

Morality and Cross Carpeting in Nigeria's Politics

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Abstract: *Specific laws govern every society. These requirements are codes of conduct that specify appropriate activities, obligations, and social interactions: politics and other spheres of human activity mirror these moral ideals. However, since the first democratic administration, cross-carpeting has been more common in Nigeria over the last 22 years. This essay addresses the primary defenses for cross-campaigning, including the significance of parties in politics, the benefits of affiliation, and the danger it brings to representative democracy. While morality and politics are undoubtedly two separate concepts that have to do with human civilization, it is also evident that they are connected in some manner because they both aim to make society more peaceful and kind. Moral corruption is undeniably an issue in Nigerian politics, contributing to the country's underwhelming social and economic growth. As a result, it was recommended that a change in political ideology, demonetization of politics, a conscious and relentless war against corruption, intensified religious and moral teachings, and the inclusion of political ethics in the Nigerian educational curriculum be implemented to improve the nation's political morality.*

Keyword: Morality, Cross Carpeting, Politics, Corruption, Governance

Introduction

Numerous discussions have been sparked by the philosophy of Nigerian politics and its effects on the social and economic well-being of the country; one of these debates questions the degree to which it encompasses morality. People are supposed to instill particular rules in every society. These standards are codes of conduct that outline acceptable behaviors, duties, and interpersonal interactions. These moral standards are reflected in politics and other areas of human endeavor. The manner, degree, and extent of how well these values are intrinsic in a nation's populace impact the pace of growth and development. To some extent, these values are ingrained through parental upbringing and passed down through generations.

Politics, a term used to refer to the theories, ideologies, principles, and practices involved with social or institutional governance, is crucial to the growth of any state's socioeconomic situation and its ability to gain worldwide recognition and influence. Questions like "who gets what" and "what portion do I get" are included. In this sense, it is crucial to safeguard and fulfill specific interests. Therefore, it is still debatable whether politics may play a role in ensuring the fair distribution of public resources among all parties involved. Moreover, the topic has recently assumed a significantly more global dimension. To establish their presence at the top of the global power structure, certain governments are no longer content to be satisfied with the problems that develop within their borders and have instead inserted themselves into the affairs of states with less authority. As a result, countries like the United States of America, China, France, Germany, Israel, and many Middle-East states are continuously at odds with one another as each seeks to strengthen its worldwide supremacy at the expense of those states that cannot wield such might.

Since the country's independence on October 1, 1960, the political landscape in Nigeria has undergone numerous changes. A journey that began with the civil government under the direction of the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and culminated in a republic in 1963 has dramatically undergone short bursts of civil rule and protracted military regimes. However, during the brief periods of civil rule, the nation saw numerous instances where certain people had to switch from one party to another, a practice known as cross-carpeting. For instance, because of ethnic disagreements, a large number of Yorubas left the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) for the Action Group (A.G.) in 1951 (Nnanna, 2010; Awofeso & Irabor, 2016).

Cross-carpeting has become increasingly prevalent in Nigeria over the past 15 years. Because of the threat it poses to democracy, it is justified in becoming a topic of literary discussion. Of course, cross-carpeting is not unique to Nigeria, but its prevalence and justification create concerns, particularly for a nation where democratic advances are barely discernible. According to Desposato (2006), there are three main justifications for cross-carpeting in the literature: the importance of parties in politics, the rewards for joining parties, and the threat it poses to representative democracy. In light of this, it is essential to find the answers to the following questions: How deeply ingrained is morality in Nigerian politics, and why is cross-carpeting rising significantly in Nigeria? Are these carpet-crosses morally acceptable, and how can morality be ingrained into Nigerian politics?

Conceptual Clarifications

Morality is based on religious principles and inspires the drive to act morally. The laws, taboos, customs, and predetermined forms of behavior that make up any society's moral code all draw their compulsion from religion. Morality thus emanates from religion and serves to control human behavior. Any transgression of the moral law is viewed as evil and is subject to punishment. Moral principles are passed down through the generations mainly through positive parental guidance and socialization. Like in Nigeria and many other typical African nations, the most important values are expressed in proverbs or morally significant folktales. A proverb is typically quoted anytime the need to reaffirm particular moral ideals arises. It can function as instructions for action or judgment in situations involving moral failings.

Moral philosophers agree that morality has a Latin etymological foundation. Agulanna (2014) said that the Latin word *moralis*, which he believed Cicero coined to translate the Greek word *ethos*, which means habit or custom, is where the concept of morality originates. Ekwealo (2012) stated that ethics and morality are interchangeable in support of this viewpoint. He emphasized that whereas morality is derived from the Latin term "mores," which means custom, habit, and way of life, ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which refers to character or habits. As a result, morality is a notion that, in its etymological definition, refers to behavior, principles, rightness, and the administration of or living. Nowell-Smith (1967) asserts that morality includes both reasons that encourage moral behavior and that which is good, desirable, or deserving of pursuit for its purpose.

Human behavior in this context refers to voluntary human acts such as enterprise, endeavor, exploit, work, or activity carried out by a person or group at a specific time.

Every member of society must ensure that their behavior complies with the moral code governing their society. Man cannot live a solitary existence due to his social nature; hence his activities impact other members of society. For example, if someone acts righteously, society will be tranquil, and people will live in harmony; nevertheless, if he acts wickedly, it may cause resentment and indifference. Therefore, people may only treat others "in manners that make for harmonious living" 7 in society by establishing a moral code of conduct.

Moral principles can be universal or non-universal, as Olasunkanmi (2014) emphasizes. He asserts that moral principles are universal when shared by all peoples regardless of their religious or cultural affiliations but non-universal based on particular national, institutional, or religious affinities. Furthermore, whereas non-universal moral principles are less binding, universal moral values are binding on people, and failure to uphold them attracts some punishment in contrast to immorality, which encompasses injustice, self-centeredness, intolerance, wickedness, discrimination, coercion, dishonesty, and corruption. Morality revolves around ideals like justice, responsibility, equity, fairness, truth, and impartiality, as Ayantayo (2009) noted. Therefore, anyone who demonstrates the virtues of sound principles is morally upright, while those who do so are morally deficient. These are principles that are detrimental to the welfare and peace of society.

Politics: Politics can be summed up as the "craft and science of government," according to Yusuf (2012); it is the collection of all activities involved in the administration of a state or territory, particularly those directed at elevating one individual over another or consolidating power within an institution. Politics is the system that holds society together, particularly in public affairs, welfare, social amenities, and exercising power to organize and control a particular community or state. Politics involves theory and practice that direct the decision-making process for a group of people.

The ancient meaning of the concept is explained in Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. According to Dudley (1973), politics is "the art and science of government." As opined by Okomba (2006), politics is a concept that describes the behavior of humans within a government setup. The ancient Greek definition refers to searching for what is just in the administration of Polis, or the city or society. Therefore, politics focused on ensuring that the community's citizens lived in comfort. Politics cannot be completely detached from its historical meaning in the modern sense, but pursuing political power has altered the notion. Today, people view politics as either the art or science of governing or as a struggle for control and authority in a polity between rival interest groups or individuals.

The claim above makes it clear that rivalry between two interest groups frequently serves the egos of the individuals involved rather than the interests of society as a whole. It emphasizes that Nigeria has abandoned the traditional ethical dimensions and responsibilities of politics and shifted concerns about usurping the state's organs to further the goals of the privileged few who benefit from the whims and caprices of government.

Cross-Carpeting: This is frequently used interchangeably with phrases like "decamping," "party switching," and others. It has grown trendy in Nigeria, especially before and after elections. It refers to a situation in which someone shifts from one party to another, primarily to further their interests (Awofeso & Irabor, 2017). Cross-carpeting is the act of switching from one political party to another to further or defend particular personal interests.

Although the concept of "cross-carpeting" in politics has been described using various terms, it is essential to remember that cross-carpeting refers to both the frequency of such transitions and the movement between parties. For instance, some politicians switch from their initial political party to another party, join it again, and then quit again. Ikechukwu (2015) used the phrase "party

nomadism” to describe cross-carpeting in this context. Once more, these changes in parties are typically unjustifiable. When he no longer receives benefits from a party, such as elected posts or contract awards, a person who has continually benefited from that party may choose to depart. Awofeso & Irabor’s (2017) assessment of defectors as political prostitutes emphasizes their lack of political principle, ideology, and conscience, as well as their steadfast commitment to the socioeconomic advancement of the country.

Carpet Crossing in Nigeria Politics

While it is undeniable that morality and politics are two distinct ideas that have to deal with human civilization, it is also clear that they are related in some way; the two focus on improving society’s ability to be peaceful and humane. Politics is concerned with how the community is managed effectively, whereas morality is focused on how society’s members can coexist peacefully by modeling moral behavior. Politics, on the other hand, seeks to establish what the government of a political society ought to do and how it ought to be structured to accomplish socially desirable goals. Politics determines what the government should do in society, so only projects and programs that benefit society should be undertaken.

In contrast, how those in charge of the society ascend to the corridors of power must be consistent with the state’s established arrangements. Unfortunately, the notion of moral politics seems unreachable given the current state of African politics, particularly in Nigeria. Politicians are employing dubious and immoral ways to achieve power. They also use fair or foul techniques to preserve and sustain their positions, thanks to the attitude that politics is a dirty game with little to do with morality.

Nigerian society has been and continues to be negatively impacted by immoral politicians. It has shown up in the nation’s corruption in all forms and degrees, particularly on the part of those in political power. Many Nigerians have long viewed politics as a profitable industry where they can quickly amass a fortune. Since this was their initial goal in obtaining a governmental position, the public funds intended for development projects have been diverted to their accounts. Because the people looking after public funds have chosen to pilfer the money, the citizens who were meant to benefit from those facilities will continue to suffer. In addition, most Nigerian politicians are kleptocratic leaders, as evidenced by the fact that many of those holding political office in the country is leaving with sizable bank accounts, a variety of properties, and several cases of financial misconduct brought against them before the appropriate agencies.

The country’s corrupt politics also contribute to Nigeria’s rising unemployment rate. Without providing jobs to occupy these countless youths, the country’s various educational institutions produce graduates yearly. It is due to the country’s politics failing to produce visionary leaders who could plan for the development of industries and the diversification of the nation’s economy, which may result in employment. Only self-indulgent, egotistical, egoistic, and kleptocratic leaders involved in politics for personal gain have sprung from corrupt politics.

Nigeria has abundant natural and human resources, but poor leadership orientation has resulted in the mismanagement of these resources, leaving the country in an undesirable and deplorable state that forces the citizens to look for any means of emigrating to another “promising pasture” outside of the country.

The appalling level of poverty in Nigeria is another indisputable result of corrupt politics in that nation. Nigeria, as previously mentioned, is a country that is richly endowed with resources. However, the country is a beggar because it gains wealth from its resources; the money goes into private accounts and becomes poorer. In contrast, a small number of her citizens, particularly political leaders, become more affluent. When people are unable to meet their necessities, poverty has a severe negative impact on the country. The levels and types of poverty that exist in Nigeria, according to Uniamikogbo (1997), are as follows: “Poverty has many dimensions, such as inadequate income, malnutrition, lack of access to social services, and lack of social and political status.” When identifying poverty in Nigeria, Familusi and Oke (2011) note that many Nigerians are deeply discouraged by their inability to afford a balanced meal, decent housing, high-quality education, and quality healthcare. They also mention political corruption as one of the main factors contributing to Nigeria’s poverty. Ironically, although the bulk of the population is starving to death, a small number of people have amassed an incredible fortune by siphoning off the nation’s bountiful resources, much to the detriment of the rest.

Insecurity is one of the effects of Nigeria’s corrupt politics. Many Nigerians have turned to hire assassins to kill their opponents to advance their political ambitions. Little needs to be said about the wealthy and well-liked politicians arming political thugs with illegal firearms during the electoral process, weapons that would never be recovered from them when their terrible tasks were accomplished. The goons would now terrorize the donor and the country’s innocent citizens using the same weapons. We must refer to a moral political scholar’s contention that injustice, corruption, and insecurity are Siamese triplets inseparable from one another in Nigerian politics. It suggests that the elimination of one will inevitably result in the elimination of all. Fighting against injustice can be compared to some of the country’s insurrections. The Niger-Delta Militancy, against which the Nigerian government fought for a long time, is a powerful illustration of this. Wherever injustice reigns, equality will never be permitted to prevail and denying individuals their rights may cause instability in any given society.

Immoral deeds in national politics have tarnished the image of the nation. Nigeria occupies a very prominent spot on the list of the most corrupt countries in the world, embarrassing the country’s natives abroad. Agulanna (2015) is resolute that: There is so much criminality, roguery, and political indecency among African leaders that nobody pays serious attention to African politics anymore. The above is about the poor image of African democracy, which is not different from what is attainable in Nigeria. In the African version of democracy, vote buying and election cheating are common problems.

The claim above makes it clear that Nigeria has lost its honorable position in the international community. Therefore, adopting a new perspective on politics and governance is crucial to restoring the nation's reputation. However, this redemption will not happen overnight unless Nigerians learn to integrate morals into the nation's politics.

Inculcating Morality into Nigerian Politics

Unquestionably, Nigerian politics is not free of immorality, which has led to the nation's underwhelming level of social and economic development. However, the issue still exists despite the public's calls for years for a new political worldview. The destiny of a nation greatly depends on its inhabitants' capacity for sound political judgment. To reintroduce a decent sense of morality into Nigerian politics, the following are recommended:

Change of Political Ideologies: Nigerians made political mistakes due to their inadequate ideology and orientation toward gaining and retaining political power. The typical politician in the nation thinks that the goal of holding political power is accumulating wealth for personal gain. Other people also find meaning and fulfillment in the absolutization of power and authority without necessarily realizing that these things never end in themselves but rather as a means to an end. Thus, serving the needs of the people is the end, which is also the ultimate purpose of politics. The idea of obtaining something by any means, fair or unfair, will be eliminated when we perceive politics as serving the public in our political capacity. Using questionable means to obtain political power is unreasonable even when the intentions to serve are genuine. The goal and objective of attaining political positions should be to serve humanity.

De-monetization of Politics: If we want to instill morality into our political system, we need to look at the enormous salaries and other perks associated with political positions in Nigeria. While it is unavoidable that democracy is the best form of governance, it is also unavoidable that it is also the most expensive to maintain. This type of government, particularly in Nigeria, results in every political office holder, including a ward councilor, receiving a handsome salary, substantial benefits, official vehicles, and security personnel, in contrast to his civil service counterparts, who struggle because they are financially incompetent. Because of the excessive advantages, politics has become a life-or-death issue in the nation. As a result, we recommend that the government demonetize politics and lessen the incentives associated with holding political office. We are not suggesting that politicians should not be honored for their services to society's citizens, but not to the point where they get filthy rich just for holding political office.

Waging War against Corruption: Launching a full-scale campaign against corruption in the nation is another approach to ensure morality in Nigerian politics. Even though government organizations like the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) deal with corrupt political office holders, the fight against corruption should not be biased or unfair manner. As purportedly claimed about the agencies, they should not be employed against corrupt opposition party leaders; instead, every kleptocratic politician should be dealt with harshly. The nation should adopt the Deterrent Theory of punishment which says that punishing wrongdoers or criminals is to deter other people from doing the same wrong or criminal acts. Oke has viewed corruption in politics as a violation of moral code or normative standards within society. He explains further that anti-social behavior confers improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms and undermines the authorities to improve the living condition of the people.³⁸ In other words, we cannot play dirty politics without its unavoidable consequence inform of corruption which will invariably deny the ordinary people their rights and benefits in governance. Therefore, the searchlight of the concerned Agencies should not spare any corrupt politician irrespective of his position, political affiliation, and affluence; in order words, the war against corruption should not be selective. Discrimination in forms of impunity or sacred *cowism* should be avoided in an effective and serious fight against corruption in the country. The era whereby someone would be in prison custody and contest and win an election should be a thing of the past. Whosoever does not have a clean record should not qualify to contest an election, let alone be appointed to occupy any political post. Nigeria should stop celebrating corruption and corrupt leader; instead, they should be exposed to great ignominy. The properties of the guilty politicians should be confiscated; this will end the shameful idea of a plea bargain, that is, paying a small amount of money as ransom for the considerable amount they have stolen. If this is done, other politicians will sit tight, at least, for the sake of the fear of public humiliation.

Intensified Religious Moral Teaching: Since it is believed that Africans, including Nigerians, are "notoriously," "incurably," and even "in all things" religious, it is relevant to use religious tools to tackle immorality in Nigerian politics. This is because every player in the game of politics in the country has an affiliation with one religion or the other, which preaches morality in every sphere of life. The increasing level of immorality in the country generally shows that religious institutions have been failing in this regard. Thus, Nigerian religious leaders should rise to the task of preaching morality to their followers; telling them that politics and governance are a chance to serve the people of the society and not an opportunity for the personal aggrandizement of political leaders; this will go a long way to influence them positively. The idea that each human life is valuable is deeply rooted in the teachings of the country's major religions.

Introduction of Political Ethics as a General Studies Programme: Experience has shown that not everyone given a chance to hold political office has the knowledge that yields excellent performance in the position. Many of the politicians in Nigeria come from different academic disciplines and have little to no background in governance. Therefore, we want to point out that the government should require higher education institutions to include politics-related courses in their General Studies Programs. By doing so, all students who will eventually become the nation's leaders—will have a fundamental understanding of politics and governance. Once

more, this will equip them for the work ahead while barring leaders unprepared for the social, political, and economic obligations of the positions they hold from holding government.

Conclusion

In contemporary Nigerian society, our politicians fall well short of expectations. A typical Nigerian politician exhibits unethical behavior, shows little consideration for the interests of others, is egotistical, and engages in corruption in all areas of their work. Their interests are focused on cross carpeting or carpet crossing when the political advantage swings to the opposition, as well as how they can protect themselves from the whims of the law concerning their corrupt acts. However, it harms the country's growth and development and should be vehemently opposed.

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