

Nigerian Factor: A Monster in Nigeria's Wheel of Progress and the Way Out

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Abstract: Nigeria as a country is endowed with what is required to become one of the greatest countries of the world in terms of social, political, economic and educational development, but the menace of "Nigerian factor" has become one of the major impediments to the realization of that feat. The menace has become part of the socio-cultural pattern among Nigerians that it has become very difficult to uproot in spite of the anti-corruption war. Nigerian factor is a corrupt value system and mind-set that are learnt either consciously or unconsciously which propels an individual to seek for self-gratification against the collective interest and growth of the nation. It manifests in the attitude to work of Nigerians, expectation of gratification and appreciation before carrying out an official duty, "sorting" in educational institutions in order to gain undue advantage from lecturers, nepotism and cronyism, long leg, poor attitude to due process, bottom power, among others. Nigerian factor puts both private and public officers in a fix between doing the right thing or towing the line of the menace, it affects the quality of graduates from educational institutions, leads to marginalization of those that refuse to tow its line, and so on. The paper therefore recommends value reorientation through effective teaching of values in Social Studies at different levels of education, attitudinal change through the instrumentality of education, modelling of appropriate values and attitudes among others.

Keywords: Nigerian factor, monster, wheel and progress.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a country possesses what it takes to be one of the greatest countries of the world in terms of social, political, economic and educational development, but more often than not, the country continues to "mark time" and retrogress. Many authors have attributed this to corrupt practices and other related vices among Nigerians. In order to "polish" these corrupt tendencies which are highly detrimental to the progress of the country, a phrase called "Nigerian factor" was coined to becloud the vision of Nigerians thereby preventing them from seeing the grievousness of their corrupt tendencies and actions that impede the progress of the country. In spite of all the rhetoric about war on corruption, the phenomenon has shown so much resilience that it seems to have become normal in the country [1]. What ought to be a menace which every Nigerian should fight against, has now come to stay as part of Nigerian social system which many Nigerians now embrace and practice.

In addition, it was observed that the malignant presence of Nigerian factor in the nation is now very much politically correct and socially and morally acceptable [2], to the extent that it has become a norm among the citizens, despite the fact that its ripple effect is more or less inescapable [3]. Explaining further, Nwodo added that "the Nigerian factor" is an ailment whose symptoms are often confused with its causes.

While some look at it in terms of corruption, nepotism or fraud, others see it as a normal socio-cultural way of life peculiar to Nigerians.

The concept of Nigerian factor

Nigerian factor is a concept that many Nigerians are familiar with and can easily decode its meaning once it is mentioned, or surfaces at one point or the other consciously or unconsciously. It means different things to different people as well as the context in which it is used. Nwodo [2] described Nigerian factor as a phenomenon that is at one's social, psychic and psychological which embodies the potential failure of any enterprise in Nigeria simply because it may be Nigerian in origin, conception or execution. This presupposes that once a project or an enterprise hails from Nigeria, or is executed by Nigerians, there is the likelihood of failure of such venture simply because of its link with the name Nigeria. Similarly, Okwuje [3] sees Nigerian factor as that niggling stronghold which prevents the average Nigerian from accomplishing certain things. In addition, just as it was established earlier that the concept of Nigerian factor is multifaceted, Okwuje added that one may also see it as that straight jacket which confines one and brings about disillusion.

In the field of business, Nigerian factor was described as sets of activities or practices that prevent

one from running a successful business in Nigeria [4]. It refers to all those factors that are peculiar to Nigeria which inhibit successful business endeavours or enterprise in Nigeria. Suffice to add that even though these factors are termed Nigerian, they are not innate but are an acquired value system and a mind-set. Since the concept of Nigerian factor is multifaceted and multi sectorial, it is therefore seen within the context of this work as basically a value system and mind-set that Nigerians hold and operate which affects nation-building and development generally. It is a corrupt value system and mind-set which are learnt either consciously or unconsciously, which propels an individual to seek for self-gratification against the collective interest and growth of the nation.

Manifestation of Nigerian Factor

As established earlier, Nigerian factor are corrupt tendencies which originate from corrupt value system and mind-set and has become an acceptable way of life among Nigerians and given the multi-faceted nature, its manifestations will be discussed from different perspectives.

First is Nigerian factor in relation to attitude to work: It has been observed by Onakpobero [5] that from birth to adulthood Nigerians are nurtured along cultural thought patterns that later on provide a solid base for engaging, promoting and entrenching corrupt tendencies. Since corruption which comes through the perspective of Nigerian factor has been sub-consciously adopted as national socio-cultural norms acceptable by many Nigerians, it becomes very difficult to modify. Some of the ways through which this monster of Nigerian factor manifest in Nigerians' attitude as identified by Onakpobero [5] include Nigerian time, gratitude, "use your brain o", "shine your eye o", "No carry government for head o", "E no matter, forget e", among others.

Putting all these into perspectives, one discovers that an average Nigerian is not disciplined as far as being prompt to work is concerned because of the orientation unconsciously inculcated: that meetings and functions seldom start as scheduled, even the official time for work is often compromised due to this factor of Nigerian time. Secondly, many Nigerians have developed the mind-set of receiving gifts in both cash and kind in the name of gratification before they perform their official duties, while those that fail to offer such gratification are often time neglected or not attended to as promptly as it is expected. In addition, the normal slangs which many Nigerians understand and work with include "shine your eye o", "use your brain o", and the like which have to do with using every opportunity available to enrich and accumulate wealth illegally for oneself from one's place of assignment even at the detriment of the establishment or the employer.

Beside these, corrupt tendencies popularly referred to as Nigerian factor has also crept into higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, to the extent that many students and lecturers have taken it as a norm. A concept like "sorting" has become a household word among many undergraduates to the extent that they are more concerned with how to go about it rather than how to study harder. It simply refers to the art of inducing a lecturer with money in order to gain an undue advantage (marks) from him/her. Torulagha [6] observed that it is an open secret that students are occasionally compelled to pay for grades in many secondary schools and universities by some Professors/ Lecturers/ Instructors/ Teachers. Some students can successfully pass an examination without attending a class by bribing their way through. Similarly, Uzochukwu [7] reiterated that some students are in the university not by merit, but through a kind of bribery called sorting.

Suffice to add that some lecturers who are not involved in "sorting" are also caught in the web of Nigerian factor syndrome by desperate students through giving and receiving of appreciation in cash and kind. This particular style of giving gratification to some lecturers is a way of soliciting for marks and undue advantage over other students as the lecturer in question unconsciously goes outside examination or professional ethics to award undeserved marks to such candidates or lower the standard for the sake of such candidates as the case may be. Consequently, this practice of receiving appreciation by some lecturers has affected the quality of research project undertaken by undergraduates as the supervisor in such cases deliberately lowers the standard for such candidates or goes to the extent of writing some portion of the work for such student instead of providing guidance and mentorship to the supervisee(s).

Nigerian factor also manifests in form of nepotism and cronyism. Nepotism or cronyism is the practice of partiality in awarding jobs or contracts and other advantages to friends and associates without regard to merit. Confirming this assertion, Okafor as cited in Martini [8] reported that there is evidence that family ties and personal connections play important role in the appointment of individuals into public positions, as well as with regard to promotions and remuneration. Among Nigerians, family ties and connections to people that are within or close to the corridors of power constitute a factor for appointments and job placement. It has become a norm to the extent that those in charge of appointments who refuse to play along the line of Nigerian factor but choose to emphasize merit and level playing ground for all are termed foolish and wicked by their kinsmen and associates.

In addition to the foregoing, Ayawei *et al.* [1] observed that metaphorical allusions like "long leg", "bottom power", "chop chop", "scratch my back" are

all euphemisms for corrupt behaviour. While long leg has to do with using connections to get what one wants; bottom power deals with the use of sex by female folks to either gain admission, employment, placement as well as promotion; chop chop and scratch my back has to do with the art of conniving among people to take something from an organisation through dubious and corrupt means or a form of collaboration to receive bribe. Even though these practices are morally and ethically wrong, many Nigerians have accepted them as a way of life.

Even the education sector is not left out of this menace of Nigerian factor. Torulagha [6] observed some of the corrupt tendencies in the Nigerian educational system which is part of Nigerian factor to include paying professional examination takers to take standardized examinations for them, paying invigilators at the examination centres to enable them to look the other way and allow the professional examination takers to do their jobs for them, sorting which has to do with the art of giving money to lecturers in order to gain undue advantage from the lecturers, even some parents pay for their wards to enable another person take examination on their behalf (impersonation) among others. Apart from the issue of “sorting” and giving of ‘appreciation’ to lecturers in order to gain undue advantage, one other area that this menace has caught many academics unconsciously is in the area of “who you know syndrome” in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria. Some rich men bribe Vice chancellors, Registrars, Deans and Head of Departments to secure admission for their children[7], or to secure a particular course for their ward, even when other candidates may be better off intellectually than their candidate, or using their positions of influence or financial status to see that their children score some marks at all cost. It is an open secret that some high ranking staff of tertiary institutions of learning do give the names or matriculation number of their ‘candidates’ to some lecturers after examinations for special favours and consideration during marking and scoring.

This menace has become a norm in many institutions of learning in Nigeria that it has become a difficult scourge to fight because those that are involved get some financial benefits or favours while those that do not subscribe to such ideologies are considered to be “wicked” and “hard”. They can also be “blacklisted” among students and some staff, and in most cases, become objects of attack by students without receiving any serious protection by school authorities and colleagues.

Another area where the manifestation of the monster called Nigerian factor is evidenced is on Nigerian highways and roads. It has been observed that those who work at some checkpoints on the expressways cannot do so without collecting bribes from car owners and drivers [7]. Many motorists on

Nigerian highways where checkpoints are situated have the option of being prepared to part with some money in order not to be delayed unnecessarily or properly checked by the officers on the highway or be prepared to experience some delays if they are not ready to part with money, which ranges from ₦20 to ₦200 even when all the particulars are current and intact. This practice is gradually eroding the integrity of many road users as they can get their way easily with a “closed fist” towards the officer on duty which is a pointer to the officer that they understand what to do in order to avoid delays on the highway, while those that do not want to compromise are often delayed unnecessarily in a bid to make them part with some money. This in turn makes many motorists to tow the part of Nigerian factor on the highways.

Nigerian factor is also seen on Nigerian roads as it manifests in total disrespect for laws and unrivalled selfishness [9]. Many motorists do not have regards for law and order as they drive on Nigerian roads. They can drive across traffic if there is no traffic warden, drive against traffic light indications provided no traffic warden is close by to effect arrest, or refuse to obey traffic signs totally. Suleiman observed that in Nigeria, it is perfectly alright to drive on pedestrian walkways and chase walkers off by blaring horns. In addition, many traders have no regards for Nigerian roads as they are often seen in cities blocking a lane to display their goods or capitalize on traffic jam to sell to commuters. This is a common practice in different cities in Nigeria, without regards to law and order as well as the implication of their actions on the aesthetics of city life.

Suffice to add that due process is another aspect where Nigerian factor manifests. It is not out of place to say that an average Nigerian lacks the patience to follow due process in daily living, because the attitude of many Nigerians is tailored towards “short cut” in everything. It has become a normal practice among many Nigerians to “shunt” the queue on Automated Teller Machine (ATM) or give their ATM cards to the person in front of them to do their transactions for them without consideration for the people that came earlier. Many individuals find it difficult to queue for anything, which has its adverse effect on the country’s socio-cultural life. Apart from the impatience of many Nigerians who are not ready to wait for their turn, some unpatriotic staff of filling stations, banks and other organizations constitute a serious challenge in this regard as they use their influence to favour some people either because of the relationship that exist between them or the monetary gain or any other favours that they may derive from the beneficiary, which often times causes chaos in such places.

Effects of Nigerian factor syndrome

The fact that Nigerian factor has been accepted as the normal way of life for many Nigerians does not

mean that it does not have any negative consequences on Nigerians as well as the social, economic, political and educational life of the country. Some of these effects include;

1. It puts public officers and others in the private sector in a dire conflict between doing the right thing by law and heeding to the strong lure of this cultural thought pattern [5]. Since the practice has become part of the socio-cultural pattern in Nigeria, many people without the strong will to change the status quo often find themselves in a dilemma to either do the right thing and face the reaction of the people or yield to the demand of Nigerian factor.
2. It affects the quality of graduates that are produced from educational institutions in Nigeria. One cannot truly vouch for the quality of graduates as well as the class of degree that they carry since many factors might have interplayed to give such candidates the results. It is no longer news to see many graduates with second class degree or first class who cannot defend the certificate during interview or place of work. Commenting on the issue of quality in our institutions of learning in Nigeria, Torulagha [6] observed that:

The educational sector today, seems to produce graduates who are not sufficiently disciplined and equipped with the appropriate academic and professional skills, hence, have no qualms about breaking the law, perpetually looking for shortcuts to amass wealth and are morally bankrupt.

3. Marginalization of those that tried to uphold the tenets of integrity and due process. This was affirmed by Nwodo [2], that those who try to institute a semblance of order in Nigeria's grossly dysfunctional systems are marginalized. This is because what ought to be an aberration has now become part of the socio-cultural pattern in Nigeria, and as such, those that tried to do the right thing suffer marginalization and deprivation in various ways. Similarly, it was also observed that the art of giving and receiving gratification also leads to "come back" syndrome by those that refuse to pay or give it [6]. This is common in many public offices where "tipping" which is another manifestation of Nigerian factor is operational. Those that "tip" the officer in charge of files will enjoy faster and speedy movement of files while those that refuse to give such bribe are delayed unnecessarily using various terms like go and come back later or the officer concerned is not on seat.
4. Abuse of power is a common seen in many episodes of everyday life in Nigeria society [2]. This is common with uniform men in Nigeria who use their position and the power of their guns to terrorize innocent citizens who display the knowledge of their right in the face of intimidation and molestation. It is

a common practice in Nigeria for uniform men to have their way in filling stations, use sirens to push other motorist out of the road in traffic, and jumping of queues at ATM points for transaction without any form of apology to those that came earlier.

5. Encouragement of low quality and substandard products. Since Nigerians sees Nigerian factor as a normal way of life, foreign investors once in Nigeria and having observed the abysmally low premium that Nigerian place on each other as human beings, quickly lower the bar of quality on their services and devote their energies to unbridled profiteering [2].
6. It engenders corrupt tendencies and practices among young Nigerians. To see how endemic and the damage that has been caused by these tendencies called Nigerian factor, Torulagha [6] asserted that it is not possible to be a saint in Nigeria while the entire socio-political fabric is corrupt. The practice of Nigerian factor has become a norm and a "smart" way of life in Nigeria without any form of punishment to those that indulge in such acts, consequently, many young Nigerians consciously develop such attitude and value system to flow with the tide of Nigerian factor.
7. Other costs and consequences of corruption which manifest through Nigerian factor syndrome include the erosion of the moral fabric of society, violation of the social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermining of democracy, subversion of the rule of law, retardation of development, among others [1].

The way out of Nigerian factor

Even though Nigerian factor has become systemic and institutionalized, all hope is not lost in changing Nigerian factor syndrome among Nigerians. The following are recommended as the way forward:

1. There is need for value reorientation through effective teaching of values in Social Studies at all levels of education in Nigeria. Since the ultimate purpose of value education is to change behaviour for the enhanced well-being of all [10], such teaching will equip the young ones with the necessary where with all to cultivate positive values that could refute "Nigerian factor".
2. There is need for attitudinal change through the instrumentality of education. Inculcation of the right attitude in children and youths through education is a necessity if the fight against Nigerian factor must succeed. If children and the youths are not properly socialized, they are very likely to end up adopting destructive social values [6].
3. Defending Nigerians that dare to stand out for what is right. The government and every organisation should ensure that those that can stand up for what is right and fight the menace of Nigerian factor are protected in order to encourage others to adopt such practices. Positive reinforcement could also be given to such individuals by way of promotion and

other incentive so as to encourage similar gesture from other Nigerians.

4. Modelling the appropriate values and attitude by the Nigerians that believe in changing the status quo. Nwodo [2] reiterated that the onus is on those who have been scared so many times and in so many places by this syndrome to begin to model an alternative value system. This presupposes that those that have fallen victim of Nigerian factor syndrome at one point or the other who believe in changing the menace should be more resilient, and stand for what is right in order to serve as role model to others.
5. Appropriate sanctions should be meted out promptly to those that engage in corrupt practices under Nigerian factor syndrome by government to serve as deterrent to others. This can be done by instituting non-corrupt and uncompromising administrators and heads of various agencies of government who can stand for what is right and punish all forms of corruption in the name of Nigerian factor in their organisation.
6. There is need to clean the educational sector since education is the second or third most powerful and effective instrument of socialization [6]. Since the educational sector is a major agent of socialization, people that engage in corrupt practices under the cover of Nigerian factor should be sanctioned appropriately in order not to inculcate and model wrong values to the younger ones. Those that cannot serve as good role model to the younger ones in terms of exhibiting good values and positive attitude that could enhance nation-building should not be retained in the education sector.
7. There is need to inculcate contentment and self-satisfaction through all the agents of socialization since Nigerian factor syndrome permeates all the segments of the society. This could be done through teaching of contentment, integrity and other virtues by religious institutions as well as the mass media who could educate the masses about the menace of Nigerian factor as well as promoting patriotism through showcasing Nigerians that exhibits true patriotism, loyalty and nationalism.

CONCLUSION

Nigerian factor has become a serious challenge to nation-building as well as a scourge which has eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian society. Even though this scourge has been with Nigerians and has been accepted as part of the socio-cultural life of Nigerians, it

can still be overcome with serious determination, resilience, persistence and doggedness on the part of government and Nigerians who believe that Nigerian factor is a scourge that must be fought to a standstill. The government must also show serious commitment in this fight, not just to gain cheap popularity and to score political goals but to create enabling environment in order for few Nigerians who are ready to fight the scourge to boldly stand out in different sectors of the society to confront the menace.

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