

Nigeria: Corruption in Development

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Corruption and Legitimization in Nigeria

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Introduction

Critique of the micro-definition of corruption.

The term 'corruption' is semantically opaque. Its contemporary use to describe 'venality in high places' is derived from an archaic sense of 'moral decay' as applied in the context of the political community (the supposed embodiment of the 'general interest'). The continuity of the extended with the archaic core meaning is, however, broken by the very distance between general and particular, public and private, in the two applications of the concept. To interpret, for example, a minister and a taxi-driver as both being corrupt in the same sense, it must be additionally specified whether that sense is official or personal. In fact, once the macro-logic of state power is alluded to, the micro-definition's individual frame of reference seems to be bracketed or neutralised; in any event, the purely moral reading is no longer the expected (technically, the 'unmarked') one. The phrase 'official corruption' seems to underlie most instances of the single word; what is corrupted (in the current linguistic world-view) is no longer integrity but, in effect, authority.

From the Weberian standpoint of institutional power apparatuses, corrupted authority should lead to ~~three kinds~~ of legitimization crisis depending on the type of political domination practiced by ~~one corrupted figure~~. According to the ideal typology, charismatic authority when corrupted cannot lead to the delegitimation of any political *order*, only or the individual claiming such authority. Corruption of traditional authority, on the other hand, would lead to a crisis of custom, and corruption of legal-rational authority calls into question what Habermas (1979:185) describes as procedural or reflective legitimacy. Even overlooking the evolutionist inspiration of this schema, it remains highly speculative in grounding legitimacy in belief/intention structures. To elevate these subjective criteria as the standard of legitimacy is simply to postpone the day when their relation to the 'general interest' must be defined. This was the problem faced by the early Marxist concept of alienation, and previously answered "... from species being", although this solution is not as objective as it may have first appeared. Habermas appeals to the Weberian framework but deepens it by postulating a historical sequence of cognitively-based levels of justification of the three-part domination-typology, which he

also subdivides into seven stages of moral consciousness' (1979: 89).

I think that these approaches to legitimacy demonstrate the hold which the moral definition of corruption continues to exercise over social theory. But why does the concept of corruption continue to fall back into its etymological mold? Why should a breach of official behaviour be reduced to a violation of the 'impersonal bureaucratic ideal', or the "reflective norms (principles) of competing general and particular interpretations of needs" in Habermas' reformulation (1979:83)? Evidently, a persistently micrological approach is common to all action theories. The consequences of that approach include the proposition that any excess of corruption in the Third World over what obtains in the West should be ascribed to the failure of 'modernising rationality' here.¹

In what follows I try the opposite course: to explain the evidently localised nature of corruption in West and non-West by identifying the different contradictions which it expresses in each region of the world system. Thus corruption's, and legitimisation's, lack of a universal practice is tied to the varying form of the state (as an embodiment of contradictions at the macro-level). Then the functions of corruption in the neo-colonial state are not eternal although they can be seen as characteristic.

In general, I tie the concept of corruption to that of state power; the corrupt individual is an inherently political actor in the same sense that Marx (1843/1963) called the bourgeois economy of civil society a political economy. Any theory of corruption should, in short, account for its political-economic effects. In the case of Nigeria, Nzimiro (*ms.* a, b) notes that the major internal function of corruption is to finance national/political parties, while the major external one is 'to render the national bourgeoisie dependent on multinational corporations; the unity of the two functions is an² external contradiction, exemplifying the disequilibria of imperialism. In the following five sections I attempt to continue this task by moving through successive approximations of the role of corruption in reproducing the moments of the Nigerian state. This analysis is not static, and the contingent outcome of the legitimisation crises of both West and non-West depends on the suppression or resolution of the contradictions of each. Corruption, I claim, poses a greater threat to the legitimacy of peripheral/Third World regimes, than to that of central/Western ones, precisely because the former are caught in a more crucial contradiction. In this I follow Amin (1980); while the Western crisis is being met by the technocratic control of "social welfare state/mass democracy" (Habermas 1975), the non-Western one can only be met by disengagement, that is, by the strategy of rupturing exchange relations of both industrial and financial capital. These questions are taken up again in the conclusion (section 5 below).

Corruption and Legitimation in Nigeria

By the phrase 'neocolonial state formation' I mean what Amin (1980: 197) calls [the unit of] 'spontaneous reproduction of dependent capitalism (the neocolonial mode of production) through the hegemony of the local bourgeoisie, via the economic mechanism of the capitalist system.'

What are the contradictions of this formation, so far as they explain the workings of corruption? The principal political contradiction serves as a diagram of the basic corruption-situation: the objective limit on the extraction of surplus for partisan redistribution by the hegemonic bourgeois fraction(s). Let this stand as my proposed 'macro-definition'. It is clear that not every antagonistic social relation in such a state is corruptible in the above sense; only those which perform its political reproduction. Thus commodity specu-

lation (hoarding and smuggling) and extortion (a predatory increase in prices over and above the inflation rate) are practised by all bourgeois fractions in the purely economic sphere; but those with access to state power practice them more efficiently because they control many market conditions, and this control makes them ultimately better able to refinance their own bids for power. This is captured in the following schema:

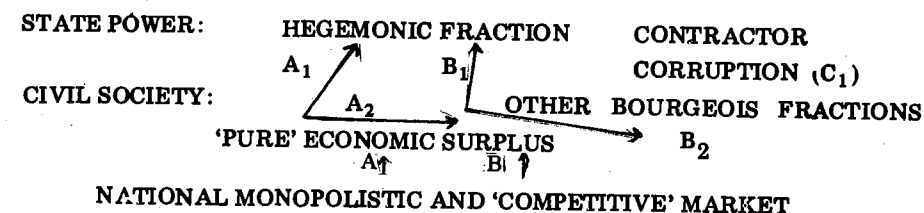


FIG. 1: CONTRACTOR CORRUPTION IN THE STATE

The two sources and pathways of economic surplus A and B are meant to idealise the scale of surplus from more monopolistic to more 'competitive' (i.e. among capitalists). No distinction is made here between labour and other commodities. The dynamic of state-internal corruption is precisely that additional, superimposed exchange by which non-hegemonic fractions of the bourgeoisie 'buy' a greater share of the overall surplus (especially the monopolistic end of it) from the hegemonic fraction. Thus, as C_1 increases, so should the ratio of A_2/A_1 . State contracts constitute the greater part of A.

Two important factors are left out of this diagram: the supranational market (i.e. the pathways of surplus into the world system such as treated in section 2 below) and the relationship of non-bourgeois actors to all of the above. For the moment, it is enough to note that the wage-earners and peasants enter the schema through the national market, where they buy their subsistence in various ways (see Manfredi 1981: 11-13) and also consume ostentation values, that is potlatch or inverted surplus (see section 4 below). What remains in schematic view is the first approximation of the nature of corruption: the politicisation of the extraction of a monopolistic national surplus. The concept of a 'diagram of power' comprising both state and economic (i.e. production) relations was developed by Foucault (1978 and subsequent works) to solve precisely the difficulty faced above: the totalisation of situational 'micropowers' at the state level. While corruption is not defined in the constitution or political discourse as such, its indubitable role in maintaining the hegemony of the dominant ruling-class fraction with respect to the others shows its centrality to the political process.

The overselectiveness of this diagram from the viewpoint of state power is just its incompleteness with regard to the power-basis of the market monopoly. For if the state alone could guarantee that monopoly, then both the rate of corruption and the ration of A_2/A_1 would fall to zero. Rather, the state's access to monopolistic surplus is contingent on an alliance with multinational monopolies whose local activities have been incorporated in the state's own base of subsistence (for this definition of dependency see Anikpo *ms.*). While the character of this external alliance is quite different, as it crosses the national boundary, it is no less essential for the control of state power because of the latter's dominance of the local economy.

Corruption in the World System

The contradiction between the neocolonial state and the multinational monopolies,

and the resultant class alliance undertaken on unequal terms, account for the following deficiencies in the state as compared with a metropolitan country:

- inclusion in some, and consequent exclusion from other, spheres of multinational influence, even apart from geopolitical blocs,
- accelerating inflow of manufactured goods despite nationalisation of primary industries;
- unbalanced emphasis of state investment on unproductive machinery for political repression, and costly infrastructures;
- sterility of local intelligentsia and non-development of local culture; permanent crisis of universities;
- increased ethnic/regional competition (list derived from Nzimiro (ms. b)).

External dependence is to be seen as conditioning internal structures consistent with the imperialist division of labour. The predominately *commercial* form of internal monopoly explains why it is not directly controlled by the national state; rather it is a concessionary distributorship, and as such is itself monopolised. The primary contradiction at this level of analysis is between the magnitude of the comprador's fee paid to the national and/or local bourgeoisie by the multinational to secure the local markets (which is a kind of protectionism-in-reverse, since it guarantees imported goods from one source against fair competition from other sources), and the potential saving of surplus value through the strategy of local assembly plants (import substitution). In the form of a class power diagram, the national state (including the non-hegemonic bourgeoisie to the extent that they have bribed their way to a share in the national market surplus A_2) is a conduit for multinational capital which is reproduced rapidly and without risk through the pre-nationalised capital market (Fig. 2). But alternatively, the state is the beneficiary (Fig. 3) of capital accumulation ($M_2 - M_2$) which may be greater than the comprador corruption (C_2) forfeited. As one productive sector shifts from pre- to post-nationalisation, others of course open up for the multinationals (especially in production of Department I goods). It is the ready flow of comprador corruption (C_2) which keeps this dynamic in external control.

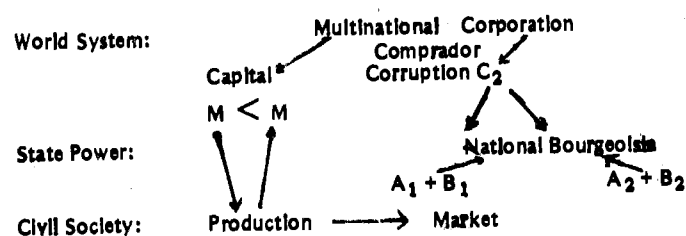


FIG. 2: COMPRADOR CORRUPTION — PRE — INDIGENIZATION

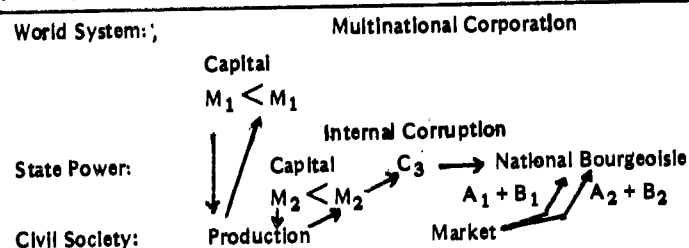


FIG. 3: INDIGENIZATION OF SOME CORRUPTION AND SOME CAPITAL

Nzimiro (ms. a) shows how the transition from the first to the second of these configurations took place under the military regime whose top members wanted to provide for their continuing share of surplus as civilians by creating a role of non-governmental clientele: shareholding in the new import substitution industries.

Dos Santos and others have criticized A. Gunder-Frank for concentrating on a linear, chainlike relationship among the various spheres mediating between the central metropole and the most peripheral satellite. Changes have taken place in the structure of dependence, due to imperialism's contradictory development. As Amin stresses, the organisations of nation-state and world systems are mutually irreducible to each other; the former became crucial in the transition from mercantile colonialism to imperialism, and from asymmetrical exchange to unequal exchange (differential exploitation of labour power in the centre and the periphery simultaneously — in his narrow definition of the widely used term, 1980: 172–3). The 'New International Economic Order', a dead letter since Cancún, was always in danger of being turned in the direction of indigenisation financed by primary products sold at optimistically high cartel rates.

But besides these two major levels of contradiction, each with its own characteristic form of corruption, the analysis must recognize a third, which is pre-mercantile in origin, unlike the post-mercantile (neo-colonial) state. I refer to neo-feudalism and its tributary form of corruption.

Corruption as Tribute

Marx already established with perfect clarity, when he distinguished between 'pre-supposition' or logical priority and historical-chronological precedence as two ways in which given relations of production may come before a particular State. . . [that] in the order of historical genesis, a form of State may precede the relations of production to which it corresponds. The Absolutist State in Europe was predominantly capitalist while the relations of production still bore a feudal stamp. —Poulantzas (1978:41)

Just as the world-system is heterogeneous and internally structured in contradictory ways so the nation-state itself, especially one as complex as Nigeria, displays many possible political dominations of the production process, through control over a part of its surplus. And more fundamentally, vast domains of production have never been assimilated to capitalist production relations (although this claim has been highly controversial)³. I am concerned with two moments of exchange between members of the hegemonic bourgeoisie and those whose political power is pre-constitutional in reference.

The second moment is redistributive in function, like the token fee paid by multinationals to the comprador class, the first, tributary moment, is homologous with the case of section 1 above, namely payment from the enclosed to the enclosing (non-hegemonic → hegemonic bourgeoisie as paralleled by neo-feudalists → hegemonic bourgeoisie). In the last analysis the corruption is the legitimating of state power, and compels us to consider the redistributed surplus, ultimate agent of legitimation to have been initially tributary in origin.

It is well known that chieftaincy has long been marked by intense competition at bribing the 'kingmakers' in the state apparatus which grants constitutional legitimacy to one contestant. Almost all aspirants these days, except when succession is rigidly determined by kinship, are scions of wealth rather than royalty in any strictly traditional sense. Such wealth may have had a basis at one time in traditional *perquisites*, especially land and monopolies on contacts in the luxury import trade. This privileged position does not

sent 'mixed' economy (always justified, it seems, as a step towards 'socialism'). And the civilians have been readier to echo Western prescriptions: (a) the first announcement about the 'desirability' of an increase in fuel prices for the domestic market came on the heels of the Mondale visit in 1980, shortly after Carter had sanctioned a similar step; (b) as with Thatcherite and Reaganite policy, the present round of inflation is expected to be paid for by 'sacrifices' by wage-workers alone, that is, in a historically great transfer of surplus to the bourgeoisie.

The other hallmark of the civilian regime is their openly double standard on corruption: insistent denial and flagrant performance. The need to convince the public of the state's prosperity through potlatch of embezzled funds is still slightly greater than the shame felt for the nation's poverty. One is thus resignedly accommodated to corruption at the same time as all sorts of probes and purges are launched. The fiction of a national economy is wearing a bit thin.

NOTES

1. For a thorough critique of Habermas' efforts at combining Marxism with a "genetic theory of action", see Arnason (1979).
2. As developed in Godeller (1975) and previous writings.
3. The theory of structural heterogeneity of peripheral economies is summarised in Senghaas (1977). This theory is often attacked by what Amin calls "West-centred" Marxists because it supposedly denies the present universality of capitalist production relations. In fact, one has the choice of dividing the capitalist/precapitalist domains spatially (the sectoral approach of Rey (1978) or analytically (in the distinction of production/reproduction, i.e. after rejecting the utility of the mode-of-production concept as does Friedman 1976). Beckman (1977) helpfully summarises the issues. But after all this debate, precious little has been done in concrete research on the diversity of production relations currently employed in urban and rural Third World communities, for reasons suggested by Clarke (1977).

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