

Nigeria:

A country where corruption makes rulers deaf, dumb and blind.

By Lanre Ogundipe

“Corruption is the enemy of development, and of good governance. It must be got rid of. Both the government and the people at large must come together to achieve this national objective” Pratibha Patil



The discourse on corruption in Nigeria remains an endless talk shop simply because both leadership and followers are deeply enmeshed in the scourge. Nigeria's corruption has become a virus that is ravaging the entire landscape to the extent that it would take God's intervention to recover the country from its stranglehold. The author quoted above would suggest that corruption is an African issue. I, however, disagree. The “pandemic” is not restricted to Nigeria or Africa alone. Western societies are not exempted. I dare say that the Western nations, more than any other, are culpable in the performance, though at the extra territorial level. While jealously guarding their own treasures and appropriating resources for their own people, they navigated the length and breadth of the globe, exploiting other countries, for selfish interest. They corruptly enriched their countries with the wealth, toll, and blood of others. African slaves built their cities while their resources served their economies. It would take eternity to discuss corruption, but for a quick grasp of the phenomenon, Nigeria as a nation would serve the purpose of my attempt to discuss this nagging social concern. There is phenomenal corruption in our country simply because there is a profound failure of leadership generally and in the fight against corruption in particular. If the truth is to be told, with very few exceptions, our crop of leaders is essentially self-serving and visionless. Some

even rank as despots and not leaders in the true sense of the word.

They lack(ed) vision, focus, and selflessness and are indulgent on a large scale. *Without fear of contradiction, our leaders are unimaginably corrupt; they are greedy; they are vindictive; they are reckless and, in many fundamental respects, senseless. Virtually whoever has access to power abuses it. The exceptions are very few indeed. There is perhaps no other country in the world where power corrupts and absolute power corrupts as absolutely as in Nigeria.*

Our indisputable consistent dismal ranking on the global corruption index testifies to the societal decadence and poverty of leadership that bestrides the country, yet we gloat over this shameful misnomer, wears its badge with pride and carry on like Nero of Rome. That the so-called African leader and hope of the black man is now donning the crown of corruption and poverty headquarters of the world, without qualms, in incomprehensible. Like a deaf and blind man, he hears nothing, he sees nothing. Our leaders hear nothing, and they see nothing. Nothing moves them. What a shame!

While yet adorning their corruption epaulette, those who plunged the country into the ditch are moving around with full chest, parading credentials of 'sainthood' and superiority. Yet our society keeps applauding them as people with morals and means. Each opportunity they had in providing leadership became personalized. Citizens are compelled to embrace their warped ideology. They are subjected to mental and material poverty and reoriented to believe that except one identifies with the loyalist camp, chances of enjoying any benefit from the state, even one's survival, is slim. The promoters of that bastardization are walking the streets unchallenged of their evil deeds.



This same attitude was what brought our country to its knees. Its assets are decimated, its infrastructure lying in ruins. Our education system has been destroyed, health facilities are in comatose, shipping lines have become moribund, and in short, Nigeria has been destroyed. Look at what happened in this country in the 1970s! Where are all the river basins? Where are the industries? Where are the motor companies? Volkswagen of Nigeria, so many of them? These industries were all destroyed between 1986 and early 1990's. At that time, if you were in their good book, they would likely issue you license to establish a bank. You can turn the bank into whatever you like. If you were favoured, you could get a license for oil block or whatever catches your fancy. At some point, the government was simply personalized. I say this on good authority. Some Nigerians who were in the security services in the country would attest to these facts. The country's security agencies were turned into laboratory of sorts to test all kinds of fantasies.

In all honesty, the meaning of corruption goes well beyond the meaning normally adduced to it in Nigerian public discourse. For, corruption means much more than public officers taking bribes and gratification, committing fraud and stealing funds, and diverting resources, entrusted to their care. Corruption, in my view, means a deliberate violation, for gainful ends, of standards of conduct legally, professionally, or even ethically, established, in private and public affairs. These gains may be in cash or in kind or, it may even be psychological or political but they derive from the violation of the integrity of an entity and involve the subversion of its quality and capacity, going by the definition of the late erudite scholar Bala Yusuf Usman in one of his submissions on corruption.

Corruption is one of the major problems that Nigeria has to tackle and overcome if it is to make any significant and sustainable progress in the 21st century. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo instituted two anti-graft agencies within a space of three years (ICPC September 2000 and EFCC in 2003). Can we say they have been able to stem corruption? Rather, it's on the increase. Instead of looking inward to see the underlying factors that had inhibited efforts to curtail the scourge, the campaign now is targeted at eradicating or muzzling the mouth of the oxen that "threaded out the corn." The kingpins of corruption are

resolute to emasculate the campaign. It must not be allowed to continue. It must be silenced so business can continue as usual. The main reason for the failure of Buhari's – military regime's – campaign against corruption and indiscipline was the regime's inability to deal effectively with the problem of economic and social decline inherited from the preceding regime. The regime also shot itself in the foot by trying to arrest the country's economic and social decline by doctrinaire and anti-people policies. massive retrenchment of workers in the public service, the introduction of many new taxes, levies and fees on citizens, drastic reduction in public expenditure, especially on social welfare and agricultural subsidies, and the widespread destruction of the means of livelihood of small privately employed persons like motor mechanics, food vendors and petty traders by pulling down their makeshift sheds, kiosks and bukas in the name of urban environmental sanitation. It would be unseemly for me to particularize further, but I cannot over-emphasize the importance of eradicating this epidemic that has reduced our nation to the ground. Any who has not lived among us may not be able to appreciate the extent to which bribery and other corrupt practices have wrecked our nation. Those who occupy positions of power operate in exclusion of the ideals of disinterested service. Much of the attraction of a post lies in the opportunities it offers for extortion of one form or another. Unless the commission fully realizes the gravity of this problem and tackle it with courage, any recommendations for marginal reform are bound to fall flat – dead on arrival. It is most troubling to see that only a handful of Nigerians, especially public officials, are people of integrity and honesty.

Most educated Nigerians are citizens of two publics in the same society. On one hand, they belong to a civic public from which they gain materially but to which they give only grudgingly. On the other hand, they belong to a primordial public from which they derive little or no material benefits but to which they are expected to give generously and do give materially. To make matters more complicated, their relationship to the primordial public is moral, while that to the civic public is amoral. The dialectical tensions and confrontations between these two publics constitute the uniqueness of modern African politics" It is my conviction, as an ardent believer in possibilities that Nigeria is not beyond change. Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability, and the vision to steer her in the right direction. I wholeheartedly agree with a school of thought that says "corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed". Although many Nigerians may tend to share this view, the incurable optimist I am about the future of this country, make me to conclude that our tomorrow will be alright if we all submit to moral discipline in all its facets.

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