## AFRICAN RELIGION AND CULTURE AS PART OF THE SOURCES FOR CRIME AND VIOLENCE CONTROL IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria as a heterogeneous society is faced with numerous crime and violence. Criminal offenses no doubt, challenge Nigerian social setting. Crimes and violence peculiar to Nigeria include: murder, terrorism, kidnapping, extra-judicial killings, cyber crime, insurgency, militancy, electoral malpractices, stealing by tricks – 419, robbery, examination malpractices, etc. A lot of measures have been put in place to control criminality and violence in Nigeria, but the more the crime and violence fighters are inaugurated, the more the crimes and violence are proliferating. Therefore, the problem this research has indentified is the weaknesses and inability of law enforcement agencies in Nigeria to control crimes and violence to the barest minimum. The paper in reaction to this problem aims at introducing pragmatic attention to African religion and culture as a formidable measure for the control of criminality and violence in the country. When it is done, there will be respect and regard for human life, economic development and growth, sustainable peace, unity etc. The study employs historical and phenomenological research method. Method of data analysis is descriptive. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. It is also recommended that Nigerians should pay serious attention to traditional values and culture, commit criminals to the ordeal of African religio-spiritual battles, and collaborate the law enforcement hierarchy with major state-holders in African traditional religious practices, among other things.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Sources, Crimes, Violence Control, Contemporary Nigeria.

### Introduction

In Nigeria, numerous ethnic and lingual diversities exist. As a heterogeneous nation, there have been difficulties in talking about the emergence of unfavourable experiences. Among these unfavourable experiences are the challenges of criminality, and violence. Frankly speaking, it is not only peculiar to Nigeria, but to the globalized world. News of terrorism and other violence are heard of other countries of the world, crimes on the other hand are heard but the frequency of the occurrence and practices of criminal and violent acts have become a common place in Nigeria. The act of kidnapping human, killings, drug and human trafficking, robbery and so many financial crimes are heard and seen on daily basis. The violent acts of insurgency, the herdsmen attacks etc are no longer strange experiences. People have been displaced in various ways by these violent actions. The people in politics, civil service, academics etc commit their own peculiar crimes. As a multifarious state, each group tries to protect its member when he commits any of these criminal offences. This character or ideology is suspected to have developed from the individualist spirit introduced by the colonial masters as against the communal life style in the entire African continent. Okafor and Adama (2018) state that, the coming of the colonial administration sprout out individualist interests among Nigerians.

Nigeria became a republic by 1963. Within 1964 and 1965, when Nigeria was mandated to conduct election by herself, a lot of malpractices were experienced. Abah (2015) is of the view that from 1964/1965 polls are undermined with irregularities and unprecedented electoral violence. The country is never calm in the midst of all the criminal and violent challenges. Many machineries have been put in place to fighting against criminality and violence, that notwithstanding, the more measures are put to action, the more crimes and violence are proliferating in this 21st century Nigeria. Take for instance, in 1984, President Buhari had enacted legislation by decree, just to instill discipline in Nigeria. From 1984 till today more actions had been inaugurated, yet crimes and violence increase every day. Presently, President Buhari promises to fight insurgency. Buari (2015:9) states that: Buhari frequently say "Our government will bring to an end the menace of Boko Haram terror that is plaguing the society". Nigerians are still looking forward to see the end of Boko Haram when the terrorists are very much busy in operating in a very high rate in Yobe, Zamfara, and states within the North-West and North-Eastern Nigeria.

It is the position of this paper that before the advent of the colonial administration, Christianity and Islam, there had been relative unity, peace, security and crime-free scenario in Nigeria. It was the African traditional religion and culture that were both the police and army for the citizens. Therefore, this remains the problem this research identifies among Nigerians that there is unnecessary negligence or the efficiency of African religion and culture towards control of crimes and violence in the 21st century Nigeria. If man is brought to the confines of culture and norms, he is bound to be upright in obedience to laws, rules decrees and other obligations. Cole (2017) is of the opinion that the process of socialization is protected by norms and inculcated to us by those around us including families, teachers, and authorities from religion, culture etc. Norm itself is an integral of culture. For Nigeria, if the Traditional religion and culture is comprehensively involved in her fight against crimes and violence, there would have been serious control against crime and violence to the barest minimum. Mr. Chigozie Amajide (Personal communication, 14 June, 2019) stated that a man called over-red

that lives at Njamenze, Enugu North Local Government is where they go to discover and deal with robbers.

Thus, modern measures alone cannot fight crimes and violence to the barest minimum. African religion and culture remains fundamental in the struggle for a crime and violence free Nigeria. It discovered in this study that African religion and culture will hold to a reasonable degree in the fight against crime and violence. Crimes and violence in the present Nigerian society are at their alarming rate. Inclusion of African religion and culture among the measures employed in the fight will aid the control of the menace to the barest minimum, held to avoid foreseen criminal and violent interest and son. The research aims at readdressing the degree of criminal and violence offences in Nigeria in the areas of the economy, politics, education/ academic, public/civil service etc. It also aims at orienting Nigerians on the effectiveness of African religion and culture on the control of crime and violence in the country etc. The study employs historical and phenomenological method of research. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, and were analyzed with descriptive style of data analysis.

## **Clarification of Key Terms**

Crime has been defined by Summers (2001:321) as illegal activities in general. Hornby (1974) see it as an action or omission which constitutes an offence and is punishable by law. Crime has two phases of interpretation. Firstly, it is any illegal activity. Secondly, it is punishable by law. Violence on the other hand, according to Summers (2001:1586) is: "behavior that is intended to hurt other people physical'. Hornby (1974) views it as behavior involving physical power or intimidation to harm, or hurt, damage, harm or kill someone or something. It is the unlawful activity of using physical power or intimidation to harm, or hurt someone or something. Violence involves physical destruction on either animate or inanimate beings, or a non-living thing. These definitions show that both crime and violence in this context revolve around unlawful activities against mankind. African Traditional Religion has been defined by scholars as those religious practices that are indigenous in African soil.

African Traditional Religion has been defined by Ekwunife, Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:5-6) as:

Those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religions of African which are rooted in the past. African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales, songs and names), sacred specialists and persons, sacred spaces and objects and religious works of arts, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuity and discontinuity.

This definition from Ekwunife makes it clear that it will be difficult to separate African Traditional Religion from African culture. It influences many tenets of African culture, be it economic, health, educational/knowledge, social etc. Based on this, it can penetrate into every integral of the people's life in curbing crime and violence in the 21st century Nigeria as an African country. Culture, has also been defined by Nwosu and Kalu (1982) as the totality of the people's ways of life. African culture itself touches all aspects of the people's life just as African religion is part of African culture, they can integratively assist in controlling criminality and violence to their barest minimum.

# Development, Types, Causes and Effect of Criminality and Violence in The 21st Century Nigeria

Criminality and violence became obvious in Nigeria at the exist of the colonial masters between 1st October, 1960 and 1964 when Nigeria conducted elections for the first time by herself. Abah and Nwokwu (2015:6) point thus: "Afterward, as from 1964/65 election, all polls conducted by Nigerians in the country have been consistently married by irregularities and unprecedented electoral violence which had undermined the democratic experiments and in extreme cases threatened the corporate existence of the nation". The traditional Nigerian society had organized and peaceful ways of choosing her leaders, but this political system was disorganized with crimes and violence at the departure of the white rulers. This quest for power must have been learnt by Nigerians, from the colonial administrators. In the words of Kopstein et al (2014:8) posit that: "Though corruption and electoral violence were traceable back to the then ruling class, the present vase rate of destruction, crimes, fraud, and Kidnaps etc in today's society was unimaginable..." Kopstein et al also acknowledge that unbecoming increase in crime and violence are traceable to the ruling class. The class that ruled Nigeria then were the British colonial administrators.

Historically, within late 1970s and early 1980s another development in criminality and violence was experienced. Though there were violence in form of riots in the 1920s to 1960s like the Aba women riot, and other riots in the Northern Nigeria, and even the civil war between 1967 and 1970, but individualistic perceived crimes to a different shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. according to Osondu (2018:215) he emphasizes that: "... in the 1980s, when the get-rich-quickly syndrome was drug traffic king, then, the order of the day was apprentices, auctioning their master's businesses for hard currencies to engage in drug trafficking". Mr. Francis Okechukwu Onwu (personal communication, 10 July, 2019) lamented that in 1971, one of the apprentices serving at Onitsha sold his mater's water tanker lorry handed over to him to manage at a very cheap prices, and found his way abroad, where he joined drug traffickers. Drug trafficking has been discovered in this work as one of the crimes Nigerian commit. More so, it was not a pre-colonial crime. In 1990 the military regime in power then founded the national drug law enforcement agency. Its top men, few years later were caught or found in the drug trafficking scandal.

However, Onwuemenyi (2019:30) stresses on other crimes in Nigeria when he laments against the embezzlement of public funds thus: "... one would be wondering if it indeed occurred that was the case of the 19977 & 2.8bn oil missing money or the \$6.8bn fuel subsidy scam... Petroleum trust fund N 2.5bn fraud in 2011 among the endless list also is the mysterious N1.7bn police pension fraud.." He further ask for the investigation of the alleged \$26bn oil contracts scam. Onwuemenyi identifies embezzlement of public funds as criminality in the country. Before the end 1990s, obtaining property by pretenses, cheating-number 419 (referred to the Nigerian colonial criminal code section 419) became a common crime. The emergence of internet computer website now made the crime very notorious. The free internet accesses encouraged young people to abandon school and joined the illegal yahoo website fraud. They popularly assume the name "yahoo boys". In reaction to this crime, the military enacted decree 419 to stop this particular offense. Anazodo et al (2012) identify that there are corruption within the anticorruption agencies, white –colar corruption, looting government treasure, ghost workers or payroll fraud, bribery in tertiary institutions and so on. All these corruptible acts then mention here are all criminal offenses liable to legal penalties. In the 21st

century Nigerian context, criminalities and violence can be categorized in various periphery which include economic crimes and violence. For example, embezzlement of public fund, oil bunkering, market burning, kidnapping and abduction, illegal confiscation of people's properties, robbery/armed robbery (especially the less privileged), farming crimes e.g deliberate and deceit destruction or burning of farms to claim insurance funds or grants.

Crimes and violence on the academic sphere include: student riots, mainly triggered by cultists' students, beating or bullying lecturers, teacher's students by cultist students, etc, plagiarism, and copyright diversion, examination malpractices e.g result buying, pre-examination question disclosure, passing or failing students for personal pleasure, etc. political crimes and violence in Nigeria include: burning of independent electoral commission (INEC) Offices, political thugs, vote buying, and other electoral malpractices. Social crimes and violence are: militancy, domestic violence, trafficking in women assassination, extrajudiciary killing, other cyber crimes, raping, other riots, terrorism e.g Boko-Haram insurgency, other wars, sex with the under aged, and so on. health criminality and violence in Nigeria today, are as follow: drug trafficking, sale of fake drug in which late Prof. Dora Akunyili dealt with as director of NAFDAC during her time, sale of fake/poisonous expired consumables, murder, dumping or disposal of unwanted newly born babies etc. religious crimes and violence include: demolition or destruction of places or paraphernalia of worship under durex, individual ownership of churches, other religious fanatical crimes and violence e.g religious riots, and killings amongst other things.

In this paper, six factors are observed as the causes of those types of crimes and violence xrayed in this sub-section. The factors are: economic interest and poverty (unemployment), lack of moral consciousness, low attention to African religion and culture, lazy mindedness, greed and selfishness (individualism), and fanaticism. Though, the advent of the colonial masters, western education, Christianity, Islam and Arabian culture is among the basic factors or causes of the increase in criminality and violence, in the Nigerian state, but the citizens did not reject the infusion of these traits to their psyche. Since the citizens have succumbed to the traits or diffusion, the study concentrates on the aforementioned factors. Many strategies or measures have been employed but they we incapacitated from achieving the courses for which they were introduced. One of the reasons for this failure is greed, selfishness, or individualistic spirits. People in authority make sure they install their own people so that when the commit any crime, they will be protected. People also want keep working because they are surrounded by protective and supportive personalities and authorities. In the regard, British council (2017) states that throughout the history of Nigeria there had been the culture of impurity that released most economic and financial criminals to go free without imprisonment or conviction. This has been a bottleneck on the fight against crime and violence. Mr. Ajim Josiah (personal communication, 4, December, 2018) said that in most government offices in Nigeria, the people presently servicing cannot be far in blood relation or friendship to the former and present individuals at the helm of affairs just to make sure that their interests are protected even when they leave those offices. Lack of moral consciousness is also a contributive factor. Morality has lost ground in the people's conscience. There is no emotion for human pains, infliction, or sin. People practice and observe various religions and beliefs in words not in actions.

Morality is displayed in pretence. Adekoya (2016) observe that police, custom, army and federal road safety corps persuade to part with some money from drivers even when their vehicles are in excellent condition. Some mothers especially unmarried ones would have babies and dispose them at dumping post because they do not exalt morality. A group is announced over the radio station to have raped a four year baby, after which they killed the baby. Virtually all these crimes are committed because the culprits lack moral consciousness. Mrs. God's power, patience (personal communication, 18 November, 2018) states that as a spinster she was pregnant by her boy friend and she planned to dispose the baby after birth, but after listening to her grandmother who she ran to on the penalties accruing from the god's on abortion and taking of human life in their custom, and the blessing that follow sound morals, she cancelled her previous plan. According to her, she is presently happily married to a civil servant who accepted her and the baby.

Law attention to African religion and culture is also a factor that encourages criminal acts and violence. In the case of Mrs. God's Power patience, the attention she paid on her peoples traditional religion and culture as rendered her immoral plan a failure. Okwueze (2003:77) buttresses the point thus:

In many traditional societies, rewarding someone for positive behavior starts from childhood. It is used in the process of inculcating and enforcing proper moral behavior. When children in the process of learning the customs and value of the society from their parents, are rewarded for behaving in a certain way such rewards give them further encouragement to repeat those approved moral actions.

Most of these customs and values are built from the traditional religion. Children who are brought up in a related background of African religion and culture have sound moral behavior. But because such upbringing has been over thrown by permissive non-challant training, crimes and violent litter every nook and cranny in Nigeria. Economic interest and poverty (unemployment), and lazy-mindedness contribute to the increase in crime and violence. A lot of people want to be rich, many and poor, and many do not think out strenuous jobs to start live with. People want to lie down and wealth will flow. Those who have something doing, do not want spend much years to make money because the background of many were relatively poor, thus the quest to save the generation from poverty. Mr. Adeyemi Abiodum (personal communication, 12 June, 2019) points that, in the snail farming business he engaged himself, his children will always ask him how many years he will rear snails that will give him money to build a house that will accommodate a family of six. The young generation neither thinks of stressful jobs to do, nor want to make wealth gradually. Fanaticism is a factor igniting crimes and violence. Religious and cultural misconceptions are caused by fanaticism. Sometimes Christian will visit their villages destroying and dismantling traditional shrines and worship paraphernalia, abuse and condemn the adherents with certain unheard names. Islamic adherent in their numbers condemn Christians, and Christians vice versa. This has given rise to religious riots and other criminal actions in the name of religion.

In all, these criminal and violent experience in the nation, have invariably enriched some people, hence, eviction of several designs of mansions all over the country. The streets are clustered with different brands of flashy cars. Every street has recreation centres, and so on.

Moreover, lives and properties are lost on daily basis, lager part of the country's population are getting poorer. Projects are abandoned by government, the country's prestige is lost globally, young people are getting corrupt, academic standard is degenerating, the economy has no hope for diversification, among other things.

## Efficacy of African Religion and Culture in Controlling Criminality and Violence

African religion and culture had been the only source that controlled criminality and violence for the Africans, even before Europeans arrived. Ekeopara (2005:78) opines that:

In pristine Igbo land, the sanctity of the society was maintained through the correct observance of traditional cultural norm and value. A well ordered system of ethics and moral codes existed before the European missionary came. By observing the customs, *Omenala or Omenani*, social order and stability was assured in the traditional society....

Apart from the emphases on the Igbo, the traditional African societies, maintained law, and order. There was standard audience to moral codes. It was African religion that sustained high ethical and moral tempo in Africa. Ekeopara (2005:81) adds thus: "it was a belief held by Africans that traditional religion is the bedrock of traditional ethics. The Supreme Being, the divinities, and ancestral spirits were the main sources of African morality". Magesa (1998) opines that moral laws were inviolate and immutable and no offender was left unpunished in African religion and culture.

In African religion and culture, the spirit world has divergent spiritual agents responsible for each offense and penalties. These spirits have various mediums of executing justice and moral, sanctity and orderliness. One of these is the *Amadioha* or *Kamalu* deity. It executes crimes and violence through thunder. Onunwa (2005:206) emphasizes that:

This deity, which also manifests the glory of God through lighting and thunder, has its cults in many parts of Igbo land particularly in the south Igbo sub-culture areas. In the south Igbo sub-culture area, the name of the deity is *Amadioha*. In the Cross River Igbo zone, the name popular name for this deity is *Kamalu*, often shortened *Kalu*, while it is understood as *Igwe* (sky), in the Onitsha area of north-west Igboland.

The *Amadioha/Kamalu* uses thunder to vindicate the innocent and punish the unjust. Magesa (1998:48) points that: "In African religion, one of the incontestable attributes of god is the power to punish... the Dinka are agreed that god's punishment is rally a consequence of human behavior." Because all and sundry is aware of the wrath of God in African religion everybody behaves according to the contents of the norms, customs, and values. Africans valued truth, and children were trained to always tell the truth. If people at public offices, in businesses, etc were brought up in like manner, Nigeria experience nor or less criminal and violent activities. Opata (1998:71) asserts that: "In Igbo world view truth at very high esteem. All these conformity to the religion, and culture of African should be complied with by the present Nigeria society. Nobody wants to die, nobody would want to suffer the affliction of the gods. In African medicine-men and diviners use mirror to show victims who harmed them. In the health sphere, traditional medicine prohibits excessive charges to patients, and

administration of fake treatment. On issues of passing judgment, the kings elders, and priests do not pervert justice for any reason. If African religion and culture is brought completely back to life style of the present generation, life would be better. African religion and culture has no spirit of fanaticism. They accommodate both indigenes and foreigners. There is no claim for superiority or infidel in African religion and culture. All these convictions have characterized Nigeria with criminality and violence. They religion and culture encourage hardworking in lawful manner.

#### Recommendations

- 1. Government should encourage the collaboration of the law enforcement hierarchy with major stake-holders in African traditional religious practices.
- 2. Serious attention should be given to traditional values and culture.
- 3. Faculty of law in universities should introduce African traditional legal system as a course and prerequisite upon graduating from the university.
- 4. African religion and culture should be made mandatory for pupils in senior primary school, secondary schools, and offered to students in tertiary institution as a general course.
- 5. African local language should be taught to pupils from nursery stage to enable the lesson on African religion; culture and knowledge penetrate the conscience of the pupils very effectively.

### Conclusion

This paper has shown that the level of criminality and violence in Nigeria in this 21st-century is devastating, hence the need to introduce comprehensively African religion and culture to the system, because two heads the say, are better than one. As far as the religion and culture were able to control human excesses and offenses against fellow man, they will still do it now. Rimes of various types and names erupt every day. News unheard of before is now the news being heard daily. People are injured in one way or the other. Political office holders deceive the led on issues affecting human lives, serious insecurity in the midst of numerous security bodies and gadgets. Lives and properties are incessantly destroyed. Crimes and violence touch every facet of human life be it economic, health, politics, academics, religion and social. Numerous citizens are lazy minded, yet they need quick money. There is serious moral decadence, fanaticism and so on. All these fuel the menace of criminality and violence. The research therefore finds hope and succor in African traditional religion and culture as means of reducing crimes and violence to a well controlled rate.

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## Interview

	Interview						
S/	NAMES	ORIGIN	PROFESSION	AGE	DATE	INTERVIEWER	
N							
1	Mr. Amajide	Imo	Commercial	44	14/6/19	Okafor, E.I &	
	Chigizie	State	Bus Driver			Amaechi-Ani, N.N	
2	Mr. Onwu	Anambr	Business Man	73	10/7/19	Amaechi-Ani, N.N &	
	Francis	a State				Onwuama, M.C	
	Okechukwu						
3	Mr. Ajim	Benue	Civil Servant	48	4/12/18	Okafor E.I & Okolo,	
	Josiah	State				R.N	
	Aondoagba						
4	Mr. God's	Rivers	Trader	34	18/11/18	Okolo, R.N &	
	Power,	State				Onwuama M.C	
	Patience						
5	Mr. Adeyemi	Ogun	Farmer	52	12/6/19	Okafor E.I, &	
	Abiodum	state				Amaechi-Ani, N.N,	
						Okolo, R.N &	
						Onwuama M.C	