(AB)USE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: AN INDELIBLE NEGATIVE IMPRESSION ON NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL OUTFITS

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ABSTRACT: *Social capital in sociology, economics, psychology, political science and allied disciplines has been explored mostly in terms of its positive utility value in society. However, the phenomenon has more negative impacts on the public institutions of developing nations, especially with regard to the roles of these institutions in the sustainable development agenda. Although bureaucracy, especially with regard to the principle of impersonality, has helped developed nations to control the vulnerability of public institutions to social capital, the inability of developing nations to objectively follow bureaucratic principles has made their public institutions vulnerable to the abuse of social capital driven by ethnic/religious affiliation. Hence, this adverse social capital scenario has generated a public service environment in which people are employed or appointed based on their proximity to powerful ethnic and religious groups. By extension, this has had far-reaching negative consequences on development and sustainability in these nations, as mediocre manpower continues to undermine efficiency and promote a culture of perpetual underdevelopment. In this paper, we expand on the above notion using secondary data in Nigeria and link the dominant notions of social capital to bridge the gap in the literature about social capital and public institutions in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: *bureaucratic institutions, downside of social capital, social capital; sustainable development; public institutions; ethnicity and religion*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, social capital as concept, theoretical paradigm, and social phenomenon, has attracted contextual and contestant analysis and advanced interpretations by different academics depending on their scholarly conviction about emerging issues in society. This is not unconnected to the ever-growing knowledge and human diversity in relation to cultural, political and religious orientation, and more, which have emerged to shape human interactions at various societal levels such as family, tribe, ethnicity, and race.

From the period of armchair theorizing to the current era of inductive and deductive theorization that has come to characterize scholarship in sociology and allied disciplines, social capital as a topic of debate has created consciousness among scholars and laymen in society of the need to understand the invisible web that sustains group life. This intellectual endeavor marks the academic shift from micro to macro theory and practice within the social sciences and human society at large. At different levels and in different societies, social capital plays certain roles that reinforce the survival of life in society, such that its lack can create invisible crises that affect the wellbeing of individuals, as well as the collective conscience of the system (Putnam 2000; Durkheim 1938).

Although the term 'social capital' in its current usage and coverage did not actually run through the works of many founding fathers of sociology, such as Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and others, the concept in its interpretations and utility value can be keenly observed to have been implied in the works of these founding fathers in their various theoretical framings. For instance, Durkheim's use of social solidarity and collective conscience is a referential example of how the crisis that is inherent in industrial society would be managed by professional associations, which in their utilitarian values are networks of people based on their social capital (Haralambos–Holborn 2008). Similarly, in Marx's analysis of the classes and the material basis of society, the essence of social capital is seen in the relationships that exist between classes and within classes. As a result, capitalists appeared in the analysis as that group with more social capital (networks) to establish domination over the proletariats via political power and influence in society, which factors determine the policies that control the common destinies of men. The proletariat is defined as the group with less social capital in the system, both in terms of their individual chances of survival and the group's chances of survival (Marx–Engels (1950) in Haralambos–Holborn 2008).

Weber's analysis of social stratification suggests that market and status-related situation, as well as acquiring skills and social prestige, have become a means of attaining upper-class status, which in itself is invisible social capital that assists

with accessing certain opportunities in the social system. In the latter's view, the ownership of means of production and workers' status are not closed and restricted, but liberalized for those who aspire to climb the social ladder, unlike the "blood-induced social group" defined by factors such as race, ethnicity, and caste, in relation to which membership is automatically restricted to people due to birth and marriage (Weber 1965 [1947]). However, all the classes and statuses, and even the parties in Weber's classifications, have some social capital given their utilitarian values for the members of society who belong to them.

In his analysis of the existence and survival of society, with emphasis on social structure, Georg Simmel drew the attention of scholars to the layers of communication that brought the concept of society into existence and continue to sustain it. In contrast to the view of realists, Simmel was of the view that society does not represent such an alien power over individuals, but rather influences the creation of individuals at various levels starting from the family (Simmel 1964). According to Simmel, individuals create and maintain the concept of society and autonomy via their constant interactions, which are determined by the level of exchange in society. In essence, the interactions of members of society are embedded in the benefits they expect from each other at different levels of direction of interaction. In referring to the power of family networks, tribes, ethnicity, race, and class in producing or rather transforming into social capital, the work of Simmel aptly exhibited the inalienable position of social capital in the social structure and interactions among members of society. Many other founding fathers of sociology in one way or the other touched on the phenomenon of social capital in their work while explaining the existence and survival of society and even-ongoing interactions in society without necessarily applying the concept in its current usage in the literature, thus showing the imperativeness of the concept and its utilitarian value in the history of human social existence (Portes 1998; Ivana 2017).

Despite the stealth appearance of the concept of social capital in the work of the early sociologists and other social science scholars, the concept of social capital only systematically appeared in the sociological literature via the work of Pierre Bourdieu on *class distinction* (1985). Bourdieu included social capital among the listed forms of capital in his work that are inherent in the class relationships in society, such as economic capital, cultural capital, social, and symbolic capital (Haralambos–Holborn 2008). Specifically, Bourdieu defined social capital as consisting of social connections – who you know, and who you are friendly with; who you can call on for help or a favor. Social capital, distinguished in Bourdieu's work from other forms of capital, has become a hot topic of interest among scholars in the area of social sciences such that every social scientific discipline has in one way or the other applied the concept

in explaining and predicting human behavior and interactions with regard to politics, consumer/producer behavior, ethnographic networks, social welfare, social structure, and more (Portes 1998; Ivana 2017; Schmid–Robison 1995; Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017; Coleman 1990; Zhou–Bankston 1996).

Across generations, social capital has functioned to harmonize social networks and the distribution of available resources in society; hence many scholars have paid more emphasis to the beneficial aspect of social capital. However, few (Putnam 2000; Sik 2010) or no scholars have considered the downside/negative implications of social capital (i.e. the abuse of social capital), especially with regard to the existence, survival, and sustainability of developing nations such as Nigeria, where bureaucratic institutions have not assumed firm positions in determining who gets what and how due to a strong prevalence of corrupt practices mediated by family, ethnic, and religious cleavages. In Nigeria, the consistent traditional pattern of redistribution of wealth and other resources (the substance of traditional small-scale societies) has coagulated into a pseudo-modern bureaucratic pattern (the public institution) as a result of the amalgamation of ethnic groups into a modern nation state. This has made management and access to available resources vulnerable to corrupt practices powered by social capital networks via the family, ethnic, and religious networks. As a result of the above gap in the literature, the present paper is specifically interested in analyzing the abuse of the utilitarian value of social capital and its implications for the advancement and sustainability of developing nations, focusing on Nigeria, to expand the reach of the concept and phenomenon of social capital with regard to explaining individual and group behavioral dispositions towards the access and redistribution of wealth and resources in this context.

SOCIAL CAPITAL: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS

Social capital in its own right has emerged as the byproduct of classical arguments and explanations about the existence of social class in society (Bourdieu 1979; Haralambos–Holborn 2008; Putnam 2000; Portes 1998). Social capital is, in Bourdieu's own words, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less, and institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1985: 248). Social capital as a concept involves the transformation of the perceived invisible structures of networks of relationships, from family networks to hitherto unknown individuals and groups in society, into a more understandable form of expression (i.e. perception of consistent strings of

characters, sounds, and common understanding), hence the stealth appearance of the phenomenon in the works of the early sociologists. Conceptually, the work of Bourdieu helped scholars within the social sciences to capture the hitherto inexpressible but observed relationship between members of society and access to wealth, resources, and opportunities within their society.

In capturing these relationships between members of society and access to resources, the concept gained popularity among scholars in the area of social sciences, causing ripples in the current literature of sociology, anthropology, political science, economics, and more (Ivana 2017; Schmid–Robison 1995; Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Ferragina 2013; Zhou–Bankston 1996; Tlili–Obsiye 2014). Social capital as a concept has helped scholars over time to conceptualize ongoing interactions in society among individuals and groups as a measure of the qualitative and quantitative progress in society. These quantitative and qualitative analyses include, among other subjects, the relationship between the masses and the elites in the corridors of political power (Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017). This is perhaps why Ferragina and Arrigoni further adduced that social capital in Britain was once the hope of the poor, which in any case the government was expected to reinforce through the agencies and organizations interested in helping the former.

The economic relationship between producers and consumers is also seen as a subject of social capital connected to the arrangements maintained between producers and distributors in order to maintain the deficit of cash on the side of the distributors who cannot afford to pay for the amount of goods they are capable of delivering at particular point in time (Schmid–Robison 1995; Baker 1990; Granovetter 1995). Social capital as a strand of the concept of capital is identifiable in the web of material goods and services obtainable in a given society (Arrow 1999). Economic resources in society can be redistributed from the rich to the poor through a social capital ladder, which helps the poor to link up with the rich who have access to the resources available in society (Schmid–Robison 1995; Samuels 1990; Boyer 2000; Burt 2000; Grisolia–Ferragina 2015); the ethnographic structure of ancient and modern societies substantially reflects the social capital available in society, making it more or less a substance of honor among people such that whoever wants prestige and recognition is expected to work hard to increase their social capital within the system (Matute-Bianchi 1986; Smart 1993; Waldinger 1995; Zhou–Bankston 1996).

The concept of social inequality and the presumed antidote to absolute inequality in society are a byproduct of class and social capital, which will only be resolved with the understanding of and potential access to social capital by the poor and the excluded (Ivana 2017; Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Schmid–Robison 1995; Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017).

The concept of social capital, as captured in the work of Bourdieu and subsequent scholars in the field of social sciences, is a thought-provoking contribution to the literature and, by implication, has extended scholarly curiosity in obtaining more understanding and utilization of the concept to generate a reliable and sustainable solution to the ever-growing inequality, abuse, and corruption in modern society – especially in developing nations, where democratic and bureaucratic institutions are weak and inconsistent (Okafor 2017).

Within the context of sociology, social capital is a strand of theory that seeks to technically explain the invisible web of relationships that sustains society in terms of the distribution and accessibility of resources. As a result, social capital cuts across a number of theories and empirical endeavors in sociology and other social sciences to unveil the inalienability of social networks in the relationships between individuals, individuals and groups, and individuals and society.

From the time of antiquity, the web of relationships that exists in society has been observed as indirectly connected to the availability of resources, which can only be accessed via the hierarchy of stratification in society (Hanifan 1916; Jacobs 1961). Durkheim, in his theoretical exploration of society, unveiled the importance of social capital (although not in specific terms) in the cohesion of human society, the absence of which he claimed resulted in some incidence of suicide, according to his classification of suicides (Durkheim 1996). Indisputably, Durkheim saw society without social cohesion as pathological, and by implication a threat to the survival of the individual members of society (Portes 1998).

In the social institutions of society, social structures that have developed overtime harbor individuals who become assets as well as liabilities to one another in terms of interrelationships in society. These structures that manifest as positions – especially political ones or networks of leadership structures among social institutions, from the micro (family), to the macro (the inter-institutional networks) level – involve certain obligations related to the redistribution of resources (such as material and non-material resources) in society, and to members of society, having at the center the occupants of hierarchies of authorities and various powers (Tönnies 1955; Simmel 1969; Malinowski 1954). These structures and the powers attached to them operate as social capital to the occupants of these positions and to everyday individuals in society who access these networks of power relationships in pursuit of the wealth and resources of society. In view of the fact that every social phenomenon in human society maintains some degree of interconnectivity, social capital does not operate as an end in itself, but rather it is a means to other ends – perhaps accessing other forms of capital. This is expressed in the work of Loury (1977), in which social capital is seen as a means of creating human capital. Of course, in the work

of Bourdieu, social capital is one of the four specific forms of capital which he mentioned as having other sub-attributes and as being mutually interwoven (Haralambos–Holborn 2008).

Social capital from the perspective of Loury (1977) is a foundation for other forms of capital required for human survival, such as economic capital, among others. Accordingly, social capital is seen from the economists' perspective as the raw material for pursuing other forms of capital and resources in the social system, hence members of society are more or less concerned about the amount and extent of networks they have to secure their wellbeing and survival within that social system (Samuels 1990; Gwilliam 1993; Schmid–Robison 1995). In a more structural functionalist sense (although with a focus on the power structure), Coleman (1988) observed social capital to be functionally important for society thereby bringing together actors in society both at individual and corporate levels.

According to Coleman, social capital operates as a variety of entities with two elements in common, such as some aspects of social structures and their facilitation of certain activities of actors, which may be persons or corporate actors within the structure. However, Portes (1998), Ivana (2017), Putnam (1993), Ferragina and Arrigoni (2017), and Tlili and Obsiye (2014) reject the position of Coleman (1988), pointing out the vague and unspecified nature of his theoretical position and its implications for empirical verification. Coleman indeed brought to the fore the functional capacity of social capital as a two-way street, as well as its vulnerability to academic exploration, depending on the interest of the scholar. In line with this functionalist perspective of social capital, Baker (1990) defined and explained social capital in view of societal structures and occupants in pursuit of their interests. According to Baker, social capital is a resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests. From the position of Baker, social capital is created by changes in relationships among actors. This of course is observable in movement on the social ladder and the web of relationships in an open society where there is less segregation and an absence of group isolation.

From a more structural-functionalist perspective, Radcliff-Brown (1952) maintained that society is made up of structures which are occupied by individuals with certain responsibilities and inherent powers and opportunities. These powers and opportunities are assets in themselves as regards the occupants of positions as well as other members of society.

The theoretical exploration of social capital as initiated by Bourdieu and earlier scholars has attracted quite a number of developments aimed at expanding its analytical horizons to increase understanding among scholars, policy makers and laymen. In any case, Bourdieu set out to discuss and grapple with social inequality in society, especially focusing on the factors behind inequality itself

and the affected groups. This is displayed in Bourdieu's approach to social capital and other forms of capital in society. For instance, Bourdieu discussed in his major work what he classified as the four forms of capital in society – being economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Economic capital is said to consist of material goods which members of society possess as ends in themselves, as well as means to an end in relation to other forms of capital. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital consists of qualifications, lifestyles, and time, their hierarchies in terms of quality, and their appreciation by members of a particular society; this classification also comprises legitimate culture, middlebrow culture, and popular taste. The third type of capital, which is the interest of the present paper, is social capital, which Bourdieu maintained consisted of who you know and who you are friendly with; who you can call on for help or for favors. Finally, Bourdieu mentioned symbolic capital, which he referred to as competence and an image of respectability and honorability (Haralambos–Holborn 2008). Furthermore, Bourdieu maintained that the four forms of capital in society, according to his classification, are interwoven such that each is connected to another in no specific direction.

While social capital in itself can be a means of generating economic capital, economic capital can be a means of creating social capital and other forms of capital within the social system (Bourdieu 1985; Portes 1998; Ivana 2017). Social capital, much like other forms of capital, is embedded in the social system such that from family networks to those of economic and political structures there exist webs of benefit-induced interactions both on the side of authorities and beneficiaries from the common masses (Smith–Kulynych 2002). This situation is found in virtually all of the different strands of human socioeconomic relationships in the developed and developing nations (Sik 2010). According to a classification by Sik (of network-sensitive society and network-insensitive society), social capital abuse among developed nations follows the demand and supply chain of traditional human material and nonmaterial needs embedded in the delivery of modern services via public institutions. While these are obvious in network-sensitive societies, they are more discrete among the network-insensitive societies of developed nations. However, the abuse of social capital seems to occur more in the developing world, where the social capital phenomenon is embedded in existing social structures. This embodiment of social capital in preexisting social structure is crucial, such that social capital takes on a new dimension or may be somewhat be disrupted and relegated to the background (Coleman 1991; Ivana 2017; Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017; Putnam 2000).

For developing nations, accessing resources through social capital via the channels of ethnicity and religion is more or less the typical approach, such that it now has more weight than competence within public institutions (Okafor 2017).

In contrast to this, in developed nations the effect of social capital is gradually being diminished, or has mostly disappeared, leaving a gap between ordinary members of society and the available resources (Putnam 2000; Ferragina–Arrigoni 2017). This of course is the effect of the strong bureaucratization of public institutions that leaves more or less space for social capital, such that belonging to an ethnic group or professional class cannot grant one access to resources, but can assure one access to information, while symbolic and cultural capital in Bourdieu's classification (such as competence and qualifications) become useful instruments for accessing resources.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONAL OPERATION AND OUTFITS IN NIGERIA

Bureaucracy, more than other concepts and theoretical frameworks, has taken over modern society both in developed and developing nations. This has made all the traditional institutions in these societies across the globe operate in a relatively uniform manner, such that rationality in social institutions is no longer culturally induced but understood and interpreted within the logic of global rationality (Giddens 1984). Max Weber, in one of the most enduring theoretical orientations in sociology and social sciences as a whole, expounded on the most effective strategies for managing the interactions of members of society via public institutions. For Weber, objective and legal rationality is embedded in the objective separation of social/public institutions from individual affections (Weber 1965[1947]). His theory calls on the concept of ideal-type bureaucracy, and, by extension, ideal-type bureaucrats, which, according to Weber, are the symbols of objectivity in public institutions. While the ideal-typical bureaucracy is an independent structure of social institutions, the ideal-type bureaucrat is a position in the system which people occupy (Weber 1965[1947]; Ritzer 2011).

Among the principles/characteristics of ideal-typical bureaucracy are rules/continuation, specificity, hierarchical structure, technicality, neutrality, and documentation (Ritzer 2011). The ideal-type bureaucrat, according to Weber, is expected to adhere to these principles to support the effective performance of the institution. As the industrial revolution ushered in the social scientific approach to understanding human interactions in society, especially in the interest of the leaders and the captains of industry, Weber's theoretical orientation became applicable to Europe where it originated, and to America, and subsequently spread to other parts of the globe via empire-building and colonization by European nations. Although Weber's bureaucratic theory has been put to test by some critics who have challenged the unquestionable rationality of bureaucratic

systems and the domineering influence of bureaucracy in postmodern society (Clegg 1992; Ray–Read 1994), Weber's bureaucratic principle has become overwhelmingly influential around the globe and is perhaps the most enduring curriculum for running public and private institutions throughout the world (Ritzer 2011; Haralambos–Holborn 2008). By implication, developing nations that are dependent on developed nations either as a result of colonialism or other bilateral relationships are anchored to the concept of ideal-type bureaucratic setups. An objective approach to development counts on the efficiency of public institutions, while the latter are efficient only through the appropriate adoption of the principles of bureaucracy.

In Nigeria, one of the developing nations that was colonized, traditional institutions (such as family-, educational-, economic- and political institutions such as exist among small-scale societies) were transformed to conform to the regimes of the colonizer (Britain), which invariably operated on the principles of bureaucracy.[2] However, Nigeria, although appearing as a unified system, still operates as a conglomeration of ethnic groups with incoherent cultural orientations (Nwanunobi 2001). In the face of this diversity of cultural orientations among these ethnic groups living together as one nation (Nigeria), understanding and interpretations of interpersonal and group interactions are yet unclear, such that in relation to the ethnic groups making up the nation the understanding of public institutions in view of their cultural orientation towards wealth and resources is totally out of place in the context as concerns bureaucratic principles.

Due to the differences in the cultural orientations, first between those who were colonized and the colonial agents, and the unified ethnic groups in the aftermath of colonization, indigenous people from these ethnic groups, who have used ethnic cleavages to pursue certain interests and built social networks in their own indigenous ways, later transferred their own concept of social networks (here, social capital), and when approaching the colonialists established public institutions such that the principles on which the latter were set up became corrupted and compromised (Okafor 2017).

The complexity involved in the concept of social capital, colonized societies, and the blueprint of developed nations via colonialism is captured in the work of Talcott Parsons, who distinguished between two pattern variables 'A' and 'B.' According to Parsons (1951), 'simple societies' (developing nations)

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2 This is observable in the structural setup of the symbolic institutions, such as the ministry of education, health, finance, aviation, environment, petroleum resources, culture, etc., which are managing on a larger scale what could be termed domestic affairs among the small-scale societies in Africa.

operate, according to his evolutionary analysis of society, in line with pattern variable 'A,' which is associated with descriptors such as ascription, diffuseness, particularism, affectivity, and collective orientation. In contrast, industrialized societies (developed nations) operate within the framework of pattern variable 'B,' which suggests achievement, specificity, universalism, effective neutrality, and self-orientation. In essence, Parsons highlighted in a short way the objective nature of developed nations in terms of the social relationships between individuals and social systems that place more emphasis on social institutions. In the opposite case, developing nations are found to be premised on a platform of subjectivity, wherein rationality and objectivity in the approach to social institutions are lacking.

The availability and the use of social capital in developing nations such as Nigeria is invariably affected by the pattern variables as classified by Parsons, especially with regard to the principles of bureaucracy on which public institutions were established. For instance, instead of the selection of people based on competence (achievement) to fill positions in public institutions in Nigeria, such positions in most cases end up going to people associated with powerful families, who have no special form of competence.[3] Relationships in public institutions in Nigeria have become an avenue for all manner of activities, including unofficial and anti-institutional activities (diffuseness) among the operators of public institutions in most cases, instead of respect for the rules of office engagement (specificity) (Okafor 2017).[4] Individuals in public institutions in Nigeria are more interested in their irrational interests in public institutions (particularism), even at the expense of the sanctity and efficiency of the institutions, than the general objective and rules of public institutions (universalism).[5] In Nigeria, members and users of public institutions can easily

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3 For instance, employment in different ministries in Nigeria may be classified as 'quota sharing' among the political class and top bureaucrats, who subsequently collect money or praise from the candidates they propose, who are usually incompetent fellows from family, ethnic, or religious networks.

4 For instance, Nigerian universities battle with quota sharing between 'campus politics' and academic competence in terms of the production of those with PhDs. For some universities, the proportion can be as unbalanced as 70% 'campus politics' PhDs, and 30% academics. In others, the proportion may be campus politics 30%, financial capability to influence would-be panel members 40%, and academic competence 30%. While campus politics is about 'who you know,' and how powerful and popular your supervisor is, financial capability refers to one's ability to pay some amount of money to grease the palms of those involved in PhD presentations and defenses.

5 Among the public servants in Nigeria, petty business indirectly linked to official capacities, or rather time of service, has become the order of the day. The majority of public servants regularly to attend their offices because of the extra wealth they can acquire through the proxy use of their official resources, which in most cases amounts to exploitation of the unsuspecting poor masses.

pursue their interest in these institutions with no reference to due procedure (affectivity), provided they have access to the people in charge of these institutions, instead of following the due process of the institution in question (effective neutrality).[6]

Finally, in Parsons' framework, the extent of enlightenment among the citizens of developing nations, especially among the operators and users of public institutions, does not inform their sense of judgment (self-orientation) when they pursue their interests in public institutions, but rather their perception of public institutions either as religious or ethnic groups (collective orientation), contrasted with other ethnic groups using the same public institutions within the nation.[7]

Social capital as a phenomenon of the social system becomes a dangerous instrument for undermining public institutions set up on bureaucratic principles in developing nations, thereby scuttling development, in particular. In developed nations, social capital is subject to the principles guiding public institutions such that obtaining help and assistance are within the ambit of the rule of engagement of the particular institution, irrespective of the relationship between the one seeking help and the person offering help through the public institution. This perhaps underscores what Weber clearly referred to as bureaucratic impersonality – when institutions and their occupants are dissociated from personal, emotional, or primordial sentiments when making judgments that affect the system. However, in Nigeria the case is different; public institutions are subject to the negative impact of social capital such that principles guiding public institutions can be altered or even ignored by individuals to satisfy their desires, insofar as they have access to power and the people in charge of these public institutions.

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6 Among Nigerian public institutions, personal interests such as promotion and the utilization of institutional resources are pursued by individuals based on their personal networks rather than due procedures within and outside the institutions in question.

7 As obtainable in Nigerian public institutions, promotions and appointments for high-ranking positions are attached to family, ethnic, and religious networks among the employees of these institutions and the ruling political class, such that changes of ethnic-cum-religious personalities in political power affect the promotions and appointments to such positions.

THE DOWNSIDE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG DEVELOPING NATIONS: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

According to Portes (1998), from a sociological perspective, one may appear biased and unscientific if one perceives that good things always emerge from sociability; bad things are more commonly associated with the behavior of *homo economicus*. Social capital arising from family networks, kinship, communal sources, and from ethnic to organizational levels is associated with varying levels of challenge and opportunity for individuals in society. Specifically, due to the hedonistic nature of individuals, it is nearly impossible for them to operate within any web of relationships and opportunities that lacks control without abusing them – hence, the abuse of social capital. Social capital as a web of free access to opportunities in society, without specific rules of engagement and patterns of desiring and demanding help and assistance in the social system, is a hydra-headed phenomenon that undermines the principles of socioeconomic development, leading to weak public institutions that are susceptible to political, group, and individual manipulation.

Although Portes (1998) summarized the negative impact of social capital in four specific areas– namely, the exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and the downward leveling of norms – there are endless ways in which the latter phenomenon appears in different contexts and times. For instance, in developed nations it may occur in a more sophisticated way due to the efficiency of public institutions and the level of enlightenment that makes it difficult for individuals to be used to satisfy others' interests. In a case involving the usefulness of social capital for facilitating harm to members of society, Putnam (2000) explained how social capital became instrumental in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Putnam claims that for the ring-wing American terrorists (McVeigh) to succeed in this mission, his social network with co-conspirators was handy, even in relation to convincing some insiders to provide reliable information. Ultimately, through social networks the mission was successful, leaving 168 people dead and 800 injured.

According to Waldinger (1996), among the Italian, Irish and Polish immigrants in New York, social capital became an instrument for enhancing social interaction and exchange, while at the same time it acted as a form of inhibition to 'outsiders' in the construction trade and fire and police unions of New York, owing to the fact that the system was controlled by white ethicists. Writing earlier in the sixteenth century, Adam Smith (1776[1979]) cited in Portes (1998) indicated that the organizational structure and networks of the time granted capitalists (merchants) the social capital to undermine the common good of the

general public in their own interest. By implication, as early as in the sixteenth century the negative impact of social capital had already surfaced in the way the merchants used their organizational structures and networks in society to the disadvantage of excluded groups, which in this case were average members of society. Observing the community members of the Bali kinsmen and their use of social capital for accessing whatever opportunities were available in the social system, Geertz (1963) noted that the use of social capital among the group affected successful entrepreneurs who were over-burdened by job seekers and highly connected individuals in the system.

Individual freedom and autonomy have been observed to be endangered by social capital, especially among homogeneous groups, such that some individuals in positions of authority (especially in developing nations) are pressured to engage in anti-institutional activities to benefit the family members and social groups to which they belong (Bourgois 1995; Portes 1998).

Nigeria, one of the developing nations in the West African region, has been a victim of the downside of social capital since her independence, and the nation has continued on the same trajectory until now. The stealth appearance of the phenomenon of social capital stalled a number of attempts by power-brokers to rescue Nigeria from a downward spiral – as indicated by quality of life and qualitative developmental indices. For instance, in the early years of Nigeria's independence, courageous patriots in the Nigerian army conducted a coup specifically to flush out the corrupt elements in the corridors of power. However, due to the domineering influence of social capital (in this case, negative ethnicity) in the system, the main objective of the coup failed, while the nation bounced back into a more deadly ethnically based war, which, until the present, has left Nigeria more polarized in all areas compared to the pre-independence era (Akresh et al. 2017; Alade 1975). While the northern elites in the army worked in tandem with their colleagues from the south to arrest and eliminate the political demagogues in power during the 1966 coup, their colleagues in the south compromised the mission due to the social network that existed between the military and the former, permitting these political elements to get off the hook. As a result, a majority of the casualties of the coup were from northern Nigeria (see Table 1), leaving the corrupt political leaders from the south to escape the efforts at political sanitization that the army had earlier embarked on (Ademoyega 1991). In the counter coup, which was aimed at punishing the southerners 'who had betrayed the northerners,' the tide even turned against the country as an entity, such that the 'Fulani oligarchy' in the pre-colonial societies of northern Nigeria took over the government and made it the permanent property of an ethnic-cum-religious heritage (Anthony 2014).

Table 1. *Civilian leaders who died during the first coup in Nigeria in 1966*

Name	State of origin	Region	Status	Reason for murder
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Political leader (Prime Minister)
Ahmadu Ibrahim Bello	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Political leader (Premier of Northern Region)
Samuel Ladoke Akintola	Kwara	Western Nigeria	Civilian	Political leader (Premier of Western Region)
Festus Okotie-Ebor	Delta	Western Nigeria	Civilian	Political leader (Finance Minister)
Ahmed Ben Musa	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Political leader (Senior Assistant Secretary for Security)
Hafsatu Bello	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Wife of the Premier, Northern Nigeria
Mrs. Ademulegun	*******	Western Nigeria	Civilian	Wife of Brigadier Ademulegun
Ahmed Ben Musa	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Senior Assistant Secretary to the Premier, Northern Nigeria
Ahmed Pategi	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Civilian	Government driver

Source: Compilations by the authors from government publications, newspaper publications and other academic publications.

Although the colonialists laid the foundation for the permanent recycling of power within the dominant group (the northern Hausa-Fulani system), the 1966 coup perhaps established the foundation for the permanent recycling of power within military, religious, and ethnic enclaves (Badmus 2009), facilitated by the invisible phenomenon of social capital. From the 1966 coup to the election of 2015 that ushered in the present government, the military has dominated leadership positions. Out of the 14 successive regimes from 1966–2015, 10 (71.4%) have been led by the military. Although Obasanjo's return in 1999 and that of Buhari in 2015 are considered to be camouflaged civilian regimes, the way they managed the administration still points to the impact of military domination in politics via a network of social capital. This military domination tends to be a covert manifestation of the phenomenon of social capital in the national army that offered the best connected individuals the opportunity for counter coups to take over the government, yet still maintained the structure within the rank and file in the army.

In the separate cases of Obasanjo and Buhari, the latter were able to return in civilian attire due to pre-established networks (social capital) within and outside the military. For instance, in the case of Obasanjo the opportunity availed itself in a wave of fear of military intervention among the neutral members of society

before 1999, and Obasanjo took the opportunity to crush the military structure, and turned the latter into a willing tool he could use to rule the nation through a mixture of military and quasi-civilian strategies (Mbakwe 2018). For Buhari, the network of the northern Nigerian generals granted him the power to push the pure civilian regime out of the frame, and the threat of war and bloodshed made his major opponent (Jonathan) clandestinely surrender. Among the 14 regimes installed since the 1966 coup, nine (64.3%) leaders have come from the northern region – this group has dominated power in the wake of the counter coup triggered by the abuse of social capital among southern army officers who compromised the objective of the 1966 coup.

Table 2. Nigerian presidents/leaders from 1966 until the present

Names	State of origin	Region	Religion	Background	Year
General Yakubu Gowon	Plateau	Northern Nigeria	Christianity	Military	1966–1975
Murtala Mohammed	Kano	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military	1975–1976
Olushegun Obasanjo	Ogun	Western Nigeria	Christian	Military	1976–1979
Shehu Shagari	Sokoto	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Civilian	1979–1983
Muhammadu Buhari	Katsina	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military	1983–1985
Ibrahim Babangida	Niger	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military	1985–1993
Sani Abacha	Borno	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military	1993–1998
Abdulsalami Abubakar	Niger	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military	1998–1999
Olusegun Obasanjo	Ogun	Western Nigeria	Christian	Military/ civilian	1999–2007
Umaru Musa Yar'Adua	Katsina	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Civilian	2007–2010
Goodluck Jonathan	Bayelsa	Southern Nigeria	Christian	Civilian	2010–2015
Muhammadu Buhari	Katsina	Northern Nigeria	Muslim	Military/ civilian	2015–

Source: Compilations by the authors from government publications, newspaper publications and other academic publications

Due to the social network (social capital) among the northern political and military elites, there has been a continuous recycling of power within the region and perhaps within a single ethnic group, making it difficult for any credible leader to emerge from any part of the nation. Again, among the 14 regimes since the 1966 coup, eight (57.1%) of the leaders have emerged from the Islamic enclave (see Table 2), and this has affected the type of policies they implemented

throughout their administrations such that the nation outside the original framework of unity and oneness (as visible in the national anthem and the coat of arms) became more conscious of the religious attachment and identities of the said ethnic group.

The undertone of each regime, powered by social capital, has reflected the type of policies operated by the regime. The current regime, which was the outcome of the influence of social capital via religious, ethnic, and military factors, is a pro-Islamic, northern-oligarchy-based and military-style regime. Since the beginning of the regime in 2015, religious killing, ethnic cleansing, and extra-judicial action have marked the activities of the regime. According to documentation, so far more than 12,000 Christians have been murdered by pro-Islamic groups across the nation, but primarily in northern Nigeria, where Islam dominates. On average, five Christians are killed each day somewhere in the northern axis of Nigeria (Abbah 2020). Equally, killings involving Muslims have a sectarian undertone as the current government is championed by the Sunni Islam faction in Saudi Arabia. This can be seen as the secret behind the oppression of the Shiite Muslims in northern Nigeria and elsewhere (Amnesty International 2018). With the ethnic-based social capital undertone of the present government, Fulani herdsmen and their Boko Haram collaborators masquerading as bandits have become one of the deadliest terror groups in the world in Nigeria since 2015. This reflects on the manner and style with which they devastate communities and massacre human beings and even occupy their lands without any attempt by the federal government and even state governments to intervene, especially when the government is dominated by Fulani/Islamic groups. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2019 (IEP 2019), more than 20,000 Nigerians have lost their lives under the present regime, with many deaths resulting from the herdsmen's invasion of communities and other ethnic groups.

In relation to the impact of military might with a social capital underpinning on the emergence of the present regime, extrajudicial killings and the compromising of national security due to complicated and fluid networks of ethnic, religious, and military social capital has led to more devastating experiences due to the military in Nigeria. While the regime has favored the Fulani ethnic group and the Sunni Islamic community via social capital based on religion and ethnicity, the Nigerian military could not be reformed as a security apparatus capable of rescuing the masses due to the exploitation of social capital in the army by the present regime.

The complication of the presence of social capital within the political circle has filtered down to public institutions such that the appointment of directors of public institutions in Nigeria, and even employment in these institutions, has

been grounded on social capital via ethnic, religious, and class membership. More than 80 agencies and parastatals were denied of substantive directors from 2016 to 2020 as a result of the lack of individuals acceptable to the social capital network of the then-usurper who was covertly controlling the government of Nigeria as the president's chief of staff.

Table 3. *Random selection of appointments by Mr. President in various ministries since 2015*

Ministries	Ministers[1]	Permanent[2] Secretaries	Region	State of origin	Religion
Agriculture/ State	Mustapha Baba Shehuri	Dr Mua'zu Abdulkadir	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Borno[1] Kaduna[2]	Islam Islam
	Alhaji Sabo Nanono		Northern Nigeria	Kano	Islam
Aviation	Senator Hadi Sirika	Engr Hassan Musa	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Katsina[1] Borno[2]	Islam Islam
Defence	Bashir Salihi Magashi	Sabi'u Zakari	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Kano[1] Jigawa[2]	Islam Islam
Education/ State	Adamu Adamu	Sonny S.T. Echono	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Bauchi[1] Benue[2]	Islam Christian
	Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba		Southern Nigeria	Imo	Christian
Environment/ State	Mohammad Mahmoud	Bakari Wadinga	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Kaduna[1]	Islam
	Chief Sharon O Ikeazor		Southern Nigeria	Anambra	Christian
Federal Capital Territory	Muhammad Musa Bello	Umar Gambo Jibrin	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Adamwa[1] Niger[2]	Islam Islam
Finance	Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed	Dr Mahmoud Isa-Dutse	Northern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Kaduna[1]	Islam
Health/State	Osagie E. Ehanire	Alhaji Abdulaziz Mashi Abdullahi	Southern Nigeria[1] Northern Nigeria[2]	Edo[1] Katsina[2]	Christian Islam
	Adeleke Olorun-nimbe Mamora		Southern Nigeria	Ogun	Christian
Information and Culture	Lai Mohammed	Grace Isu Gekpe	Southern Nigeria[1] Southern Nigeria[2]	Kwara[1] Cross River[2]	Islam Christian

Source: Compilations by the authors from government publications, newspaper publications and other academic publications.

The Nigerian federal character commission, which was designed to accommodate all and sundry through the recognition of individually functioning capacities, gradually disengaged from public employment and appointment procedures after the 2015 election, being influenced by negative social capital. In terms of employment and appointments, the government of Nigeria from 2015 considered more important ethnic-cum-religious ties; it thus diminished the professionalism and national unity of national public institutions. This can be seen in the lopsided appointments of ministers and permanent secretaries of ministries (https://www.premiumtimesng.com 2020). As a form of systematic corruption, the process of appointing directors, permanent secretaries, and ministers, which is guided by the civil service commission and the federal character commission, has been subverted via delays in appointments and reckless transfers in the interest of specified candidates in the system. This strategy has been applied by the present regime and other regimes to subvert due process in the system in the interest of social capital networks (Adebanjo 2020; Aworinde 2020; *Daily Bells* 2020). After the 1966 counter coup that ushered in the northern Nigeria pre-colonial Fulani oligarchy, the process of appointments and promotions was reduced to the use of ethnic-cum-religious indicators among the domineering group (Fulani and Islamic enclave), paving the way for subsequent coups and leadership domination (*Premium Times* 2019); see also Table 3., above). Professionalism vanished from Nigerian institutions such as the Nigerian army, while respect and objectivity were obliterated from the covert relationship among the members and operators of public institutions (Ayitogo 2021). Of course, this was earlier reflected in the approach of the Nigerian military to the 1967 civil war, which was more of ethnic pogrom than a battle for the nation's unity (Achebe 2012; Alade 1975).

One of the challenges of the social capital phenomenon in the Nigerian military resurfaced as the Boko Haram terrorist group, which started in 2002 but took on devastating dimensions in 2009. While Boko Haram was purely founded on religious grounds and had nothing to do with meeting the common goals of citizens, the group still benefited from powerful networks of sympathetic Muslims in the army and the political class who scuttled every effort to end the activities of the group (*All Africa* 2014; Soni 2014; *Sun News Online* 2019; *Blueprint* 2019). According to Walker (2012), Boko Haram was able to survive the onslaught of the Nigerian army due to informants within the circle of the Nigerian army who enabled them to evade the action the federal government took to flush them out of the system. With the recent Chadian army operation against Boko Haram, some atoms of truth emerged that the high-ranking officers in the Nigerian army were not ignorant of a secret agenda of sustaining Boko Haram in Nigeria (Olafusi 2020). In the policy framework of

the present regime, the visible gestures simply indicate that the fluid network of religion and ethnicity mixed with social capital can energize the religiously motivated activities of Boko Haram. For instance, since 2015 the appointment and retirement of military chiefs was suspended, even after countless pieces of evidence of the failure of military chiefs who were overdue for retirement (Owolabi 2019). Even with the recent retirement and appointment of new military chiefs, processes and personalities still indicated the existence of the phenomenon of negative social capital. For instance, the chief of army staff who took over from Buratai was documented as being the individual who was withdrawn as a theater commander of a joint task force against Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria in 2017 due to his poor performance (BBC 2021). Equally, the same chief of army staff who has been listed by the international community as a human-rights-abuser awaiting prosecution was simply rewarded by the present government, via social capital, with an ambassadorial appointment (Erezi 2021). The problem of negative social capital may also be visible in the activities of the violent migratory group known as the Fulani Herdsmen, in relation to which the police and military kept sabotaging the security of the Benue state and other affected states to protect the interest of the Miyetti Allah sect that was founded on the network of Fulani oligarchy (https://www.vanguardngr.com2020). While the Fulani-sponsored Boko Haram elements in the disguise of herdsmen are busy killing the indigenous people of these states, the managers of the national security system are scuttling local security outfits in the affected states to aid the success of the Fulani takeover of the ancestral land of inhabitants (Danbaba 2018).

The process of employment in public institutions in Nigeria moved from competence to compromise after the British colonialists left the country, based on a logic of who knows who. Britain – for utilitarian purposes – trained ad hoc staff from the available human resources to carry out specific tasks that would support their administration; this made every individual who worked with the colonial agents more efficient in what they did compared to the average graduate of Nigerian universities in the late twentieth century. After independence, when the social capital phenomenon became grounded on ethnicity and religion, employment in public institutions became dictated by one's connection to social networks that were defined on the basis of ethnic and or religious affiliations, such that people were offered prestigious positions to which they had nothing to contribute – or rather, they contributed to the collapse of the system. This process has been sustained by the covert policy of non-open employment by federal institutions located in different regions of the country. In each of these institutions, employment is based on ethnic, religious, and political social capital among close allies.

Due to the phenomenon of social capital in employment and appointment in public institutions, incompetent and technically unsound employees found their way into the work force, especially in specific prestigious positions, and even started the culture of reproducing their like in the system such that, at some point – and even until now – expertise and excellence have become bitter words to the people who control public institutions, especially if the expert(ise) is not derived from the ethnic or religious group associated with whoever is in charge of the institution. Such a situation was recently reflected in the emerging corruption saga in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) that reveals how public institutions have become the private properties of employees (Abdullateef 2020).Since payment and promotion are not based on performance in the public sector, but rather on evidence of employment and who one knows in the system, everyone in the nation has become interested in joining in the system with the aid of their religious and ethnic social capital such that a significant proportion of Nigerian civil (self!) servants do nothing in relation to their duty/posts – except for during the week when salaries are paid, when they come in to fill out a payment slip (Ifeanyi–Adepegba 2018). While certificates can be easily bought from willing institutions due to corrupted internal protocols, promotion is assured through internally and externally built networks in public institutions in Nigeria (UNODC 2019).

The phenomenon of social capital has rendered Nigerian public institutions vulnerable to all manner of manipulation by individuals and groups such that there is currently popular discussion about this in relation to each public institution in Nigeria. For instance, the police force as an institution is notorious for its collaboration with dangerous elements in the country that perpetuate crime. Criminals in Nigeria have perfected strategies of operating within their network relationships with the employees of the Nigerian police force in any setting, such that criminals avoid provoking the wrath of the police, but can comfortably operate in a domain for years without detection – hence the popular expression: *'the police know who is who among the criminals in every setting.'* This situation, for example, was observable in a case of when the police and military personnel were found to be in the payroll of a dreaded kidnapper in Taraba State. While the kidnapper offered personnel a regular payment for each of the kidnapping missions he successfully carried out, officers cleared the road for him in each of the operations and shielded him from any further investigation (Ogundipe 2019). How police respond to crime incidents equally betrays their compromise in managing their duties, as this affects the poor and the rich and equally the officers of the institution. When a police officer or a prominent personality is killed or kidnapped by criminals, the police employ every available resource to get to the root of the matter, and will always get

to whoever was involved (Urowayino 2019); when ordinary citizens are killed, however, no matter the number thereof, police may continue with a fictitious investigation for years without any positive outcome. The Nigerian judiciary in theory is the conscience and has the trust of Nigerians, but has sunk into the abyss of shame such that the supreme court of Nigeria can boldly subvert the truth depending on who appointed the chief justice of the federation. Evidence of this is found in the management of the 2019 state and presidential election cases during which the election tribunals, courts of appeal, and the supreme court of Nigeria made a mockery of the social and conscience-related value of the institution.

Smugglers know who is who among immigration officers via their network of connections with these officers, thus they know when to bring in prohibited materials without detection. This was how the foreign fighters were brought in to work with Boko Haram, and how heavy military hardware for Boko Haram entered the country across the border of Nigeria with Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The group could easily and regularly import heavy weapons and foreign fighters from all over the world that they used to challenge the Nigerian security system. The group simply evaded every checkpoint in collaboration with their staunch allies in the immigration system, who maintained a social network with them via religion and ethnic cleavages, although later Boko Haram overpowered the immigration services and established itself at the border, dislodging the men and women of Nigeria immigration (Onuoha 2013; Akinkuotu et al. 2019). The effect of adverse social capital has transformed Nigerian public institutions, causing the quality of the services rendered by these institutions to deteriorate after the country's independence in 1960 such that Nigerian public institutions now exist to collate and collect salaries but lack objective reality in terms of providing institutional-specific services to citizens. For instance, local government institutions that aim to facilitate grass-roots development anywhere in the world are now death traps for development in Nigeria. While local government revenue allocation has become *bush allowances* for governors, public servants at this level only see their posts as an opportunity to exploit the poor masses whenever they manage to be in office (Ojoje 2019).

The negative phenomenon of social capital associated with ethnicity and religion has dealt a serious blow to sustainable development in Nigeria. Although we can count on the existence of infrastructural provisions similar to those of Europe and America, qualitatively speaking, Nigeria is retrogressing in terms of human development due to the social disincentives created by the deployment of negative social capital as the basis for networking in various institutions (UNODC 2019; UNDP 2019). Having degraded public institutions in Nigeria by positioning mediocre and lazy employees as the heads of these institutions,

the former in Nigeria have become redundant and nonfunctional to the extent that the common man in Nigeria has lost confidence in them (Ezeamalu 2015).

Almost all the resources that are pumped into Nigeria from international bodies and private organizations simply sink into the already muddy public institutions in Nigeria due to the phenomenon of ethnic- and religion-driven social capital. While social capital enabled by ethnicity and religion has provided a mediocre platform for unqualified people to dominate prestigious institutions, these elements still summon the courage to squander the resources that enter the coffers of these institutions and escape the long arm of the law via the same social networks of those with audit and investigative capacity to monitor their activities while in power. For instance, the ecological bailout fund shared among states in Nigeria became a form of additional income to many governors, who turned the funds into private accounts with the help of public servants of different capacities (*Point Blank News* 2020).

Sustainable development that will genuinely affect the quality of lives of citizens is still in doubt because of the peculiar nature of adverse social capital, which readily chokes every meaningful attempt at increasing the efficiency of the system. The philosophies, principles, and objectivity of public institutions in Nigeria have been sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity and negative social capital such that the heads of these institutions in most cases know nothing about the objectives and obligations of their own institutions – and worse still, they are not ready to take advice from experts who are in most cases not from the same ethnic group or religion as them for fear of domination and personal ego clashes.

Almost all the strategies adopted since 1966 until now in terms of fighting corruption and institutional malfunction have surrendered to ethnic- and religion-driven social capital and individual interests that run counter to the interests of the general public. While the first coup in Nigeria that was aimed at correcting institutional failures after independence succumbed to ethnic social capital, the counter-coups that followed and subsequent strategies for fighting individual and institutional corruption equally surrendered to ethnic, religious, and class-based social capital. Even the governments most vocally against corruption, like the present administration, individually and selectively ended up identifying who should be punished and which cases should be treated objectively because of (political) class, religious, and ethnic social capital. This adverse application of social capital reflects the distinctive character of developing nations like Nigeria, and has gone a long way to undermining the ideals of efficiency that make institutions in developed nations thrive.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of social capital has been a topic of interest among sociologists, political scientists, and a host of other social scientists, with more interest in the direction (usually in the positive direction) of its economic importance, with little focus on the negative implications of the phenomenon for sustainable development in developing nations and the social systems they adopt. This situation can of course be credited to the context of the most vocal scholars. For instance, most scholars who have distinctly treated the phenomenon of social capital as a separate entity from other interwoven concepts are from Europe and America, making it more or less a *welfare state enterprise* for nations with advanced social systems. However, in the case of developing nations, especially in Africa, the concept is related to a myriad of problems that require critical examination and a theoretical x-ray that must lead to a paradigm shift in how public institutions are managed. According to Sik's (2010) thesis on social capital, the existence of two camps –network-sensitive and network-insensitive nations –has implications for the application of social capital within social systems. While Nigeria falls into the camp of network-sensitive societies, with all the implications of this for socioeconomic relationships among citizens, the latter phenomenon has intensified in the aftermath of the colonial structures that revolutionized the traditional concept of social institutions. The present work has focused on the less talked about impact of negative social capital for sustainable development among developing nations, especially in the case of Nigeria, where ethnic and religious affiliations have been proven to endanger the efficiency of public institutions. From a functionalist perspective, the paper has unveiled the implications of the phenomenon of social capital for the half-baked bureaucratic institutions in Nigeria, the entire system of which is vulnerable to the hedonistic attitude of individuals towards public resources. As a result, the paper concludes that the corruption and the failure of public institutions in Nigeria is an unfortunate outcome of the phenomenon of negative social capital founded on sectional and parochial indicators such as religious, ethnic, and class affiliation. Public institutions in Nigeria were built on quasi-bureaucratic principles following the legacy of the colonial administration. Having uncoupled these systems of sharing resources and responsibilities from indigenous small-scale interactions, the sanctity and principle of social relationships and sharing of public resources gradually faded, making way for individualistic action and group domination of public institutions. Being trapped by such individualistic and sub-group domination, the public institutions in Nigeria became dysfunctional, making them counterproductive with regard to their original purpose. The outcomes of this are public institutions that promote underdevelopment rather than increase the qualitative conditions and welfare of people in the country.

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