

THE POWER OF CRIMINAL AND VIOLENT MINDED INTEREST ON NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS: THE QUESTION OF MORALITY IN A POPULOUS RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

Rev. Fr. Vincent Obidinnu

Christian Religious Studies Department
Nwaforizu College of Education Nsugbe Anambra State

Abstract

Criminality and violence appear to be a globalized world issues in the 21st century. In the distinct past, very little or nothing was heard about crimes and violence. In the Nigeria context, occurrence of crimes and violence has risen to an alarming degree. Some people in this contemporary Nigeria society have perceived crime and violence as a culture. The young and old in various functional capacities in Nigeria, have become embodiments of crime and violence. This paper discovers that this unbecoming rate of criminal and violent indulgence in the people's minds is a deadly cancer-worm now devouring on the tissues of Nigerian traditional institutions, irrespective of the existence of religious organizations and bodies scattered in every nook and cranny of the country. There is also the problem of absence of morality in a populous religious society like Nigeria. The kinship, family and marriage institutions, title taking, taboos, etc have been negatively influenced by ill-minded criminals. This research aims at echoing the negative effects of allowing criminal and violent minded interest to pollute Nigerian traditional institutions, and addressing the issue of outburst of immorality in a morally structured civil and religious environment. The paper, recommends that traditional institutions should be protected against criminals and terror, among other things. Materials for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Historical method of research was adopted. Data collected were analyzed with phenomenological and descriptive style of data analysis.

Keywords: Criminality, violence, traditional institutions, and morality

Introduction

Nigeria is an inherently difficult country to govern. The country is an amalgamation of peoples and cultures that were brought into on territory by the British colonial rulers largely for the sake of administrative convenience. Nigeria is a home of more than 250 ethnic groups, many of which either had no meaningful relationships with one another or long histories of mutual antagonisms prior to the advent of colonialism. The country is also divided in roughly equal proportion between its two major religions; Islam and Christianity.

This religious divisions often overlaps with some of Nigeria's most important ethnic cultural boundaries.

Nigerian's traditional institutions, according to Orji and Olali (2010) refers to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provision of their native laws and customs. The traditional institutions are perceived to be the custodians of the people's norms, customs, cultures and practices (Orji & Olali, 2010). But fortunately, crime and violence have taken the front row of the

church pew. Abusive, corrupt, criminal and violent minded Nigerian political and traditional leaders have undercut serious efforts to construct stable institutions to govern the country, solidify the rule of law and promote respect for human rights. Nigeria's post independence history had been overshadowed by the depredations of series of violent and criminal minded and uncountable governments who have vowed never to do the right things at the right time.

The actions of these criminal and violent minded individuals have done more than good to our dear country. They have successfully ruined the norms, customs and culture of our traditional institutions. They dominated all the crannies of our traditional institutions be it religious, political, educational, social etc. they generate like those people who have no conscience at all.

In the political institutions, 95% of our leaders are violent and criminal minded, they obtain their positions by demonstrating an ability to use violence and criminal tendencies to prevail in elections. In the place of democratic competitions, struggles for political office often been waged violently in the streets by gangs of thugs recruited by the politicians to help them seize the control of power. Recently, hundreds of Nigerians have lost their lives in the crossfire for the country's political leaders. Many political figures openly recruit and arm criminal gangs to unleash terror upon their opponents and ordinary members of the public. These gangs unleashed a wave of violence on local communities which

includes murder, rape, arson and other crimes.

The cry for crime and violence in our traditional institutions today are not excluding any individual, everybody has directly or indirectly got himself or herself in this saga. Presently, our religious institutions is not left out of it, because this is obviously where the bell is ringing loudly. Morality should be the key in our religious institutions but today, the opposite is the case. 90% of our men of God are wolves in sheep's clothing, sexually harassing the wives of their followers or the ladies in their church as the case may be, just to enrich themselves. Some men of God have turn to shylocks, where telling lies have become the order of the day in the name of praying for you.

Nigeria is highly infected with diverse negative behaviours, attitudes, characters and actions. The daily reports of vices in attitudes, characters and actions. The daily reports of that morality have a strong bearing in a religious society like Nigeria. The Nigerian case is much more worrisome given the fact that a lot of crime and violence exhibited today is championed by men and women who have moral values embedded in them through the various customs, values and culture of our traditional institutions. Nigeria is branded with a lot of sad stories from the leaders to the followers. The scenario raises a lot of moral questions on the personalities of Nigerian citizenry. This paper is set to examine the influence of morality in reshaping the Nigeria's traditional institutions in the midst of the criminal and violent minded individuals.

Conceptual Analysis

Crime begets criminality, criminality begets violence. These concepts have become global problems but the definitions vary in different societies or countries. Criminality and violence have become menacing in our society that now we all fear that a great danger awaits the country in the nearest future. Crime is an act that violates the law of the society or serious offence against the law of the society, for which there is severe punishment by law (Dambazau, 2007). Crime is any action or omission prohibited by law and punished by the state. Crime is a deviant behavior which violates prevailing norms, which maybe cultural, social, political and economic conditions. Crime is an act or omission which renders the person doing the act or making the omission liable to punishment within a social context, crime can be seen as social product, determined by social conditions, capable of being controlled only in social terms.

Durkheim opined that crime is a normal phenomenon in the society, a natural and inevitable product of collective life and social evolution. He held that collective conscience of a people defines what crime is crime plays a definite role in social life. A crime or criminal offence is an act harmful, not only to an individual but also to a community, society or state 'public wrong' (Daly, 1994). Daly (1994) further highlighted that for something to be classified as crime, the act of doing something criminal "(actus Reus) must with certain exceptions be accompanied by the intention to do something criminal"

(mensrea). For instance, attitude is understood to be an idea, belief, thought and knowledge in an individual which has not been acted out. When that idea, thought and beliefs are acted out, they become behavior.

An individual must have an intent feeling thought and idea of doing something criminal within him/her, before it is portrayed. A criminal intent is always perceived to be a nurtured and well planned act which an individual is looking forward to executing. A criminal and violent minded individual can never do something ordinary, except fulfilling that criminal desires in him, despite the morality which exists around him. Crime by the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1999) is defined as "An act or omission which renders the person doing the act or making the omission liable to punishment under the criminal code. Crime is brought about by the violation of the law as established by the government at all levels.

Crime as a concept can be viewed as an illegal act (an action prohibited by law or failure to act as required by law), illegal activity that involves breaking the law, immoral activity that is considered unacceptable act that is shameful, unwise or regrettable. Crime is an infraction of both the basic principle of law and order and the norms of civilized behavior. Crime is an offence against the value system of a society.

Who is a criminal? : Igbo (2007) states that a criminal should be understood as a person who has violated the criminal law of the land and has been found guilty by a

court of law and punished accordingly. Another perspective states that anyone who violates the criminal law should be deemed a criminal, regardless of whether or not he or she is apprehended, tried and punished by a court of law.

Siegel (2007) describes criminality as the process of acting in a manner that contravenes the law of a given state. Criminality is also used to describe the properties and characteristics of an individual which makes him or her to be suspected of having committed a given felony (Iwarime-Jaja, 1995). Criminality is used often in criminology to refer to actual criminal characteristics of a person with propensity evidence such as past criminal records (Iwarimw-Jaja, 1995). The cost and effects of crime vary among the various segments of the population and touch almost everyone by some degree and in general the economic growth and development of countries increase. The various cost of crime to victims, society and economy includes: loss of income, property and community productivity. It can also involve psychological trauma on victims, their families and friends which normally brings pain, suffering, lower quality of life and eventually death (Douglasson, 2009).

Violent is the physical force, destructive in nature, capable of causing fear in the minds of the people, therefore violent crime are those criminal activities that employ the use of violence to intimidate or cause terror (fear) in the mind of people with intend to coerce individual, group of people or the government in order to affect the conduct of the individual, group of

people or influence the policy of the government. By traditional institutions, we refer to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provision of their native laws and customs (Orji & Olali 2010). The essence of the institutions are to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the communities by the instrumentalization of laws and customs of the people. Traditional institutions are the custodians of their people's norms, customs, cultures and practices. In most African setting, just as in Nigeria, selection of persons into the offices of traditional institutions is hereditary, selection or election by the instrument of relevant methods. The mode of selection of the occupant of traditional institutions vary in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, from ethnic groups to ethnic groups or communities to communities.

Traditional institutions are symbols of indigenous people's rights, privileges, laws, customs and traditions which include but not limited to paramount rulers and their councils (Orji and Olali, 2010). The traditional institutions in the Nigerian context is inclusive of the chiefs-in-council, elders-in-council, title holders who may be appointed based on their contributions to the growth and development of their communities additional in African traditional setting, just as it is obtainable in Nigeria communities, the traditional judicial functions. They make laws, execute and interpret them and also apply the

fundamental laws, customs and traditions of the people for the smooth running of their communities (Orji and Olali, 2010).

Boege (2006) agrees that traditional institutions are like the helmet of every community where their judicial, executive and legislative powers are managed. Morality is a philosophical concept which falls under the wider branch known as Axiology. It does not have a very easy definition because different schools of thought hold different views of morality and moral values. For instance, one of the earliest moral philosopher Aristotle (a realist) viewed morality as a disposition whereby a man is pronounced good by the fact that he is good in himself and functions in a good way. Morality here is identified with goodness, which is not only pronounced but also observed. Morality is a concept that deals with the principles concerning what is right or wrong and what is good and bad. The problem is who actually determines the right and the wrong or the good and the bad, and how it is determined.

The issue here is that what seems to be right in society 'A' might be frowned at in society 'B' and vice versa.

Schofoed (1979) states that the term moral implies "behaviours". Moral or immoral suggests behavior which is accepted and unaccepted. According to him, since norms or standards are established by the society, such society is making value judgement, because it is saying that some forms of behaviours are more socially acceptable than others. This implies that the ability to understand and to identify with the available value judgement of a

society is morality. The views of Nduka (1983) and Amaele (2010) are not too far from the above. Nduka (1983) and Amaele (2010) uphold morality as a behavior in accordance with certain standards of what is right and good to be members of the society. This morality is the life wire of any successful society.

Omogegbe (1993) perceived morally as a means to an end. According to him, actions that are intended to bring good results for those concerned are moral actions and should be encouraged while those intended to bring about bad results are immoral actions and should be discouraged. In this argument, to perform an action is to use the action as a means to an end as an instrument used for the attainment of certain objectives. Hence, if the end aimed at evil, the action as whole is evil, notwithstanding if the means employed is good, since it is believed that a good means employed is good, since it is believed that a good means cannot justify an evil end. The definitions above suggests that morality could be defined as the concerns for actions that morality could be defined as the concerns for actions that could be defended as good or rejected as evil by rational man. Morality can also be seen as a form of social consciousness in which one relates to another in the society.

Morality in a multi-cultural and multi-Religious Society

At Nigeria as a nation of nations is presently at the peak of moral crisis. If the moral ailment of the nation is diagnosed medically, it has reached its chronic stage, only to be saved by a stronger interventionist force. Nigeria is a both a

multi-cultural and multi-religious society, with a population of over 200million people, cutting across diverse religious and cultural groups. At present, it is difficult to determine what is right from wrong or good from bad in Nigeria. Morality and Religion have become privatized in which everybody, be he or she, a leader or a follower thinks what he or she is doing it the best. Morality and Religion is so personalized that even the parents practice theirs different from their children. Family standards has become history, likewise the norms, customs and culture embedded is applicable to various communities (Amaele, 2010). There is no longer fear for elders, 'who has more money, let him be given the chieftaincy title', is the order of the day. Title holders are no longer on merits nor on the sons and daughters of the communities who has contributed wisely to the development of the community. It is no longer on 'who the cap fits let him wear it' it emphasizes more on the best killer who has violently pulled down his opponents and masterminded his death, the individual who has given the highest bribe to the 'Eze' or 'Obi' of the community. Then his reward would be to give him the chieftaincy title as an honour.

The various institutions in the country, ranging from the government to the private individuals all have their respective ugly tales. Crime and violence have been given feathers to fly over and above genuine practices of our traditional institutions. The political institution seems to have become an eyesore. People use diverse wicked instrument to snatch power from people, with eye on the nation's wealth not the fate of the common people. Those

individuals who are cultists, kidnappers, robbers, fraudsters, rapists, murderers and other 'criminals' are let loose and respected (Amaele, 2010). Sometimes, they are recommended and given leadership positions at the local, state and national levels. Sometimes they sit in front of the church pews to be recognized by the men of the God because of their donations of large sums of money, despite their involvement in crime and violence.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Morality is an essential ingredient and a vital aspect of our traditional institution, because the society expects high moral integrity from our leaders in the society. Nigeria is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society which by nature is inbuilt with diverse moral principles. Unfortunately, a lot of immoral practices and other abnormal behaviours executed under religious disguise do not sincerely reflect the truth of such religious manifestations. Moral decadence in Nigeria is as a result of negligence of Nigerian norms and values. Sometimes sentiments and biases manifest from the underdeveloped religious and ill minded individuals to create crisis and violence beyond the shores of the immediate cultural environment, as it extends to the diverse part of the country. The complex nature of the nation, culturally and religiously suggests that a multi-cultural and multi-religious approach should apply a highly equipped, funded, supervised, qualitative and comprehensive traditional institutions is advocated for the nation in this research work.

The following Recommendations were made as follows:

1. There should be effective and functional interactions between the members of the society with their leaders in various traditional institutions.
2. There should be a more co-ordinated outfit to the supervision of traditional institutions at all levels.
3. Moral Education should equally be made compulsory at all levels in our traditional institutions.
4. The social deviants who have corruptibly enriched themselves should not be given primary place of recognition and respect in the society.

perspective in moral education.
 Ibadan: evans brothers.

Schofield, H. (1970). *The philosophy of education: A introduction*. London: George Allen and Union.

Omogbe, J. (1993). *A simplified history of western philosophy versus (modern philosophy)* Ikeja: Joja Education Research Publisher.

Orji, K.E & Olali, S.T (2010). Traditional institutions and their dividing roles in contemporary Nigeria. *Chieftaincy institution in Nigeria*. Lagos: Concept Publication Ltd.

Siegel, L.J (2004). *Criminology: theories, patterns and types*. Wadsworth typologies. (9thed). Canada: Thomson.

Iwarine-jaja, D (1995). *Criminology: the study of crime*. Port-Harcourt: SIJ publishers.

Igbo, E.U.M. (2007). *Introduction to criminology*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Ltd.

Gouglasson, G.O. (2009). *Socio-economic determinants of crime in Nigeria*. *Pakistan journal of social science*. retrieved from <http://www.medwelljournal.com> 2009.

Federal republic of Nigeria (1999). *Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria*. Lagos” federal government press.

Dambazu, A.B. (2007). *Criminology and criminal justice* Ibadan: spectrum books ltd.

References

Amaele, S. (2010). Moral and religion values in Nigeria: issues, problems and prospects. Portarcourt: Harey Publications.

Boege, V. (2006). Traditional approach to conflict transformation-potentials and limit. Berge of research centre for constructive conflict management. Retrieved journal, 30, 2016 from <http://www.berghhof>. Handbook.net.

Nduka, O.A (1983). Introduction. In O.A. Nkuka and E.O Iheoma (eds). *New*

Daly, K. (1994). *Gender, Crime and Punishment*. New haven: Yale university press.

MDRDJ