In a situation where the rules are a reflection of elitist section of the society, state actors are bent to manipulate the hitherto weak, parochial, inefficient and poorly designed constitutional rules to ensure their almost unlimited power and unconstrained access to private exchange. In such economy,

resource allocation is usually totally politicised (Arowolo, 2004, 72-73).

Rules that regulate the activities of individuals within a society matter and are a major determinant of how individuals and organisations behave. The behaviour of bureaucrats (bureaucracy) and the political actors (acting on behalf of the state) who collaborate with them to perpetrate corruption can be analysed effectively only within the context of existing rules. Thus, without a closer understanding of a country's law and institutions, any effort to analyse or understand corruption within that society would be futile. Any anticorruption programme that is designed without taking into consideration the impact of the existing rules on the behaviour of individuals (including bureaucrats, politicians, entrepreneurs, voters, etc) within the society would be ineffective. Rules define how individuals can interact with each other, provide a means for the settlement of conflict, and generally place constraints on individual behaviour. The readiness of the stakeholders to play according to the rules often depends on the ability of the state to ensure compliance (Mbaku, 1992, 247).

Present anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria suffer from several problems. First, they are being carried out within inefficient and non-viable rules. Second, anti-corruption campaign itself involves efforts to manipulate outcome within existing rules. Third, the counteracting agencies charged with policing and enforcement of the laws and the bureaucrats who work in those agencies are not properly constrained by the laws. Fourth, many bureaucrats are themselves corrupt and can not be relied on to provide leadership needed to man this campaign exercise. Finally, the political actors who act on behalf of the state are not sincere and committed enough to have a successful and sustainable anti-corruption crusade. Nigeria today operates under constitutional rules that were adopted at independence with minor amendments.

Despite many attempts at post independence rules reform, Nigeria has not succeeded in designing appropriate laws and institutions, especially those that would guarantee the types of outcomes desired by members of the society. Instead, what is known as constitution in Nigeria is basically adaptation of European constitutional models. The institutions brought to Nigeria by Britain were primarily 'structures of exploitation and despotism'. This has resulted in institutional instability and privatisation of the state by those who were charged with the responsibility of ensuring its continuity and stability. As a consequence, clientalism replaces moral upright and sycophancy placed above merit (Arowolo, 2004, 78).

Thus, the rules established to regulate socio-economic and political relations were not the outcome of negotiations among representatives of relevant population groups in the country. Rather, these rules were a function of British experiment designed to satisfy their desired outcomes and the post-colonial rule making was constantly being engineered by the military, constitutional discourse was still limited to a few urban elite's opinion, a significant part of national political opinions were excluded from participation.

The Nigerian state and the bureaucracy capitalise on the 'weakness' and 'softness' of the structure and the fragility of the existing rules to manipulate the teeming ignorant population, and increase their economic base through advantage of venality. The nexus of corruption that exists between the state and the bureaucracy would not have been possible if such attempt were not supported by either of the two. Therefore, bureaucratic corruption and political corruption are a function of unholy alliance between the political leadership (referring to the state) and the bureaucracy (represented by its officials). Subscribing to this assertion, a scholar has argued that 'the civil service is an important linkage in the

exploitation of the Nigerian economy and resources by foreign capital. It constantly plays a collaborationist role in this direction' (Amuwo, 1989).

## Effects of Corruption on Nigeria's Socio-Economic and Political Development

Transparency International has persistently rated Nigeria among the most corrupt nations in the world. For instance, The 1996 Study of Corruption by Transparency International and Goettingen University ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation, among 54 nations listed in the study, with Pakistan as the second highest (Moore 1997, 4).

As this was not too bad enough, the 1998 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked Nigeria 81 out of the 85 countries pooled (Lipset & Lenz 2000, 113). And in the 2001, Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the image of Nigeria slipped further down south; she ranked 90, out of 91 countries pooled, with second position as most corrupt nation, with Bangladesh coming first. Similarly, the 2007 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index rated Nigeria 147 out of 179 countries under review. The implication of this is enormous on the economic development aspiration of the country.

The prevalence of corruption has had adverse effects on the Nigerian economy and her quest for economic development. The recent interest in the political dimension of economic growth has had a significant impact on the study of the behaviour of bureaucrats and the ruling elite and how their activities affect macroeconomic performance. In the past four decades, Nigeria has been so plagued with the problem of governance that it has been recording a downward trend in economic mismanagement arising from bad governance and corrupt practices that have driven many of the people below the poverty line.

Corruption has been identified as the major clog in the development wheel of the country. It has allowed fraudulent accumulations that have resulted in the progressive and phenomenal enrichment of Nigerian rulers thereby impoverishing the greatest number of Nigerians, making them hopeless, the future of the youth has become uncertain and diverting the interest and destiny of the Nigerian youth to armed robbery, drug peddling and trafficking and all manner of racketeering found among the youth of today.

Corruption can tarnish the image of a country. As we have seen, Nigeria suffers more than most nations from an appalling international image created by its inability to deal with corruption and bribery. Political corruption has introduced and increased political violence, thuggery, intimidation and political assassination. One-man-one-vote rule does not count in Nigeria as a result of political corruption.

On the whole, corruption has made Nigeria to be perpetually underdeveloped, where development remains elusive and unattainable, spoil system becomes acceptable standard norm, and meritocracy is a 'forbidden fruit'. There are little or no resources for investment and the country becomes a 'danger zone' for foreign investors.

## Conclusion

This paper examines bureaucratic corruption viz-a-viz unholy alliance between the state and the bureaucracy. It concludes that corruption is celebrated and promoted because deterrent is lacking and rules reform so far has been to the advantage of the elitist section. Nigeria has tried and considered



several strategies in an effort to minimize levels of bureaucratic corruption but all these strategies seem not to have been effective enough to put the menace to rest. Even the evidence shows that the counteracting institutions – the judiciary, the police, etc are not properly constrained by the law and that most civil servants (including Judges and police officers) are themselves corrupt. As a result, most strategies or approaches at combating corruption in Nigeria have been unsuccessful.

Corruption can be tackled by changing the orientation and psychological perception of Nigerians towards corruption. This can be done through enlightenment campaigns, introduction of anti-corruption in the school curriculum as well as formulating and implementing people-oriented policies. This should aim at tackling the problem of poverty identified as one of the causes of corruption. Youth and women empowerment is a social necessity for a secure future. Empowering women and youths is capable of minimising social vices from the society and providing responsible future leaders.

Also, political leadership must also see position of authority as a call to service. Therefore, leaders should demonstrate high level of integrity, transparency and accountability. Effective rule reforms must be put in place to condition and constrain the behaviour of the bureaucrats and the political leaders. There should also be deterrent mechanism to punish those who involve in corrupt practices. In this regard, political leadership must demonstrate willingness to track and punish corrupt officials and citizens as well as create economic climate conducive enough to raise the standard of living of the citizenry.

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