



**CAN TRADITIONAL (INDIGENIOUS) RELIGIOUS SYSTEM CHECK-MATE CORRUPTION IN
NIGERIA SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE**

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Abstract

African traditional societies were not perse sacrosanct. There were elements of corruption here and there. However, the citizen abhorred, condemned and frowned seriously at any corruptible behaviour. Corruption which has to do with deprivation and neglect of justice, love, charity and fairness was not loudly pronounced in our traditional societies because of the inseparable attachment the people had with religion which permeated all spheres of their lives and made them disassociate themselves from anything evil or corrupt. The adherents of traditional religion had very close affinity to God, whom they also approached through pantheons of spiritual forces. They also had a very clear idea of the living dead-the ancestors whom they venerated from time to time and behaved in a manner that appeared to suggest that their conducts morally and otherwise were constantly being evaluated or assessed by the gods and ancestors. Going by this background, this paper will be making a clarion call for all to be more religious conscious and adopt a life of moral rectitude as those in our traditional societies in order to get our present society corrupt free.

Keywords: Traditional, modern, Societies, Corruption and Religious system



Introduction

The Nigerian society is in a very serious state of moral, social, political, economic, legal and educational decay. Corruption has been defined as behaviour, which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding influence. This includes such behaviours as bribery (use of reward to prevent judgment of a person in a position of trust), nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit), and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses) (Nye in Igbo and Anugwom, 2002:110). Again, Ikejiani-Clark (1995: 125- 142) in a journal article on “Corruption in Nigeria” accentuated Nye’s viewpoint when she wrote that corruption is said to have taken place when the participant follows what would be termed unacceptable ways. This includes bribery, lobbying for posts, rigging elections for money, etc. Corruption therefore is a deviation from norms, traditions and generally approved ways of relationship and interaction in public and private offices, thereby encouraging cheating, nepotism, favouritism, tribalism, bribery, dishonesty mistrust, disobedience to constitute authority to mention but a few. These acts of corruption and indiscipline are rife and have penetrated the bone marrow of Nigerians. It has come to stand and many people today see it as normal ways of doing things. No wonder the Igbo of Nigeria has a proverb that “Aru gbaru afo oburu omenani” - “If corruption or abomination is allowed to thrive in a society for a year, it will be taken as part of the people’s culture”

It has been argued that the major roots of corruption were sown during the colonial period when a lot of structures were created for the purpose of administration. The pre-colonial society knew little or nothing about corruption but soon after Nigeria’s independence in 1960 and shortly afterwards in 1963 after Nigeria had become a republic, there grew in galloping proportions corruption in every sphere of human life.

Nigeria as a nation in Africa is looked up as not only the giant of Africa in terms of population and economy, it is also looked up for exemplary behaviour but people get disappointed when Nigeria is properly examined. Corruption is here and there in all nooks and crannies of the nation. Outside the nation in other parts of Africa, Nigerians are avoided, in the international community, Nigerians manifest their corrupt behaviour there hence in some shops in Europe, there are banners egregiously posted on the entrance with the inscription, “Nigerians are Not Allowed Here”, what a stigma to the nation? Have we stood to ask ourselves why we are expunged as outcast in the international circle? The reasons are quite obvious as we shall always attempt to cheat, pilfer, traffick for personal aggrandizement etc. It is therefore necessary to see the different faces of corruption in Nigeria and the dangers inherent in the practice with a view to providing lasting solutions to this “cancerous disease”.

Forms of Corruption in Nigeria

It is acknowledged that corruption has reached an unprecedented and alarming proportion in Nigeria. To treat a disease to a point of cure, one must first of all through diagnosis identify the cause of the disease. It is in this regard that the researcher is out to identify the forms of corruption in Nigeria. Corruption, which distorts, corrodes and destroys ... imposes injustice, imposes dissatisfaction (2000: 13), has dealt a staggering blow to the value systems of Nigeria. This was why Odey (2001: 54) wrote that:

... before we get bogged down by our desire to see the Nigeria of our lofty dreams become a reality, we should first of all understand the fact that the military (even civilians-mine) had done such enormous harm to our country, to our economy, to our political culture, to our social fabric, to our value system and to our collective psyche that we should count ourselves lucky if it takes about ten years to repair the damage. The level of corruption institutionalized by the military and [he consequent destruction of our value systems have been total, thorough and disheartening.

Sequel to the above, the researcher agrees with Odey that the forms of corruption which are hydra-headed could be discernible from our religious, economic, social, political, and educational values. There will also be discussions on corruption in the civil service and the Nigeria security agents. To these forms we now turn.

(a) **Religious Dimension:** In the organigram of the early church, Christ gathered for Himself a group of twelve apostles whom he taught the three cardinal things his father sent him to do here on earth. These were

- i) to preach the kingdom of God
- ii) to save us from sin and
- iii) to show us the way to heaven by His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

These he handed down to his close followers (apostles) who consequently handed it over to the elders of the church in Jerusalem. From among the elders, we also knew that the position of the bishop arose purposefully for defence in the times of crisis like persecution and heretical teachings. Given this background, it is clear that Christ founded only one church but today the church has witnessed so many schisms against the advice of its original founder. The



result is that mushroom churches have sprang up with the ubiquity of many cranks, social misfits and drop-outs, touts and undesirable elements, evangelists of diverse motives and self-ordained pastors.

Most of these preachers are out to commercialize the church and encourage all kinds of vices in our society. They have criticized all forms of worship in the main-line churches (Catholics, Anglican Communion, Presbyterians) and consequently abandoned them for their conservatism, thus turning the face of Christianity from its original goal of saving souls for God to that of economic and pecuniary motives. The house of God is now full of cheats and charlatans.

It was in line with the above observation that Obiora (1999: 53) remarked that:

The Nigerian religious scene is beset with daunting doctrinal skirmishes and these have led to further splits and divisions. Pride, pomposity and the quest to be called leader and founder, rather than work for unity, individuals tend to see their subjective views and conclusions in absolute terms. Bitterness, prejudice, mutual mistrust, commoditization of religion - these have combined to cast living shadows on the history of ecumenism.

The Church in Nigeria has failed in achieving an ecumenical and integrative fora where there could be checks and balances in the growth of the Pentecostals. This is a big problem as any house divided against itself cannot stand. Arguably, the spate of these churches had exposed the congregation to a lot of deceit as we know that most of these "kitchen" trained, pastors, "pastors of hallucination and illusion", pastors whose self-adulation exudes the spirit of Lucifer and not that of God, pastors full of knavery, Pharisaic hypocrisy and resolute disregard for truth. They are involved in armed robbery with their pretentious flowing white robes and garments, rape, murder, adultery, incest, obtaining by trick '419' and all sorts of vices. Obiora (1999: 146) further wrote about them as follows:

It is in the process of erecting this utopian 'wonder land' that the leaders of these churches have driven into a knight-errant of incredible quixotry. It is religious bastardary, knavery and perfidy. What the self-appointed preachers have opted for is the irreligious use of untruths, half-truths and utter falsehoods to dance out their self-induced religious stalemate because they are built on the feet of clay. These self-proclaimed divine messengers are involved in an unbridled lotocracy. Consequently, an unimaginable degree of plunder and pillory conditioned by fascism are perpetrated under the canopy of religion. It is appalling.

These are the dangers arising from the area of religion and threatening the unity of churches and the expected peace and order in the entire country.

(b) **Economic Perspective:** Nigeria as a nation is no doubt blessed with a lot of human and natural resources but a few individuals in power have bluntly refused to allow the larger populace, the electorates, the hoi-polloi, the use and benefit of the proceeds of these resources. This was why Odey (2001: 41) wrote thus:

Economically, the situation became so bad even in the midst of plenty that for those who could afford it, there was apparently only one exit from the pervasive destination. A country which has been blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources capable of making it the pride of Africa was no longer able to provide daily bread for its citizens because all that are needed to live and survive were corruptly concentrated in the h/ands of the military vampires that were sucking the blobfyof of the nation.

This viewpoint is true as our leaders are themselves very corrupt and continue to 'brandish' before the poor masses the products of their loots from national economy. This has encouraged the helpless citizen to perpetrate the practice in their own small measure thereby ruining the economy of the nation.

In our markets today, corruption has been sown, watered and it has germinated. Thus, Okwor (2000: 61) observed that

In our markets people now mix bad palm oil with red chemical to make it look red. They mix powdered ground pea 'Okpa' with Alibo and flour with 'alibo'. While measuring food items like beans, rice, garri for instance, the so-called "clever dealers" use the bottom of the cup while the buyer looks on or away without seeing. The buyers get home only to discover that the twenty cups he paid for give him seven full cups only.

He further noted that the dangerous trend in the forgery of some trade names on the labels and corks. They also invent names similar to the original products. For instance, we have Boumvita in place of Boumivita or Bonita in the place of Bournvita. Others are:

Maltius in place of Naltius

Panamasonic in place of Panasonic

Boust in place of Boost

Suda in place of Soda

Swam in place of SWAN (zinc)



Shenaps in place of Schnnaps, etc.

The unsuspecting buyer hardly looks at the difference of one letter in the spelling on the one label or cork (2000: 61 - 62). This is the level to which corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society and one now wonders whether the cleansing should start from top or bottom of the societal structure. Who will bell the cat?

(c) **Forms of Social Vices:** The level of corruption prevalent in most Nigerian families[^] and peer groups or age grade associations is better imagined than described. In our families, the parents who are in pursuit of material things no longer look backwards to the training in mannerisms and etiquettes of children hence, a young boy could greet “Good Afternoon” in the morning and the parents will laugh over it. The teenage girl could dress in trousers, miniskirts “Spaghetti hand” “open back”, “open chest”, “tight”, light trousers exposing all the contours in her body and she will walk round the whole length and breadth of our streets with parents saying nothing. The child now grows with this culture of nudity and cannot change this practice in the higher institution of learning and so carries it to a home as a wife. In the home also young boys start with pilfering and will graduate to dreaded armed robbers yet our parents will not say a word.

These children eventually grow and turn into social problems such as divorcees, drug addicts, cause of martial instability, wife battering, abortion, prostitution, homelessness, child marriage, communal violence, cultism etc. The society is sick no doubt as at every level of our relationship with one another, each person is striving for and finding ways to cheat the other. Women equality is on the lips of Nigerians as nothing has been positively done to bridge the gap. Women are to be seen in public gatherings and not to be heard. There are no laws supporting women’s rights, the Nigerian society is still supporting institutionalizing the supposed inferiority of women (Onuh, 2000: 117). Quite conceivably, the social vices and problems inherent in the Nigerian society have been encouraged, exacerbated by the family, the government and the entire society who cannot vociferously condemn it and stand out to terminate it.

(d) **Political Form of Corruption:** In this classification, one is really pointing at the style of rulership or governance in Nigeria, be it military or civilian. “Power is the fundamental concept in politics.

In fact, it is the desire for power which propels people in[^] politics. In politics, therefore the principal attraction is to have access to⁴ power - that ability to make things happen” (Ngwuoke: 2001: 33). If the primary objective is to gain access to power, the question is how well the power will be utilized because for Aristotle, “Our own observation tells us that every state is an association of persons formed with a view of some good purpose. I say good because in their actions all men in fact aim at what they think is good (1975: 25). The Nigerian political scene has shifted from doing good to the benefit of the state to that of self-centeredness, egoistic tendencies, corruption and knavery. This was what Onyenwuenyi (2001: 97 - 98) summarized in the following words.

We Nigerians have suffered greatly since independence owing to unstable government resulting in military rule for 28 years out of 39 years of independence. During those 28 years, we witnessed heart-breaking drama like “two million men-march ” in Abuja and 5 million men- march in Lagos; the annulment of a democratically conducted June 12th ' election, adoption of General Abacha by the then existing political parties as a sole presidential candidate, indiscriminate arrests of citizens who express their views on the governance of the national military leaders' succeeding each other on a competitive selfish interest, conversion of national crude oil as enterprises at personal levels, sack of Nigeria from Commonwealth; closure of media houses by decrees.

The above are few examples of how a nation has been passing through the tunnels of crisis hence retarding growth in all spheres of human existence.

Lending credence to the above view-point, Achebe (1983:1) gave a graphic picture of the threatening quantum of corruption that had gripped the country and the consequent waste of human and natural resources. He said that, “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely the problems of endemic corruption and failure of leadership, the unwillingness of our leaders to rise to the responsibility and the challenge of leadership and personal example”.

Anugwom and Igbo (2002: 112) citing the Newswatch Magazine (1992) wrote that:

Corruption 'became institutionalized in the country through the establishment of many elephant projects and money galping Jamborees, including the gigantic Iron and Steel. Complex at Ajaokuta which has not achieved anything for over ten years now, the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) celebrated in 1977, gulped billions of naira of the tax-payers money; the construction of fly-overs and double-carriage highways many of which are ill-maintained, the creation of states from three regions- to 12 states, 19 states, 30 states and now 36 states in the country etc. These projects .are known to be ways of siphoning public money and rewarding loyal public officials, politicians and retired and serving military Administrators or Governors who run their states as if they were private estates.



The nation was deeply immersed in corruption arising from poor and weak leadership, which regarded some people as sacred cows. The result was embezzlement and defraud “kick back and lack front”, rigging of election, selection and not election syndrome 10%, to be paid to a government official for any contract awarded, murder cases during election to public posts, sectionalism, favouritism, nepotism, sex scandal, incarceration of innocent but vociferous citizens etc.

These were the off springs of political corruption in Nigeria. The blazing heat of the fire of political corruption sent so many Nigerians packing hence Odey wrote that “Politically, the turmoil, the repression and. the general insecurity that pervaded the country forced thousands of Nigerians to flout all international border laws and get out of Nigeria by hook or by crook. As a result, Nigeria’s external image suddenly slumped to infamy”. (2001: 41 -42).

To this end, there will be no gain-saying the fact that any nation in this state of corruption has a bleak not bright future.

(e) **Educational Perspective:** The Nigerian educational policy makers as well as those at the level of implementation are corrupt as they dwell on half-truths and live on absolute mistrust. The level of corruption in our educational institutions has reached unprecedented height. The teacher, instructor, professor comes late to office as he has to engage in other business in order to keep “afloat” before resuming his official government work. In most institutions, there are more “ghost” workers than the real ones and this is an agreement between the heads of such institutions and the policy makers who come to the “clearing house” every month or quarterly or otherwise to share, their booty.

There are such corrupt practices in our educational institutions as examination leakage for money, illegal levies by teachers, selling of snacks in the school premises, excessive charges for handicraft, sex abuse, bullying, immoral and seductive dressing styles, selling of handouts and textbooks, sale of grades after examination, cultism, threats on lecturers and a whole number of others. These are the kinds of atmosphere in primary, post-primary and higher institutions of learning in Nigeria under which learning should take place. Shame! The products of these institutions are also expected to lead this nation tomorrow.

(f) **Civil Service:** Our civil service is not free from condemnation as the workers most often have their salaries misappropriated, pension allowance and service money such as money for water, electricity, telephone construction and maintenance of roads are never paid.

In another dimension, salaries are deliberately delayed and at times denied, night allowances, hospital bills, mileage claims, approved salary scale, leave allowances are with-held. Sometimes they are fixed in our banks for it to yield interests to individuals. Also commonplace in the civil service is victimization such as punitive transfers “sitting on one’s file, sex scandal, favouritism such as employment to a brother or village member, peer group, classmate, society or church members, in- 1 laws etc.

In the civil service also, we have heard of vandalization of public /property, the digging of a ditch to accommodate a car, removal of the engine and tyres of an official car and replacing them with bad ones, removal of air-conditioner and other valuables from government quarter if disengaged or at the expiration of tenure of office. This is the face of the civil service in Nigeria.

(g) **Security Agents:** The police, the army and the navy appear to be more corrupt in Nigeria. This is because they have the power that lies in the barrel of the gun. The Igbo adage has it that “Onye nna ya zuru ori ji ukwu agbowwa uzo” - “the thief whose father was notorious in robbery breaks the victim’s door with the leg.” This means acknowledgement of the protection which will come from the master contributes to the obstinacy of most security agents in Nigeria. Writing specifically on Police, Nwokora (1990: 96 - 97) boldly asserted that:

To talk about the Police in Nigeria is like wasting precious ink and paper. We know that if there is any sector of our national life that is most prone to this infamy, it is our police force. Ignorance and cowardice on the part of the populace, callousness and intimidation on the part of the men in uniform, have made it an unwritten common law that to get out of trouble, real or - imaginary (most often imaginary) you just tip the police.

Common corrupt practices among the police also include- delaying justice by refusing to arrest a criminal after taking bribe, illegal detention, falsifying statement, neutrality after collecting money from both parties, releasing a criminal without punishment, ‘road block’, do it or pack well, hiring out guns and uniforms to criminals etc.

The Army as earlier noted are also very corrupt as they have vaulting ambition to become head of state and so organize coup d’etat, they go about showing power in filling stations, hospitals, snatching civilian’s wife, show power and rank to junior officers, denial of rights for instance right to use the road from Abakpa junction to Enugu metropolis, and go about acquiring power illegally to the detriment of the “idle civilians.”



The navy on their own part can allow a person who has committed treasonable felony escape through the sea, seize vehicles belonging to individuals or companies for a long time and sometimes impose sanctions on such goods. Interestingly, we have come to anchor that in virtually all fields of human endeavor in Nigeria, corruption has been sown, watered and has grown into a full, mature 'plant' which cannot be tendered and checked at will.

The Way Forward

Nigeria is undergoing an excruciating experience as a result of the spate of corruption and requires a pensive strategy to stamp it out.

It is acknowledged that the Federal Government has assiduously worked to bring it to an end by the use of decrees, edicts, committees and panels, namely:

- a. Christopher Kolade Panel which as entrusted with the 'responsibility of reviewing contracts and licenses.
- b. Oluwole Rotimi Panel that was entrusted with the responsibility of reviewing Federal Government assets.
- c. Chukwudifu Oputa Panel: Charged with the responsibility of looking into the many cases of gross violation of human rights in the country during the 15 years of unbroken military dictatorship.
- d. Alhaji Igada Inuwa Panel on uncompleted projects and services.
- e. Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria NAFCON, and
- f. Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act 2000 (Odey, 2001:53-54)

It is important to remark that all these panels and commission failed woefully in accomplishing their task. Some sat, found out the culprits but because of 'sacred cow' syndrome, those people were not brought to book by the power that be.

In view of the fact that all these attempts have failed, this paper is recommending that religion should take over as God who is creator of all things can easily proffer lasting solutions to this apparent endemic cancer plaguing the country.

Divinities as tools to fight corruption in Nigeria Governance

Each divinity has a local name which describes either "his allotted function or the phenomenon which is believed to be a manifestation or emblem of his being". The divine 'wrath' is represented by some of the divinities. The Yoruba divinity representing the 'wrath' of God is jakuta meaning, one who hurls or fight with stones. The Yoruba thought that the 'wrath' is incompatible with Olodumare the supreme beings nature, so it was transferred to jakuta, who is ever present and ever ready to manifest himself on disobedient children. Jakuta is the solar and thunder divinity, the divine minister of justice. He is now identified with Shango who was attracted by this divinity and so entered the pantheon in that respect. He is called Oranfe in Ile-Ife, in Nupe society, he is known as Sokogba (God's Axe). The axe belongs to God to be thrown at the children of disobedience. The Igbo call him Amadi-oha. He punishes wicked and evil people, thieves, robbers and anybody who engaged in work of iniquity.

Since the world belongs to God the social and Moral orders are according to His ordinances, far above all divisions and races. The divinity of God's 'wrath' is thus the minister of justice in God's government that their service can be employed to dispense justice and cleanse our societies.

Also, in Hausa society, there is ABOi (sacred being) especially among the Katsina people. The Aboi is one of katsina traditional institution that creates room for a corrupt-free society. Aboi is used simply as a god of justice, honesty and fair play. The Aboi used for oath taking to symbolize justice, truthfulness and honesty among others.

In a bid to have a free corrupt society, the erroneous concept of power, greatness and wealth must be addressed. Nigerians are fond of adopting foreign policies in trying to move the country forward, but what we have not embraced is the right attitude to wealth, power among others, which are rudiments of a country with moral standard and ethical code.

The modern Nigeria society should take effective steps to sanction any leader, government or civil servants that are corrupt. Effective sanctions are the antidotes against corruption. In the traditional society, corrupt practices are not tolerated but exposed. Corruption of any kind is a heinous crime with serious consequences on the society. Therefore, combating it is not just the task of government, but also of individuals and organisations.

The Nigerian clergy and laity should be more active in preaching and prayers. According to Ugwu (2000: 86), "Prayers we know can change things. Nigerian Christians have the onerous responsibility of praying for the nation in distress and in a state of corruption as already initiated by Catholic Bishops conference of Nigeria (CBCN). This will definitely change the fraudulent, recalcitrant and dissident person within the shortest possible time."



The regular organization of workshops seminars, symposia and conferences on anti-corruption will also serve a useful purpose against the canker-worm. It is also the position of this paper that we return our schools to the mission or the religious as it will help the early character formation of the Christian or the Moslem.

The use of pamphlets, leaflets and tracts which should be distributed every day from Monday to Friday in offices in this country with the message that anyone engaging in corruption is running down the future of his own children and that when such a person dies, government will take over all known wealth acquired and give to the poor. The message will also include that when such a person dies, he will also go to hell fire. These will surely reduce our avaricious tendencies.

Open-air-preaching against corruption, use of dramas, dancing and clapping. Dancing steps and musical rhythms could be used in condemning corruption in our society.

Besides, the self-control mechanism is another hope for stamping out corruption if every Nigerian should change, repent (metanoi) i.e. change of the inner self for good, will be a good riddance for us all.

In conclusion, it is crystal clear that the Nigerian nation is corrupt in every field of life. Nigerian leaders (military and civilians) are on thread in exacerbating corruption. They have tried with absolute consistency to stamp it out but to no avail. They are confused, helpless and downcast. The only way forward is to resign to the will of God through the accredited representatives like genuine pastors, priests, imams, bishops and Pope. This will take us over to a world of salient values and virtues which Nigeria urgently needs.

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