

## INFLUENCE OF CRIMINAL AND VIOLENT MINDED INTERESTS ON NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS: THE QUESTION OF MORALITY IN A POPULOUS RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

BY  
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### Abstract

*Criminality and violence appear to be globalized world issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the Nigeria context, occurrence of crimes and violence has risen to an alarming degree. With the young and old in various functional capacities in Nigeria becoming embodiments of crime and violence, it would seem proper to classify the two phenomena as entrenched culture in contemporary Nigerian social experience. This research aims at exploring the negative effects of allowing criminal and violent minded interests to pollute Nigerian traditional institutions. In the same breath, it explores the unfortunate paradox of increasing level of immorality in a populous highly religious country like Nigeria. The paper then recommends that traditional institutions should be protected against criminals and violent-minded individuals, 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. First, the country is an amalgamation of peoples and cultures that were brought into one territory by the British colonial rulers largely for the sake of administrative convenience. Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups, many of which either had no meaningful relationships with one another or long histories of mutual ancestral relationships or antagonisms prior to the advent of colonialism. The country is also divided in roughly equal proportions between its two foreign religions: Islam and Christianity. This

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religious division often overlaps with some of Nigeria's most important ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Nigeria's traditional institutions, according to Orji and Olali (2010), 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. The traditional leaders are perceived to be the custodians of people's norms, customs and other cultural practices (Orji & Olali, 2010). But unfortunately, crimes and violence have taken the front row of the traditional institutions that had been the hope of the common man. Abusive, corrupt, criminal and violent minded Nigerians have undercut the 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 is intensely marked by the depredation of institutions through a series of violent and criminal minded actions. It would seem in fact that successive regimes and governments have vowed never to do right things at the right time. The actions of these criminal and violent minded individuals have done more harm than good to the country. It would also seem that one of the interests of such persons has always been to create chaos, to create an environment where crimes and other violent acts are commonplace. These individuals use violence and criminal means to get whatever they want. Traditional institutions which held many of these Nigerian societies before colonialism have been infiltrated by these individuals so that the autochthonous values inherent in these institutions have been undermined. This is the crux of this research, to examine how criminal minded individuals have succeeded in ruining the norms, customs and culture of the traditional institutions. This class of people has dominated many aspects of Nigerian traditional institutions, be it religious, political, educational, social etc.

This paper examines the influence of criminal and violent minded interests on the traditional institutions with the aim of seeing how morality will return to its expectations in a populous religious society, Nigeria, in order to reshape Nigeria's traditional institutions in the midst of the criminal and violent minded individuals. It also tries to explore how the expected moral height in a country with numerous religious bodies can reshape the traditional institutions in the midst of numerous criminal and violent minded persons will ameliorate the fate and plight of traditional institutions. It is recommended among other things that the government, church, mosque, and the civil society should jointly protect the traditional institutions. Data

used in this study were collected from primary and secondary materials. The research method employed is historical approach. Data sourced were analysed with phenomenological and descriptive styles of data analysis.

### **Clarification of Concepts**

Crime begets criminality, criminality begets violence. These concepts have become global problems but the definitions vary in different societies or countries. Crime is an act that violates 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 punishable by the state. Crime is a deviant behavior which violates prevailing norms, which may be 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

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

Furthermore, 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, 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 ordinarily, except fulfilling that criminal desire in him, despite the moral environment in which they find themselves. Crime by 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 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 order and 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 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 court of law.

Siegel (2007) describes criminality as a 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-jaju 1995). Criminality is used often in criminology to refer to criminal characteristics of a person with propensity evidence such as past criminal records (Iwarime-Jaja, 1995). The cost and effects of crime vary among the various segments of population and touch almost everyone by some degree and in general the economic growth and development of countries. The various cost of crime to victims, society and economy includes: loss of income, property and community productivity. It can also cause psychological trauma to the victims, their families and friends which normally brings pain, suffering, lower quality of life and eventually death (Douglasson, 2009).

Violence is the physical force, destructive in nature, capable of causing fear in the minds of the people. Therefore, acts of violence are those criminal activities that intimidate or cause terror(fear) in the mind of people with the intention of coercing individual, group of people or the government, affecting the conduct of the individual, group of people or influencing the policy of the government.

By traditional institutions, we refer to the indigenous political arrangement 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 is 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 people. Traditional institutions are the custodians of their

people's norms, customs, cultures and practices. In most African settings, not just Nigeria, selection of persons into offices of traditional institutions is hereditary, selection or election by the instrument of relevant methods. The mode of selection of the occupants of traditional leadership positions vary in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, from 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 parameter rulers and their councils (Orji & 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 growth and development of their communities. They also perform judicial and legislative functions. They make laws, execute and interpret them and also apply the fundamental laws (Orji & 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 philosophers, Aristotle (a realist), viewed morality as a disposition whereby a man is pronounced good by the fact that he is good in himself and function 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 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.

In same vein, Schofield (1979) states that the term moral implies 'behavior'. Moral or immoral suggests behavior which is accepted and unaccepted. According to him, since norms or standards are established by society, such society is making value judgement, because it is saying that some forms of behaviors are more socially acceptable than others. 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 above. Nduka (1983) and Amaele (2010) view morality as a behavior in accordance with certain standards of what is right and good to be members of the society. The society is the life wire of any successful society.

Omoregbe (1993) perceived morality 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.

### **Morality and Traditional Institutions in a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Religious Society**

Nigeria as a nation is presently at the peak of moral crisis. If the moral ailment of our nation is diagnosed medically, it has reached its chronic stage, only to be saved by a stronger interventionist force. Nigeria is both a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, with a population of over 200 million 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 are so personalized that even parents practice theirs differently from their children. Family standards have become history, likewise the norms and culture applicable to various communities (Amaele, 2010). There is no longer fear for elders, 'who the cap fits let him wear it'. Leadership is now determined by who the best killer is or the individual who has given the highest bribe to the 'Eze' or Obi' of the community.

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 instruments to snatch power from people, with eye on the nation's wealth not the fate of 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 men of God because of their donations of large sums of money, despite their involvement in crime and violence.

Urban cities are clustered with churches in the south, and mosques in the far north. The traditional religious practices are also not an exception, yet immoralities are the order of the day. All the criminal and violent actions are perpetrated by members of one religious group or the other. Some are underlined by economic interests, some political interest, some religious,

some social and others are merely from negative ethnic and cultural sentiments. Miss Deborah Ugba (personal communication, 20 April, 2019) is of the opinion that technological advancement should not mean the death of Nigerian traditional institutions. It should however be well perceived and handled as one of the means to sustain the positive traditional principles. Such atmosphere will automatically destroy whatever criminal and violent minded interest of people and allow traditional institutions to stand firm in the midst of other religions for a sound and enviable moral growth in the country.

The irony of the Nigerian experience is that the proliferation of churches and mosques does not translate into an increase in morality and a decrease in crime and violence. Echoing this, Mr. Nicholas Eche (personal communication, 6 June, 2016) states that the Nigeria situation nation appears to be that the more religious groups and denominations sprout, the more crimes and violence increase. The coming of foreign religions and colonialism have created the grace from where the criminal and violent minded interests incubate themselves to attack the traditional institutions.

Every person comes from a family and a community. The communities in this nation have more moral orders. Every community historically struggles to protect the interest of its members and their relationship with others before the coming of civilization, Christianity and Islam. It is based on this that Mr. Daniel Gbenda Aondogwa (Personal communications, 22 May, 2019) states that for the Tiv, they can claim to be saints, but elders of Tiv communities had tried to break the barriers that could cause land disputes, lack of food, administrative disagreements, but the young generation has gone very far in rebuilding those barriers, thereby plunging the people into hostile relationships with themselves, neighbors and visitors. Mrs. Binta Hassan (personal communication, 14 January, 2019) states that in Nigerians some cultures seem to prohibit adherents from marrying people from other ethnic groups. She lamented that such a culture is bad. Such cultural groups are suspected to condemn inter marriage relationship probably because of its suspected negative influence on the existing traditional institutions. Be that as it may, inter-ethnic, national and international relationships exist without harms as far as traditional institutions are respected and morality is placed above all the things.

The ongoing assault on our traditional institutions is an all-involving matter; everybody has directly or indirectly got himself or herself in it. Presently, the religious institutions are not left out of it; this is in fact where

the bell is ringing loudly. Morality should be the watchword in our religious institutions but today, the opposite is the case. A good number of our men of God are wolves in sheep's clothing who sexually harass the wives of their followers or the ladies in the church and enrich themselves with material and bodily pleasure. Some men of God have turned to shylocks. Telling lies have become the order of the day in the name of praying for you. The traditional religious institution has an order and a well-organized medium through which priests emerge. There is a defined order in which the religious adherents including the priests should comport themselves and this system also prescribes punishments and rewards as the case may be. The entire system deters criminalities and violence. Today, people of questionable character insist on becoming Christian, Muslim and Traditional priests, leaders, diviners, members of the village council of elders, kings, Head of age grades and so on. The marriage institution is also affected. There are a lot of criminal minded interests in marriage, many marriage rites, processes and observances are ignored due to criminal and violent minded spirit. Some people break marriage inquiries to prevent either of the sides from knowing the bad records of either side. This has caused a lot of disorder in the traditional marriage institution.

Nigeria is highly infected with diverse negative attitudes and actions. There are daily reports of vices in attitudes, characters and actions. The daily reports of immorality have a strong bearing in a religious society like Nigeria. The Nigeria case is much more worrisome given the fact that a lot of crimes and acts of violence exhibited today are championed by men and women who are supposed to possess moral values embedded in them through the various customs and values of traditional institutions.

In the political sphere, a good number of our leaders are violent and criminal minded. They obtain their positions by demonstrating an ability to use violence and criminal tendencies to win in elections. In lieu of a truly democratic process, struggles for political offices have often been waged violently in the streets by gangs of thugs recruited by politicians to help them seize control of power. Often, many Nigerians lose their lives in politically induced conflicts. Many political figures often recruit and arm criminal gangs to unleash terror upon their opponents and ordinary members of public. These gangs unleashed a wave of violence on local communities which includes murder, rape, arson and other crimes. On the judiciary or legislative realm most laws show that there are criminal and violent interests in them. Consider for instance the issues of immunity



clauses, excessive allowances and salaries, number of seats in the legislative arm, excessive security votes, etc. The judiciary is not a different case, people lose their properties in the law court. Justice is delayed and invariably denied and so forth.

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommended are solutions to the problems:

1. There should be effective and functional communication channels between the members of the society and their leaders in various traditional institutions.
2. There should be a more coordinated supervision of traditional institutions at all levels.
3. Moral Education should equally be made compulsory at all levels in our traditional and urban settings.
4. The social deviants who have corruptibly enriched themselves should not be given primary place of recognition and respect in society.
5. The government, churches, mosques and civil society should jointly protect traditional institutions against criminals and terror, rather than indulging in fanatical behaviors capable of breeding immorality and terror

### **Conclusion**

Morality is an essential ingredient and a vital aspect of our traditional institutions. Our society expects high moral integrity from our leaders. 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 behaviors 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 undeveloped religious and ill-minded individuals to create crisis and violence beyond the shores of the immediate cultural environment as they extend to the diverse parts of the country. The complex nature of the nation, culturally and religiously, suggests that a multi-cultural and multi-religious approach should apply. Highly equipped, funded, supervised, qualitative and comprehensive traditional institutions are advocated for the nation in this research work.

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