Corruption With Tribal Marks: Explaining The Ethnic Nature Of Political Corruption In Nigeria

By

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Abstract

No doubt, corruption is one of Nigeria’s biggest socio-political and economic problems today. This paper takes a look at the emerging trend of political corruption in Nigeria which is Corruption With Tribal Marks. Using Peter Ekeh’s conception of the “Two Publics” in Africa, the author argues it will be difficult to fight corruption with the present trend it is taking. The study also looks at the nature of the Nigerian state (colonial and post-colonial) and the instrument(s) through which it promotes political corruption. The paper also cites recent cases of corrupt politicians in Nigeria using Chinua Achebe’s work, A Man of the People. The paper further argues that de-ethnicization of corruption in Nigeria will take more than just a political process, but psychological and socialisation processes.

Keywords: corruption with tribal marks, tribalism, post-colonial states, political corruption and ethnicization of corruption.
Introduction

Nigeria is one of the legacies of British imperialism in Africa. The country’s multi-ethnic nature will provide the key to understanding its political problems. Since its independence in 1960, one of the main scourges that have bedevilled the Nigerian state is the pervasive nature of corruption. It is because of this that scholars have, at different times, devote considerable studies to the understanding and explanations of perhaps Nigeria’s biggest socio-political problem. The problem of political corruption has taken several dimensions at various times and varying degrees.

Scholars of different ideological and intellectual orientations have disagreed on the causes of corruption. Some see it as a social problem which is a product of social changes that takes place in human societies (Olurode, 2005a). Others see it as a universal problem which comes with its Nigerian peculiarities (Anifowose, 2005). Corruption has always been explained with little or no attention to the emerging dimension it is taking in ethnic form.

The structuralists have maintained that the Nigerian post-colonial state failed to advance real development programmes because the state is largely controlled by a political class which is only interested in capturing state resources through the instrumentality of political power. Because the political class lacks imagination, initiative and creativity, this has led to the failure of critical institutions like the public service to deliver welfare services to the people (Ake, 1981). Others have contended that corruption in Nigeria is due to Nigeria’s contacts with Britain (Ekeh, 1975; Beckman, 1985).

The primary purpose of this paper is to unearth the roots of corruption in Nigerian state in its proper form. The paper will be interrogating the Nigerian state (colonial and post-colonial) which is founded on ethnicity and uses it as a tool to maintain their rule over the masses. The paper also
discusses the how the political class benefits from the ethnic composition of Nigeria. The paper also discusses how the Nigerian post-colonial state has officially legitimised the ethnicisation of corruption.

With the understanding of the attachment of the people to their ethnic groups, the political class has made it difficult to stamp out corruption because ethnicity is used to mobilise the masses against the fight against corruption of which the political class hides under the shield of ethnicity while continue to loot the nation’s wealth.

Having identified corruption as a problem in the Nigerian state since its independence, the following questions will naturally arise: What are the real cause(s) of political corruption in the Nigerian state? Why has it been difficult to stamp out or minimise corruption? What are the solutions and explanations to the problem of political corruption in Nigeria?

**Ethnicity: Some Conceptual Notes**

What is ethnicity? Before we conceptualise ethnicity, we must make some important distinctions between ethnic groups and tribes. Frazier (1957) sees ethnicity as race or “culture contact”. He defines it as “the relations of people, not merely as individuals in their interpersonal interactions, but people as mere members of groups, which are differentiated because of both physical characteristics and cultural differences.” (p. 31). These “cultural differences” according to Frazier includes technology, customs, habits, values and resulting personality organization of the members of the various racial and cultural groups (ibid).

In Frazier’s analysis, we may deduce that ethnicity connotes the following: First, it symbolises a form of social interaction among groups of people who share common moral order. Second, it can mean (negatively) competition, jealousy, conflicts or ultra-nationalist sentiments which create a
siege mentality of “us-versus-them” mentality among groups. He notes: “Since the two parties (ethnic groups) in a conflict are not members of a moral order, generally they do not regard each other as human. Consequently, there is no basis for human sympathy or opportunity for human impulses…” (Ibid).

In essence, ethnicity may create a sense of brotherhood bond between members of the same cultural background brought up by historical affinities in trade, marriages or religious worship; they are not necessarily of the same moral order. For instance, an Ijebu man may speak fluent Yoruba as (if not more than) an Ibadan man or Egba man. This does not reduce the Ijebuness in the Ijebu man neither does it erase the Ibadanness in the Ibadan man or the Egbaness in the Egba man because they both speak Yoruba or share the same cultural background (Eleazu, 1977:24).

However, they will both remember they are both children of Oduduwa when they are dealing or negotiating power or economic values with non-Yoruba speaking groups. The Yoruba identity or bond between the Ijebu and Ibadan will immediately take the back seat when the issue of Ijebu or Ibadan state is raised. Soon, the Ijebu man begins to see how different he is from the Egba man as though they are not both Yorubas. The Onitsha people in the 1930s refused to be classified with others in the eastern region Ibos because they consider themselves superior (Abernethy, 1969 cited in Ekeh, 1975).

With this understanding of ethnicity, we then proceed to dissect the roots of the problem in our perspective of the nature of mother day corruption in Nigeria.
Ethnicity as a Colonial Construct

Was there ethnicity in Africa before colonialism?

The most important thing to note about the colonial incursion into Africa is that it was largely motivated by economic reasons (Rodney, 1972). In considering the European imperial ambitions, it is important to note that political and cultural aspects played the second fiddle to the economic aspect (Ejimofor, 1987:31). The Colonial state, an agent of European imperialist interests, was purely interested in deploying all means (including every means) to achieve its imperial ambitions. One of the chief tools to achieve this was to raise *ethnic consciousness* out of the existing tribal societies through classifications and deliberate policies.

Before the advent of colonial rule in Africa, Africans belonged to several social groups which enhance social harmony. There were groups such as nuclear and extended family, lineage and chiefdoms, and perhaps class and tribes (Iliffe, 1979: 318). It is often accepted that pre-colonial African identity was not based on ethnic affiliation, but on the clan. Ethnic affiliations are partly based on history and mythology which the colonial state capitalized on for political reasons (An-Na’im and Peshkova, 2000: 78).

Africa has tribes which related in harmony in trade, marriages and diplomacy. These tribes have developed a high degree of social and political organization which the colonial state violently disrupted and inverted to further the imperial ambitions of the European capitalists (Frazier, 1957; Iliffe, 1979; Rodney, 1972).

Since these tribes were almost never in conflicts with each other, the colonial state took advantage of the simple misunderstandings among the local tribes to create identities and loyalties which the newly-formed state felt comfortable with. The states of Africa now made Africans think
themselves as being Yorubas, Igbos, Muslims, Catholics, Christians to enable them to function effectively within the colonial framework because the metropolitan bourgeoisies wrongly thought Africans belonged to the ethnic groups they help create (Iliffe, 1979).

The colonial state in its poor understanding of ethnicity among Africans developed policies to institutionalise ethnicity. Policies like the indirect rule, assimilation or “divide and conquer” in their bid to achieve “administrative efficiency” (Iliffe, 1979). With policies like indirect rule, an African soon began to see how different he is from a fellow African who doesn’t speak his tribal language; stopped seeing his brother’s skin colour as something that should unite them; ceases to see the historical affinity he has with his other tribes. Rather, he now remembers long-forgotten disagreements his ancestors had with his brother’s over a land issue which the colonial state brought up again. In essence, he now sees the white officer as a master, a messiah and a Lord that will help him avenge old treatments. All these are to the pleasure of the colonial state. This was one way the colonial state was able to exert its hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). The hegemony the colonialist created was based on domination, oppression, repression, exploitation, injustice and illegitimacy (Nnoli, 2010:62).

A cursory look at the Nigerian history reveals a deliberate attempt by the colonial state to institutionalise divisive ethnic tendencies in the country. In 1914, despite Lord Lugard’s amalgamation of the Colony of Lagos, the protectorates of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria, each continued to be governed separately. Each had its colonial bureaucracy with different official languages. In 1939, the country was divided into three: North, West and East each having its own Lieutenant Governor who was responsible to the Governor-General in Lagos with substantial political powers devolved to these regions (Osuntokun, 1979).
The colonial state fostered ethnicity by encouraging the rise of *ethnic consciousness* among Nigerians. To prevent the masses from uniting effectively against the colonial state, they spread myths about how different the existing tribes were from one another. They achieved these successfully by enlisting the help of domestic agents of the colonial state—the petty bourgeoisies. They equally adopted several strategies which includes, but not limited to:

i. Classifying ethnic groups and insisting that official forms carry information about the ethnic origin of individuals,

ii. Disaggregating ethnic groups into various subgroups,

iii. Favouring some ethnic groups over others,

iv. In some cases, they separated already assimilated groups (Nnoli, 1986: 16)

After the successful creation and institutionalization of ethnicity, the colonial state used the petty bourgeoisies optimally in this role. With the division of the country into three regions, the petty bourgeoisies saw the opportunity to agitate for more representation in the Legislative Council whose membership was only limited to Lagos and Calabar. They raised their voices loud in their call for a federal system of government which guarantees the security of their positions under the new Richards’ Constitution of 1946 (Nnoli, 2010: 67).

When it was obvious the indirect rule policy has all but succeeded in several parts of the country, especially in the South, the colonial state declared it illegal. In its place, it gave the petty bourgeoisies the opportunity to finally displace their arch rivals, the traditional rulers, in the colonial administration. The petty bourgeoisies have gotten what they have all their lives longed for—the official recognition of the colonial state as representatives of the people. They were granted
juicy positions in the newly Africanized Civil Service and had the opportunity to rub shoulders with the colonial officials (Coleman, 1958).

The colonial state encouraged the petty bourgeoisies to form political parties along ethnic lines (Sklar, 1963). The petty bourgeoisies who lacked the privilege of access to colonial officials needs political parties to do so. With the political parties based in the regions, the petty bourgeoisies had access to state resources for the first time, and the British economic interest was under little threat (Post, 1964 cited in Fadakinte, 2013). The colonial state allowed the petty bourgeoisies unhindered access to state apparatus; they used their regions as the basis for domination. Hence, they agitations for more autonomy grew louder.

The 1951 Constitution perfected the *ethnicisation* of the petty bourgeoisies as it created regions which it divided among the competing petty bourgeoisies to effectively distract them away from uniting against the colonial state. They were content with looting of state resources where they controlled the state apparatus as was later discovered during the African Continental Bank (ACB) and Coker Commission of Inquiry\textsuperscript{iii} involving respectively former Premier of the Eastern Region, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and former Premier of Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Olurode, 2005b; Awolowo, 1987). At this juncture, we must note the following points:

First, the colonial state created and institutionalized ethnicity as a tool to maintain its hegemony. Secondly, it created the petty bourgeoisies to build *ethnic consciousness* among Nigerians in other to protect the colonial state. The petty bourgeoisies were only interested in taking over political state apparatus after independence from the colonial state, including corruption. While it looked like the petty bourgeoisies are divided along ethnic lines, they only use the masses to achieve this as a guarantee of the continuous enjoyment of state resources. (Peil, 1976) argues that the Nigerian
political elites carry the banner of ethnicity more than the masses in the process, creating ethnic camps and hatred with themselves fanning the embers of disunity among the latter as a means of guaranteeing their continuous stay in power. In a sense, the political class in Nigeria is only capitalizing on Nigeria’s multi-ethnic composition. The elites are often the major beneficiaries when the masses are divided along ethnic and racial lines. The political elites will do all it can to maintain this division as long as it is in their interests to do so (Olzak, 1989).

According to Nnoli (2010), the petty bourgeoisies “does not want public office, but privileges; not protection, but wealth. They know that they can attain them easily and quickly through increased access to public purse. To all intents and purposes…discussions in Nigeria has always been dominated by the arguments of these ethnic factions about the most advantageous privileges and state jobs for each of them. These are not arguments about empowerment of the people or creation of wealth but about jobs, privileges, and opportunities for easy access to governmental treasury…In the process of haggling of these benefits, legal and political principles yield to political opportunism, national unity to petty empires, and patriotism to mindless reaction” (p.70-71). The ethnicity the colonial state creation is thereby completed!

**Corruption With Tribal Marks: Critiquing Ekeh’s Conception of “Two Publics”**

In his seminal work on the impact of colonialism on African societies and politics, *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement*, Peter Ekeh is of the opinion that the dilemma facing Africa today is the dichotomy between what he calls “Two Publics”, one civil and the other primordial. Unlike in the West where public realm is one which was created with the
Westphalian (modern) state, in Africa colonialism broke the strong communal bond existing among tribes and on these, it forcefully created a colonial state.

According to Ekeh (1975), the three issues that make the two publics dialectically opposed to each other are: corruption, voluntary association and tribalism. He associates corruption largely with the *civil* public since corruption is nearly absent in the *primordial* public. He writes: “The civil public in Africa is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public” (p. 92). While the two are said to be dialectically opposed to each other on the basis on morality, Ekeh admits that the political actors in the civil public can also function simultaneously in the primordial public (p. 93). What could the post-colonial states of Africa have done to correct this contradiction immediately after independence?

There were two options: the first option is to adapt and localize the colonial structures and institutions for them to serve as agents of social mobilization and nation building. The second option was to use the colonial civil service as a tool for institutionalizing ethnicity just as the colonial states did. Nepotism and primordial sentiments became qualifications to gain employment into the civil service. The ethnicisation of state institutions like the Military made such institutions become political tools to promote ethnicity and corruption.

Ekeh (1975) argues that corruption “…arises directly from the amorality of the civil public and the legitimization of the need to seize largesse from the civil public in other to benefit the primordial public” (p. 110). To become clearer on his view on corruption, he divided corruption into two: first, embezzlement of public funds and second, is the solicitation and acceptance of bribes from individuals seeking services provided by the civic public by those administering these services (p. 110). In insulating the primordial corruption, he maintained that “Both carry little
moral sanctions and may well receive great moral approbation from members of one’s primordial public… these forms of corruption are completely absent in the primordial public.” (p. 110).

The truth is that while the author must have written about things that happened before independence when the primordial public still maintains strong moral values, post-colonial Nigeria appears to have been involved in a serious breakdown of values due to social and political changes since independence. As Olurode (2005a) opines: “Social change is part of human existence. Where social change takes place slowly or on the fringes of the society, it may be unnoticed or unproblematic but where it is rapid or occurs at the core, it becomes noticeable. Every society must admit social change as a fact of life, but where this is destructive of established social pattern of behavior, the change process becomes a source of concern…” (p.1)

A lot as passed unnoticed about changes in African societies since the “culture contact” with Europeans (Frazier, 1957). Since Ekeh wrote the thesis about 40 years ago, Nigeria’s political and social landscape has undergone remarkable changes from military rule, state creation, local government reforms, civil service reforms, the deciding influence of money in politics and so on have their varying effects on erosion of the value system. In an update on Ekeh’s thesis, Onuoha (2014) writes on one of the noticeable changes in the Nigerian society citing four different cases of how corruption has permeated the primordial public as a result of the breakdown of value system. He argued that: “the near clear-cut distinction between the two publics no longer exist in Nigeria (Africa)” (Onuoha, 2014: 325).

In today’s Nigeria, the primordial public, as represented by the traditional rulers and religious institutions, who are supposed to be the custodians of culture and values, have been reported to have commercialized chieftaincy titles by giving them to the highest bidders. The politicization of
Chief’s appointments, partly due to the poor remuneration of the traditional rulers, may have contributed to the erosion of values in the institution as it was the case with President Obasanjo’s involvement in the Owu chieftaincy affair (Olurode, 2005b).

Available records in the 1960s show that the primordial public was involved in corruption in varying degrees. Chinua Achebe, Nigeria’s foremost novelist, in two of his novels written in the period is about the social problem of corruption especially in the Ibo traditional society and voluntary associations. For constraints of time and space, we shall not allow the details of the plot of the novels to detain us here. In *No Longer At Ease*, Chinua Achebe wrote of the case of Umuofia Progressive Union, a voluntary association or town union, which raised money for Mr. Obi Okonkwo (the central character in the novel), to proceed to London for further education but its members expect, in return, get Umuofians employed through his influence in the Scholarship Commission in the Ministry of Education, where he was secretary. In other to succumb to pressure from his kinsmen who overburden him with responsibilities lured him to collect a bribe of 20 pounds (Taiwo, 1967:140-141). The case of Obi in *No Longer At Ease* only goes ahead to confirm that the new nature of political corruption is its ethnic nature, that is, corruption with tribal marks!

**The Nigerian State and the Legalization of Corruption With Tribal Marks**

With the petty bourgeoisies now firmly in charge of state apparatus immediately after independence, they soon divided into factions over which should have the larger share of the looting of state resources at the federal level. In other to outdo each other, they resorted to their most potent tool- ethnicity, as a means of guaranteeing greater inclusion in their access to state resources or the national cake (Nnoli,1996; Okorie and Greg, 2013). The ethnic faction(s) of the petty bourgeoisies that feels it wasn’t carried along really do not see much wrong with others since
they probably would have done same if they had the opportunity, but they can only do their best to be part of the “carry along?” so as not to lose out totally as we saw in the case of the clash between Awolowo and Akintola in 1962\textsuperscript{vi}. The faction that felt totally out of the party began raising their voices and the word “marginalization” became the battle cry. Suddenly, every ethnic faction of the petty bourgeoisies began to use it in varying degrees of efficacy (\textit{Guardian}, 1988; \textit{Sentinel}, 1994; \textit{Nsukka Analyst}, 1994, Adedeji, 1993, Ikpeze, 2000) when they felt left out of the party.

The inability of the state of mediate between the factions among the dominant social class led to the 1966 military coup and subsequently the Civil War\textsuperscript{vii} (Fadakinte, 2013; Siollun, 2009; Achebe, 2012; Madiebo, 1980). The use of the word “marginalization” by the political class largely portray them as a group of political charlatans and ethnic chauvinists who deliberately want state resources for their own selfish interests using ethnic appeal (Ikpeze, 2000; Shelby, 1990).

As a result of this, the increasing voice of the “losing” faction of the petty bourgeoisies became louder. Their never-ending cry of “marginalization” arm-twisted the military to get them more included in the federal administration with guaranteed appointments in the Cabinet and federal boards under the 1979 Constitution in “formalised and institutionalised form” (Agbodike, 1989; Afigbo, 1987). This commences the legalization of corruption with tribal marks in the Nigerian state.

The inclusion of federal character into the 1979 constitution is a display of heinous attitude by the elite. Since its inclusion and institutionalization under the 1999 Constitution, Nigeria has known no peace with the now ethnicization of looting with ignominy by the political class. That Nigeria is still united is not unconnected to the elite tie that sacrifices popular agitation for personal gains. The raising security challenges orchestrated by militia groups are indications of disillusionment
among different ethnic groups and sub-nationalities who feel their representatives among the petty bourgeoisie have not “carried along” in the scheme of things in the Nigerian state (Okorie and Greg, 2013).

Agbodike (2003) cited in Okorie and Greg (2013), argued that federal character has been institutionalised to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeoisie ruling class. In a similar opinion, Chaturvedi (2006) maintains that elitism represents only the interests of the few minorities. Implicit in the above explanations is that those who champion the principle and policies are beneficiaries hence it is another form of expanding their corrupt, sodid-political and economic empire.

Shelby (1990) argued that federal character will cultivate *ethnic consciousness* in other to achieve greater economic and political resources by making to “special treatments” from the state or society. The salient assumption of the federal character principle as understood by the petty bourgeoisie is that whatever resources are looted at the federal level will be trickled down to the community. Hence, there will be words like “our money”, “our turn” or “our time” by different ethnic groups to partake in the looting (Ibid).

While some the supporters of the federal character principle insist it has semblance to the United States (US) “affirmative action” policy developed in the 1960s to protect the interests of minorities and hedge them against “unfair majority preferences in the past” (Macionis, 1992: 294; Adujie, 2009), the principle seem to make sense to the political class *only* when political appointments are involved. With the background above, we are convinced that, unlike the US “affirmative action” which protects minorities against unfair discriminations in paid employment even in the private sector, its Nigeria version of what was called “affirmative action” is only about looting the state resources with ignominy (Adigun, 2015). Rather, the political class understood federal character
to mean ‘appointing a person from any part of Nigeria into a position, that person, first and foremost, must “carry his or her ethnic group along” in the scheme of things. Invariably, the appointee represents his “constituency”, not necessarily his portfolio(s). It looks more like “just get someone to fill in that position, so long as it gives everyone the feeling of inclusion, not so much whether they are competent for the position or not.” (Adigun, 2015). We must be quick to admit that like many other provisions of the Constitution, the Federal Character principle was meant to correct some ethnic imbalances experienced in the First Republic but that was not to be. Going by its recent application that it has created more problems than it has attempted to solve especially has it has complicated, compromised and distorted the fight against corruption. Rather than promote national unity, it has disunited the nation more than before. It has become easy these days to invoke “federal character” when politicians are caught involving in corrupt acts (Adigun, 2015). Rather than solve the problem of tribalism and ethnicity, the petty bourgeoisies have used it effectively to shield themselves from arrest and prosecution for corruption they indulge in since they carry their ethnic banners rather than the portfolio they are meant to defend. Their local godfathers, who recommended them for appointment in the first instance, will help spring up ethnic sentiments to claim their godsons are been persecuted because of their ethnic origin (Olurode, 2005a; Okorie and Greg, 2013). Also, rather solve the problem of ethnicity, it has widened its scope into corruption effectively completing corruption with tribal marks.

The Nigerian state didn’t stop there. When it became clear that when there were “deliberate violations of the…principles of ‘federal character’…by the victorious coalition” (Ikpeze, 2000:100), the political elite smuggled an enforcing mechanism known as Federal Character Commission to monitor strict compliance of the ethnicisation of corruption in the 1999
Constitution so that all the ethnic factions of the petty bourgeoisies can be effectively “carried along”.

Under the federal character arrangement, a public officer so-appointed, even if he is caught in acts of corruption, his ethnic group or the community (not his portfolio) sees it immediately as persecution from other ethnic groups since “our son” is not the only thief “eating from the national cake.” In other cases, the state may appeal to the ethnic group or community that the disgraced officer will be replaced in the same “juicy office” by one of their own. The disgraced officer then gets a plea bargain, and retires quietly after his “brother” has replaced him.viii

Abba (2003) and Sharma, Sadana and Herpreet (2011) affirmed that politicization of public enterprises breeds mediocrity which is destructive and thus contributes significantly to the inefficiency of most public organizations since mediocres are more loyal to their godfather because they lack competence. They tend to frustrate organizational goals and go unpunished. Utume (2003) cited in Okorie and Greg (2013) shares the view stating that there is genuine fear that officers, secured by provisions of federal character may begin to act like political representatives without paying due attention to their duties. The variation in human and material resources across ethnic nationalities is known but competence promotes good governance and in turn reduces the tension of ethnic revolt and corrupt tendencies under the guise of ethnicisation.

To show that the petty bourgeoisies are only interest in the corruption that comes with federal character, Section 14 of 1999 Constitution, which contains the disputed federal character principle is one of the sections classified under the “Fundamental Objectives and Directives of State Policy”, contains for instance, Section 14(2)(b) which made the primary responsibility of the State the welfare and security of the people appears to have been neglected repeatedly by the political class
under the guise that all the provisions under the “Fundamental Objectives and Directives of State Policy” are normative, hence “not judicable” that is the State cannot be taken to Court if it fails to achieve them. Other sections dealing with welfare are Section 15(3) which states that “The State shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power” and those dealing with free university education like Section 18(3)(c) which deals with free university education for all Nigerians have been criminally neglected by the petty bourgeoisies for more juicy “federal character” provisions under the same chapter of the Constitution.

Corruption With Tribal Marks: A Man of the People and Two Cases

In a study of this nature we think it is only appropriate to use, not only fictional examples but also real life proven cases of how corruption has taken ethnic dimension in Nigeria. Before we proceed, let us make an important point. Ethnicity is the biggest political party in Nigeria today. It has all the features of orthodox political parties in their ontological sense. Since Nigerian political parties all appear to lack ideologies, one can conveniently win elections by one’s ethnic origin, not on the strength of one’s ideas. Also, as in orthodox political parties, one can easily “decamp” from one party to another. All that is required is get a well-advertised chieftaincy title or marry deliberately for that purpose from the recipient group. In some cases, one starts to praise the group and its history; insult other groups to make the group feel good, then, the candidate becomes, “our son” even though it is by naturalization. More importantly, it shields one from, or exposes one to prosecution from corruption depending on whether one is in the right or wrong group⁹.
In this section, we shall be looking at Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and infuse them into two Nigerian former governors (of Bayelsa and Delta respectively) who have both been found guilty of corruption—Chief Diepreye Alamieyeseigha and Chief James Ibori.

Chief M. A. Nanga in Achebe’s *A Man of the People*, is a typical West African politician who knows how to use his community to his own political advantage. He knows how to use his people to protect his corrupt deed. Often he can renovate his village school, Anata Grammar School, just to get the Village Council endorsement for the next election because every “…man and every woman in Urua…would throw his or her paper for him on the day of election…” (Achebe, 1966:146). As far as he was concerned, his village doesn’t need cleaner water, but “Why should they lose their chance of getting …their share of the national cake?” (*ibid*). To him, the main issue was not about improved infrastructure of the people, even though some of the villagers “has been promised water but hadn’t so far seen even one pipe.” (p. 147). All that matter to the politician is using his ethnic group to gain access to state resources even though his ethnic group members hardly benefit from it.

Nanga also understands the psychology of human needs. His people will not mind him looting the state dry as far he leaves some crumbs for his beloved people to fill their stomachs. Chief Nanga also typifies modern Nigerian politicians who knows what he needs to do is be visible in his community. He will acquire several traditional titles, build boreholes; employ some people in Anata village into government positions, like Odili, and boast loudly with it and become a hero. Even though Achebe wrote the wonderful novel in the 1960s, much of its contents are still relevant today.
Being a smart Nigerian politician, Nanga will run to the same people he looted dry to defend him in time of trouble. In doing this, he will play the ethnic card. He will create “us-versus-them” siege mentality of “they hate us that is why they are after me”. His people will reply, after been told that their son is involved in looting of state treasury: “‘Let them eat’…’after all when the white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?’ (Achebe, 1966:156). What else can you tell a man or woman who manages to get his bit of the “national cake” from politicians? How do you want to preach to a people who roll out drums to sing and praise a corrupt politician that he loots their state resources and that he is only spending crumbs on them? These ones will rather fight and die to defend “our son” that hear that he is corrupt. His village chiefs will welcome him back with both arms and award him the highest title in the land. “Besides,” Achebe writes, “It may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share.” (p. 157). This explains the fact that breakdown in moral value in the “two publics” dates back to the first republic and that the primordial society have since approved of the corruption in the civil public effectively puncturing Ekeh’s (1975) conception.

This happens to be the bitter truth in our country today. Ethnicity is only used as a tool, first by the colonial masters and later the post-colonial leaders, to divide the masses and permanently becloud their sense of reasoning so as to continue to divert their attentions away from the real issues (Adigun, 2016). This is the dilemma we face today, how to treat “men of the people” like Chief Nanga!

Case 1: Chief James Ibori, the man of the Urhobo’s people

Let us start with the case of Chief James Ibori which is more recent. On 17 April, 2012, former governor of Delta state, James Ibori, was sentenced to 13 years in prison by a Royal Court in
London after pleading guilty to charges of money laundering and corruption. The story of the drama surrounding his arrest and repatriation to London from Dubai is too well-known and should not detain us here. Why was Ibori found guilty of corruption in London for offences some Nigerian Courts have “cleared” him over? This question bothers on corruption especially in the Judiciary which is beyond the present scope of this paper. In all, the dramatic ethnicisation of the whole Ibori saga shows how corruption in Nigeria has taken ethnic dimension.

It is on record that Oghara people, Ibori’s hometown in Delta state, effectively prevent the arrest of Ibori for what they perceived as persecutions of their “illustrious son” in 2007. As though that were not enough, there is a strong position among his ethnic group that he is one of the defenders of resource control, so that should immune him from corruption trial.

On his reported release, politicians from his ethnic group praised Ibori to the heavens, treating him as a hero of some sorts. The Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU) for instance described his arrest and trial as the “evil activities of those who dread his rise and courage in championing” their ethnic cause (Vanguard, 2016a). The UPU leader, Chief Joseph Omene, speaking for the group said they celebrated Ibori because he “puts the Urhobo nation on the radar of national illumination and consciousness (Vanguard, 2016a).

Another ethnic leader representing Urhobo Nationality Council (UNC), Olorogun Egbo, said: “…every well-meaning Urhobo person irrespective of our political divide we are happy about the good news of Chief James Ibori …coming home to contribute to the development of Urhoboland” (Vanguard, 2016b). The speaker of the Delta state House of Assembly referred to Ibori as the “rallying point” of their ethnic group no matter how corrupt he is (Vanguard, 2016b).
A critical look at all the reactions and submissions on Ibori from his ethnic group and the wild jubilation reported in the news media that greeted Ibori’s release attests to the fact that corruption has really taken a dangerous ethic dimension in the country.

Case 2: Chief Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, the man of the Ijaw people

In the case of Chief Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, the former governor was charged, like his Delta state counterpart, with looting the state treasury. He was reputed to have looted the sum of $55 million as governor (Roberts, 2015). Unlike Ibori, he was tried in Nigeria, after escaping controversially dressing like a woman from London.

The BBC website cited by Ajayi (2014) claims "Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, governor of Bayelsa State in Nigeria, is charged with money laundering $3.2 million in the UK. Last week he jumped bail to return to Nigeria, where he has immunity. He claims he is innocent," His arrest and prosecution were soon to be followed back home in Nigeria. He will later be impeached by the Bayelsa State House of Assembly and sentenced to 2 years imprisonment.

According to New York Times, he amassed a fortune in foreign bank accounts, he acquired houses in London, California and South Africa and an oil refinery in Ecuador, all while tapping public coffers to build an airport in his hometown and an Olympic-size stadium in the state capital, among other public projects.

After serving his jail term in Nigeria, he was pardoned in 2013 by President Goodluck Jonathan, who had been his deputy and had succeeded him as governor. The United States Embassy in
Nigeria considered the pardon a disappointment (Roberts, 2015). The pardon was granted by a fellow Ijaw man, the same ethnic group Alamieyeseigha hails from.

It is rather unfortunate that Ijaw people have since interpreted Alamieyeseigha’s trial as an anti-Ijaw campaign led by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man, and former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) chairman, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, a Fulani man (Vanguard, 2014). There is also a strong sentiment among the ethnic group that he is been tried for his strong stance on resource control in the Niger-Delta (Olurode, 2005b: 30) even though there is overwhelming evidence against the former governor (Ajayi, 2014).

In one of his interviews with Vanguard, he said on his corruption trial: “By the grace of God, they have even made me more popular. I move freely. I drive myself. I don’t need a retinue of aides because my people protect me. You can’t throw stone at me in the Niger delta. It is not possible but for His Grace.” He boasted about his popularity even after his trial and conviction for corruption when he said: “If you recollect the crowd when I came back, that crowd; it is not only Bayelsa people but the whole Niger delta gathered. From Yeneagoa where my helicopter landed at the government to Amasoma took 5 hours. Ordinarily, it was 25 minutes journey.” (Vanguard, 2014).

The two cases above represent how ethnicity has been used to justify political corruption in Nigeria. Despite the fact that not many cases of corruption have been proven or conclusive, both cases above were proven at different times that both politicians are, in fact, corrupt. But the continuous use of ethnicity to justify them by raising ethnic consciousness shows the dangerous dimension corruption is taking (Steele, 1990).
Recommendations

Due to its emotional nature, ethnicity is built by a deliberate psychological and socialization process. Combining same with corruption, like ethnic conflicts, are often difficult to resolve. This is why our recommendations will dwell more on the socialization and psychological de-ethnicisation process.

It is on that basis we make the following recommendations:

We must *inculcate values* like self-reliance, patriotism, service, humility and others among our youths. The state must take the lead in this regard through revision of school curricula, national orientation, regimented systems of instruction and the likes through social media and other accessible mediums. The recent #ChangeBeginsWithMe campaign, though a good step, must examples of “change” on the part of political leadership for the message to properly sink. In doing this, the Nigerian state must be ready at all times to reject mediocrity and celebrate meritocracy as a culture. This will be one good way of de-ethnicising corruption.

The traditional and religious institutions must act as true *role models* for the society to mirror. The glorification of money politics and materialism in granting of Chieftaincy titles, “High” masses in Church, accepting of public donations of obviously corrupt persons in the society goes a long way in ethnicising corruption because these individuals know they will always mobilise their “people” to frustrate arrest and prosecution for corruption having paid their price to their respective communities.

Also, traditional awards need to be given to deserving individuals, not necessarily those who have corruptly enriched themselves. Traditional rulers and the Church should publicly reject gifts and donations from individuals whose sources of wealth are suspect.
Value clarification is something the nation must consciously involve in if we must de-ethnicise corruption. The schools must support groups that promote values like leadership, patriotism and hard work. Groups such as Boys’ Scout, Girls’ Guide, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) Brigade and the #ChangeBeginsWithMe should be formed in schools and supported by the State and spread their messages through social media on the evils of corruption.

The need for national core values and ideology cannot be over-emphasized in this regard. Nigeria needs an ideology to provide, guide and give legitimacy and orientation of policy directions for the leadership and the masses (Ogundowole, 1988). Without a strong ideological orientation, no nation can develop effectively (ibid: 48).

Some people may ask, Why ideology? And we reply that a national ideology will:

i. Guide to cognize problems, relating to real and imagined threats and opportunities-real potentials and their correlations;

ii. Guide and direct strategy and tactics of behaviours;

iii. Guide decisions and enhance the process of attaining necessary information to achieve overall societal objectives. (Ogundowole, 1988: 48).

Another area we must begin to look at to de-ethnicise corruption is the issue of compulsory national military service for all Nigerians as envisaged by section 220 of the 1999 Constitution. This has been a long neglected ideal that needs to be realized as a way of de-ethnicising first the Nigerian youths, then of all societal ills in Nigeria.
Conclusion

Our central thesis in this paper is that political corruption in Nigeria has taken an ethnic form. The paper maintains that as long as ethnicity continues to play a dominant role in Nigerian politics, so long will it be difficult to adequately fight corruption as the two cases we cited in the paper reveals. The fact that the state has gone ahead to provide a legal framework for ethnicisation of corruption under the guise of federal character principle further compounds the problem which Peter Ekeh (1975) didn’t envisage.
References


………….(2016b, December 23) ‘He was our rallying point- Igbuya’ p.40.

‘Oduduwa or Oodua is regarded as the progenitor of the Yorubas. Most Yoruba people call themselves Omo Oodua (the children of Oodua or Odudua).

‘ The Ijebus have for 40 years been clamouring for Ijebu state to be created out of the Egba-dominated Ogun state. The Ibadan state was advocated on the basis of the fact that of all the regional capitals of Nigeria’s three original regions (Enugu, Kaduna and Ibadan) two have been given the status of states only Ibadan is yet to be a state in Nigeria.


” Chinua Achebe wrote *No Longer At Ease* and *A Man of the People* which shows how the traditional societies have become engulfed in corruption of the “civil public”.

‘ The term “carry along” is popular in Nigerian Civil Service when it involves sharing of something, often money or something of value.

“ The clash between supporters of two Yoruba nationalist leaders, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and S.L. Akintola, both leader and deputy leader of the Western Region under the Action Group (AG). The series of disagreements over who should make major policy decisions after the former became the Federal Opposition Leader in Lagos and the later became the premier of the Region led to series of unrests in the region culminating in the declaration of state of emergency in the Region. For more on this see Awolowo, O (1987) *Travails of Democracy and the Rule of Law.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria) Ltd.

“ There have been several books written on the causes of the collapse of the First Republic. In Chinua Achebe’s *There Was a Country* he gave a participant observer’s version of those things he can remember during the war. Though the
book because controversial after it was alleged that the literary icon was partisan in his views. On the violent nature of the Nigerian political class, see Siollun’s *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)* for an excellent “insider’s” analysis of the violent nature of the politicians. For a more balanced account of the civil war, see Madiebo’s *The Nigerian Revolution and Biafran War.*

“In many cases in Nigeria, a corrupt officer gets traditional title in his ethnic community to show loyalty and appreciation. The community sees it as its responsibility to defend one of their own in government since it will be their opportunity to eat from the “national cake”. President Jonathan is on record to have said to Anambriars after the sack of minister of energy, Professor Bath Nnaji, (for conflict of interests) that he will be replaced by someone from the same area. He kept this promise.

“All these are from what the writer experienced firsthand as political strategies in Nigeria. For instance, Femi Fani-Kayode, former Minister of aviation, wrote a provocative article against the Igbo, “The Truth about the Igbo” as an All Progressive Congress (APC) member in 2013. When he joined the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) later in 2014 he soon become a “champion of Igbo cause” after he reportedly divorced his wife and married an Igbo woman. Also, President Jonathan stresses his Igbo name, “Azikiwe” (a name he rarely uses save during elections) when he goes for campaign in the South-East. President Buhari was given an Igbo name in Aba “Ikechuckwu” (The Lion Killer) during the heated 2015 presidential campaign.

Urhobo is one of the numerous ethnic groups in Delta state, Nigeria.

“Ijaw is an ethnic group, perhaps the only one, in the oil rich Bayelsa state. The ethnic group spreads across Delta, Ondo and Rivers.

“The #ChangeBeginsWithMe is a campaign recently launched by the Federal Government of Nigeria at achieving attitudinal changes among the people. It has achieved little result so far.