



# RESEARCH for DEVELOPMENT

(The Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research)

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# Religion, Ethics and Attitudes towards Corruption in Nigeria: A Historiographical Review

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## Abstract

*This study reviews the literature on corruption as it relates to religion in Nigeria. It explores corruption as a concept from its most popular usage to the official government position. It also explores the types and character of corruption and presents a historiography of the problem of corruption in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. The ways corruption has been problematised in religious discourse, from the perspectives of African traditional religion, Christianity and Islam, paying attention to the transformations in these religions as they interact and influence one another and new religious movements are also examined. Additionally, it engages the debate on culture, religion, tradition and modernity in the dynamics of corruption in Nigeria. Further it engages the anti-corruption enterprise in Nigeria and the role of faith-based organisations in it. It argues that corruption in a heterogeneous and multi-religious post-colonial society like Nigeria must be conceived as a complex phenomenon that cannot be limited to a legal, political or economic concept. The concept goes beyond the idea of right and wrong, legal and illegal, socially acceptable or socially disapproved behaviour, abuse or misuse of power and touches on complex interactions through which we make sense of notions of good and evil. That is why it relates essentially to religion. Religion in Nigeria is, in the same vein a complex phenomenon of belief systems, not just in terms of people being exposed to multiple faith systems but also in terms of people espousing principles that straddle several religious opinions and beliefs that appear unlikely to sit together. The ways the apparent opposites mingle as people encounter social and material situations challenge us to adopt a methodology that is interpretative, sensitive to and grounded in empirical data in any engagement with religion and corruption.*

**Key Words:** Religion, Corruption, Governance, Christianity, Islam, Public Sphere, Private Sphere.

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### Introduction

Corruption has been a subject of intellectual interest as well as political manipulation since the early colonial days. The initial efforts to engage corruption were made within a functionalist tradition. Corruption was perceived to play a positive role in the context of bureaucratic rigidities as it oils the machine and eases transaction. Another view, however, holds that it was completely dysfunctional. Later, the negative effects of corruption were no longer debatable, because graphic development failures became directly linked to the consequences of corruption. Attention was focused on understanding the phenomenon, the causes and effects as part of the larger engagement with the challenges of economic development. The failure of anti-corruption measures and recurrent scandal, even in developed societies, has led to a revisit of the conceptualisation of corruption as an ethical issue, especially the relationship between religion and ethical decision-making.

This study reviews the literature on corruption as it relates to religion in Nigeria. It explores the use of concept, examines the debates on the foundations of corruption in Nigeria, especially the place of culture, modernity and tradition. Then it explores the problems of corruption in relation to values and the role of religion in anti-corruption crusades. Religious discourses on corruption, especially the perspectives of the three major religions, Islam, Christianity and African traditional religion in Nigeria are also examined. It argues that corruption touches on fundamental questions of good and evil and the complex interactions through which we make sense of these notions. A meaningful study of the relationship between religion and corruption requires a methodology that is interpretative, sensitive to, and grounded in, empirical data.

### The Concept and Forms of Corruption

Defining corruption is difficult in Nigeria because of the gamut of what comes under the appellation *corrupt practices*. In the words of Daniel Jordan Smith (2007:5):

When Nigerians talk about corruption, they refer not only to the abuse of state offices for some kind of private gain but also to a whole range of social behaviour in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power, or prestige as well as much more mundane ambitions. Nigerian notions of corruption encompass everything from government bribery and graft,

rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals, to the diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school, and even deceiving a lover.

Corruption takes several forms, but a defining feature of the phenomenon is a deviation from generally-held standards of behaviour, especially involving a change from good to bad. It is therefore not necessarily confined to public life. The dominant view of corruption in the literature focuses on public office. For instance, Joseph Nye (1967: 419), states: "Corruption is behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private, clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain private-regarding influence". Johnston (1993:194) defines corruption as "Behaviour seen as abusing –according to a society's legal or social standards—a public role or resource for private benefit." Most of the studies on corruption in Nigeria have been informed by this dominant approach, and some of these have attempted to elaborate on the types and character of corruption in public life.

Corruption may be categorised into three main types: incidental (individual), institutional (for example, the police) and systemic (societal). Some forms of corruption are confined to instances of malfeasance on the part of individual politicians or public officials, and are episodic rather than systemic. In other cases, corruption pervades particular institutions or sectors of activity. For example, certain ministries may be riddled with corrupt officials whereas in others, the practice is much less pervasive, reflecting differential opportunities and controls. Corruption may also feature more routinely in sectors where it is easier for public officials to extract rents due to weaknesses in the prevailing system of controls and regulations. The Nigerian Political Bureau of 1987 gives a graphic picture of the dimensions of corruption in Nigeria in this way:

Manifestation (of corruption) include, the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks; frauds and falsification of accounts in the public service; examination malpractice in our educational institutions including universities, taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs for administering justice; and various heinous crimes against the state in the business and industrial sectors of our economy, in collusion with multi-national companies such as



over-invoicing goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling (FRN 1987:213).

However, the current official working definition of corruption in Nigeria as provided by the anti-corruption law include bribery, fraudulent acquisition of property, fraudulent receipt of property, the use of pecuniary advantage, gratification, influence peddling, insincerity in advice with a view to gaining advantage, less than a full day's work for a full day's pay, tardiness and laziness. Failure to report any case of inducement to the appropriate authorities is also considered a punishable offence under the law (Akanbi 2004). The idea of making failure to report cases of inducement an offence is to underline the severity of the problem or the existence of a *corruption complex* and the need to deal with the widespread tolerance of corruption among the populace. But the law would be more meaningful if it provides an incentive for those who report cases of corruption, given that the media regularly report cases of corruption often without any action on the part of government.

#### **The Historical and Structural Foundation of Corruption in Nigeria**

Corrupt practices in terms of abuse of public office became a matter of public discourse during the late colonial period. However, even before that, the British image of African rulers was characterised by oppression, tyranny and venality (Tignor, 1993). For example, the Sokoto Caliphate was considered so riddled with corruption that it required strict British supervision. Lugard's corruption allegations against Sokoto in 1903 included the taking of bribes, bodily mutilation and the operation of inhuman prisons. By 1919, he criticised Sokoto for slave raiding, spoliation of the peasantry, inhuman cruelty and debased justice. Similarly, among the Egba Yoruba where government was centralised and hierarchical, native authorities were described as being characterised by, "abuses and extortionate demands from the peasantry, corruption and bribery in the courts, arbitrary imprisonment, and forced labours" (Tignor 1993:178). The British thus justified the colonial conquest and presence by the need to replace African administrative corruptibility, oppression and chaos with *good government* and law and order.

In spite of the above claim of dishonest, tyrannical, and venal character of the indigenous political system, the British indirect rule policy was built on

those institutions<sup>1</sup>. The British therefore sustained and supported these institutions to extract resources, especially for collection of taxes and for forced labour. In doing this, they closed their eyes to corrupt practices that would be frowned at in Britain. For example, in Northern Nigeria, office selling and influence peddling remained unabated despite British rule. Among the Igbo, illegal labour and monetary exactions on which the edifice of colonial authority rested were either unreported or ignored.

As the British began to establish the elements of modern government, the attitude towards corruption in the modern state structures differed remarkably from the traditional institutions which formed government structures at the local level. The colonial powers held the emerging nationalist elite in Lagos to account when any form of abuse of office was discovered. Herbert Macaulay was jailed for misapplication of trust funds and thereby foreclosed from election into public office (Coleman 1986:197)<sup>2</sup>. During the period of decolonisation, almost all the nationalists and politicians were criticised for personal deficiencies, dictatorial and anti-democratic impulses and violence of the political parties by the British authorities. Indeed, the anti-corruption efforts of the colonial authorities were viewed by some nationalist elements as a political weapon to deal with opposition to colonial rule. Nationalists in turn accused the colonial state of being corrupt, arguing that the state would be better run by Africans. Corruption was also used by nationalists against each other. Thus, the practice of using corruption to denounce one's enemies continued to the post-colonial period. The point is that by the early 1950s corruption, in terms of abuse of public office for private gain, had become an issue in the modern state sector in colonial Nigeria (Tignor 1993: 189).

Some scholars have implicated colonialism in the explanations of the emergence of a culture of corruption in Nigeria. The moral basis of colonial rule,

<sup>1</sup> *Indirect rule is the system by which the British governed or exercised power over colonial territories through indigenous institutions. Under indirect rule, traditional chieftaincy institutions at the local level were appropriated as a layer of authority (native administration) under the colonial government. As described by Kirk-Greene (1965:8), "The first step is to endeavour to find a man of influence as chief, and to group under him, as many villages or districts as possible, to reach him to delegate powers, and to take an interest in his native treasury, to support his authority and to inculcate a sense of responsibility".*

<sup>2</sup> *Herbert Macaulay was the founder of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NDDP), the first political party in Nigeria, founded under colonial rule. Described as the *bête noir* of the colonial government for nearly forty years, he is popularly regarded as the "father of Nigerian nationalism".*



expressed in a particular form of power relations is said to have created a particular conception of the public sphere that has provided a fertile ground for the thriving of corruption in the post-colonial era. In the first place, it is argued that the colonial administration in Nigeria was a far cry from the weberian-type in the metropole. It was a hybrid involving a gradation of positions determined by a double differentiation of rights and statues. Unlike in the metropole, the colonial officials had unlimited powers in relation to the population. They also created another system of relations between their collaborators (chiefs, interpreters, etc) and the population. Given the demand for absolute submission, the arbitrary and authoritarian style of rule and the direction of government which did not serve the local public, rabid accumulation of private wealth became a major underlining basis of involvement for African officials. In some parts of the country, especially in the east, where warrant chiefs were appointed, such chiefs were poorly paid and ill-equipped and the chiefs had to create their own para-administrative and military corps to meet the demands of the colonial power regarding the collection of taxes. The chiefs multiplied avenues for generating funds (some of which the chiefs kept for themselves) including the abuse of power. Court clerks sold their expertise in law, exploited the labour of prisoners and made themselves usurers, interpreters took advantage of their position to extract gifts from natives, peddled influence, and surveyors took advantage of the multiplicity of rules to obtain plots of land (Njoku 2005; Brunschwig 1983). Hence, corruption became a necessary ingredient of local administration and the fuel of the local administrative engine (Tignor 1971:350).

The British colonial officers also tolerated corruption insofar as it concerned their collaborators. Indeed, reports of corruption were reverted to the chiefs who were accused, making such reports a very risky venture. In many cases, colonial officials not only tolerated the corrupt tendencies of their collaborators, they protected them against public complaints. Also important was the way accusations of corruption were used as an instrument of control. While corrupt practices by chiefs were tolerated, accusations of corrupt practices were used to deny recognition to the antagonistic educated elite. In the post-World War II period, the British used allegations of corruption among the educated elite in the public service, political parties and trade unions as a justification for not recognising and responding to their demands for self-rule. Indeed, the British justified their reluctance to grant independence on the prevalence of corruption among the nationalist leaders thereby politicising the public engagement with the problem of combating corruption (see Tignor 1971). Thus, the seed of contemporary corruption and the politicisation of anti-corruption measures were sowed under colonialism.

Another perspective on colonialism and its effects on corruption relate to the idea of a bifurcated public realm and amoral politics as espoused by Ekeh (1975) and more recently by Osaghae (1994). According to Ekeh (1975), colonialism separated the state from society in Nigeria. This is because the forces of the colonial state alienated the individual and led to the emergence of two public domains: the primordial public domain which is the domain of modern social formations associated with ancient structures of kinship, and the civic public domain which is the political space in which the formal state operates. Nigerians are attached and committed to the primordial public against the civic public realm. Predatory rule reflects the illegitimacy of the civic realm. This is because while morality holds sway in the primordial public realm, the civic public realm is amoral. Politicians are wont to steal from the civic public realm for personal benefit and the benefit of the primordial realm. Thus for Osaghae, the political arena is amoral, and behaviour which would normally be considered morally reprehensible in other contexts is permissible within it. Government, even a supposedly democratic one, does not have to be representative of the people, or have their (voluntary) consent or support to hold or retain power. Government is perceived in terms of personal rule. Politics and government are approached in extractive or instrumentalist terms, meaning that few people become politicians or seek political office for altruistic reasons.

A shortcoming of this reading of the colonial impact is that it failed to reckon with the human agency and policy decisions that establish arrangements within which political interactions occur, the evolution of values within society and how these values are sustained or changed over time. Thus, Aiyede (2009:261) has argued that its most debilitating weakness is that it discounts the notion of political responsibility and absolves the post-colonial leadership of responsibility. This is clearly manifested when the Senate President, David Mark, while inaugurating the Senate Standing Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct and Public Petition stated:

Public officials are pushed to the wall to commit crime by the unnecessary demands from the society. Immediately one is appointed or elected into office, a lot of pressure is brought on him to bring development to their areas; others want him to put money in their pockets... The society needs to take a second look at our core values. The same society who pressurises the public official to steal is not reprimanded but is



conveniently forgotten when it is time for punishment (Mark 2007: 80).

Osaghae's characterisation is also ahistorical. For instance, it fails to reckon with how popular discontent with unaccountable government and corruption in public life have been expressed. The various measures employed by regimes to sustain corruption and misgovernance, the efforts by civil society groups to limit arbitrary rule, hold government to account and push for the democratisation of the public space, predicated on economic failures and falling living standards are ignored.

The discourse on religion and public life can also be located within the larger discourse on tradition and modernity in the development process. The discourse on tradition and modernity has often proceeded without the benefit of detailed analysis of African Traditional Religion (ATR) within the context of the crisis of transition to modernity. The dominant perspective in the discourse on modernity and tradition has been the modernisation theory which, in spite of several criticisms, seems to rear its head in several ways in development theorising. Modernisation appears as secularisation as far as religion is concerned. Religion as a traditional phenomenon was expected to eventually decay in social life as modernisation proceeds. This is because modernisation and tradition were viewed as mutually incompatible. Modernisation involved the erosion or shedding of traditional attitudes and institutions. One of the elements of modernisation of religion is the separation of church and state and the rise of a secular-rational bureaucratic state. This would occur as industrialisation, urbanisation and mass education transform the mindset of traditional peoples (Bruce 2002). Thus, in the modern state system, religion is expected to have limited influence on politics and public life.

However, developments in some non-western societies have shown that the picture of modernity painted by the modernisation school is oversimplified. It is widely accepted that "not only do traditional institutions adapt to and co-exist with modern institutions, the political processes of the modern state may revitalise traditional institutions and practices" (Randall and Theobald 1985:35). Lee (1994:50), drawing on the Asian experience where traditional ways are fused with technology, asserts that "religion as an intrinsic component of cultural identity cannot be dismissed as weakening under the influence of modernisation...religious revivals have contributed to the assertion of cultural identities without necessarily following a path of anti-modernisation". Indeed, it has been argued that economic development in Asia has been affected by Confucian values. Hence, capitalism in Asia has been described with such

concepts as 'network capitalism, soft authoritarianism, group spirit, consensus formation and human relatedness' (Wei-ming 2000:262).

As a result of the persistence of poverty and development failures in many African states, the informalisation of economic life associated with pragmatic strategies that individuals adopt to cope with the resultant dislocation and survival challenges, the rise of religion has been portrayed as a *re-traditionalisation of society*. Although this reminds us of the theory of prebendalism, a framework adopted by Joseph to describe clientelism and corruption in Nigeria's Second Republic, the latter is concerned with the moral crisis that "results from the gap between the self-interested activities of individuals, classes and social groups and the formal institutions and laws of the republic" (Joseph 1987:188). Prebendalism does not account for religion as a source of morality in public life but emphasised "the pervasive normative expectations shared by bourgeois, petit bourgeois, and plebeian alike that the struggle for a share of public goods will be conducted and accessed along ethnic and other sectional lines" (Joseph 1983:29). While it provided an empirical theory that attempted to capture the emerging pattern of political corruption in Nigeria at that time, the latter view sees corruption as a cultural repository that supports the workings of an inefficient system by an elite that finds an improperly-institutionalised state more useful for its purpose than a more properly-institutionalised one (Chabal and Daloz 1999).

On his part, Bayart (1999: 38) emphasises the need to pay attention to the role of religion or what he calls irrational belief systems on power, especially the role of witchcraft. He identifies the recourse to the invisible as a means of ensuring wealth and worldly success as a cultural element that supports corruption. When poverty is endemic and hope is low, a culture of corruption accepts criminal acts of bribery and extortion as legitimate coping mechanisms. Thus, corruption is a result of the interaction between cultural or religious elements with the demands of transition from tradition to modernity.

Etonga-Manguelle (2000) thinks that at the heart of the transition blues is the challenge of managing uncertainty and the effects of traditional religion in the mindset of the average African. This effect is manifested in the resort to religion rather than technology and jurisprudence in the management of uncertainty. This attitude of the African is the result of a society that has little orientation towards change, limited concern for the future and that is characterised by a general submission to a ubiquitous and implacable divine will. Smith (2007:231) also identifies the intractability of corruption as part of the "struggles that unfold as postcolonial societies experience the transition from forms of social organisation



and shared moralities rooted in kinship and patron-clientelism to those associated with a modern nation-state and a capitalist global economy”.

Given the way African societies have interacted with other cultural, religious and economic systems, tradition as presented by these scholars often comprises elements from a selection process that is underlined by preconceived notions of tradition. They often rely on vague general notions based on cultural registers and native idioms that are divorced from empirical data (Blundo 2006:35-37). Their view of modernisation erroneously portrays morality as derived from religion to be incapable of being anchored on reason. The challenge is to investigate how particular belief systems or mixes of belief systems affect attitudes towards corruption in public life under difficult economic conditions. Indeed, any investigation of the relationship between religion, ethics and corruption must be pursued cautiously. This is because the individuals encountered in Africa may have transversed several religions in a lifetime or half of a lifetime as they moved from childhood to adulthood, each experience leaving a mark on the way as subsequent religious teachings are received and used. Perhaps it is necessary to develop a proxy that can reasonably represent an *untidy reality* of the relationship among religion, ethics and corruption.

#### Causes of Corruption and the Search for a Religious Intervention

In an interesting study, Husted (1999) tested Transparency International *Corruption Perceptions Index* values for statistical correlation against economic, structural and cultural value dimensions in a sample of countries. In addition to GNP per capita [(corrected for purchasing power parity (PPP), government size and income inequality, he included the four cross-national value dimensions compiled by Hofstede (1991)]. These value dimensions include high scores for “power distance”, “uncertainty avoidance”, “masculinity” and “individualism”. Power distance refers to societies that expect power to be distributed unequally, where there are fewer checks and balances, thereby encouraging illegal activities by leaders with impunity. “Uncertainty avoidance” measures a society’s fear of the unknown (a discomfort with unstructured situations), “masculinity” measures the degree of personal materialist orientation (ostentatious displays of status) as opposed to an emphasis on “quality of life” (femininity), and “individualism” refers to the extent to which decisions are made individually rather than collectively. Regressing on all these variables for 36 countries including Nigeria, Husted found that the strongest predictors of corruption perception were GNP per capita (inversely related: wealthier nations generally have lower levels of corruption  $r^2=0.72$ ), followed by power distance (directly related, corrupt nations accept higher power distances,  $r^2=0.52$ ), and individualism (inversely related;

$r^2=0.52$ ). Husted then developed a multiple regression model incorporating GNP per capita, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity that was collectively capable of explaining 81 percent of the variability in the TI corruption perception index for 44 countries. However, there were significant outlier countries like Nigeria, Pakistan, Italy and the United States which were more corrupt than Husted’s model predicted. Whether these discrepancies share a common factor, or are idiosyncratic, has not been determined. Individualism drops out of the multiple regression model most likely because of its colinearity with income levels (Husted 1999:354).

Husted then divided the sample in two ways. He discovered that with countries having high power distance scores (respect for authority, but also acceptance of potentially impunitive leadership), masculinity and GNP per capita explained corruption differences better than his global model ( $r^2$  was 0.83 vs. 0.81 global model). Strongly collectivist (low individualism) countries also were more accurately predicted by these two variables alone than the global model ( $r^2=0.85$ ). However, other stratifications failed to yield predictive models as robust as these two. Husted concluded that nationals of corrupt countries can be culturally typified as high uncertainty avoiders, high masculine (personal material wealth overriding concerns for the general welfare of society) and accepting of a large power distance (condoning abuse of power).

Although the above views have strong political, economic and legal overtones, they suggest that culture and religion do matter. For instance, the values placed on status or personal integrity in relation to wealth and the character of social networks are underlined by morality, which goes back to Eker’s (1981) two-fold classification of moral code and authority structures. Given this reality, attention has been generated on the place of religion and faith-based organisations in reducing corruption because of the traditional links between moral and ethical teaching and religious thinking. Personal values and ethics, and religious beliefs and teachings are tied together in many ways and some faith-based organisations and religious leaders have become active in anti-corruption efforts as we shall see later.

It must be said that just like Marxism became a catchy slogan for politicians and military men alike in previous decades, the last decade witnessed disillusioned Christians and Moslems pinning their hopes on politicians who are *born again* and vow to combat corruption in Africa (Hager 2002:75). In the words of Ellis and ter Haar (2008:185), “At a time when ‘development’—the notion that bureaucratic, secular government will lead to unprecedented prosperity—has for many lost its appeal, religion provides alternative ways of organising society and politics and of thinking about the world.” The defining



feature of religious systems is the assumed linkage between the earthly, material world and the immaterial, invisible world such that human actions not only relate to social and physical environment but to a spiritual invisible world although the nature of these linkages vary across religions and across sub-groups of a religion. Indeed, virtually all religions of the world subscribe to particular set of moral values. Hence, religions are sources of ethics and principal agents of socialisation whereby the worldviews and lifestyles of generations are shaped. Religions usually espouse a series of prescriptions concerning what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or detestable behaviour. Thus, religion is expected to play a role in the moral life of individuals. Thomas, Rest and Davidson (1991) identify religion as one of the several interpretive systems by which moral action choices can be generated. While de Sardan (199:48) is of the view that Pentecostalism and other similar religious movements may offer a route out of the morass of corruption, Smith (2007:217) argues that they offer very limited opportunity to combat corruption because of "the domestication of religious morality which enables elites to participate in corruption while still viewing themselves as ethical people." He emphasises this point further, noting that "When the focus is on philandering men, alcohol abuse, promiscuous young women, youthful disrespect of their seniors, failure to pray, or absenteeism from church, it means attention is less attuned to the state, and to the political and economic structures and practices that actually produce poverty and inequality". Smith's proposition is reinforced by the series of scandals that feature in newspapers and magazines involving Pentecostal churches and other religious organisations.

The imperative of combating corruption has been underscored by the effects it has on societal growth and development. As noted by Johnston (1997), it undermines political institutions by weakening the legitimacy and accountability of governments. Corruption also reduces the effectiveness of aid-funded development projects and weakens public support for development assistance in donor countries. In short, it is inimical to sustainable development, poverty reduction and good governance<sup>3</sup>. Overall, corruption has led to mass poverty, inequalities, crime, unemployment, brain drain and violent conflicts (Ades and Tella, 1996, Aiyede 2008). In the words of President Obasanjo (2002),

Corruption is simply bad for the nation. To condone corruption is not only unpatriotic, but also irreligious for Christians and Muslims alike. No excuse is good enough for condoning the evil of

<sup>3</sup> It can also have the opposite effect of circumventing cumbersome regulation and facilitating business transactions.

corruption, be it on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sectional interest or on the offering of inducement in order to wield undue influence and pervert the truth. Corruption is an immoral and unpardonable act against society and punishable by God (Broadcast to the Nation on October 1, 2002).

The need to address corruption has been recognised and there has been consistent public concern over its consequences. Efforts have been made by both government and civil society to deal with the problem. Riley (1993) has identified three methods that have been adopted to deal with the problem of corruption until recently. The first involves the use of prohibitive laws and codes. This is usually propped up with regulatory bureaux like the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) and the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) in Nigeria which were created by the 1979 constitution. The CCB is to receive complaints about non-compliance with, or breach of, the code of conduct by public officials, process and forward to the CCT. The CCT is to hear cases of breach of the code of conduct by public officials and the provisions of the constitution relating to prerogative of mercy do not apply to any punishment imposed by it. The second is the setting up of official enquiries and commissions to investigate cases of corruption. There are several reports in this regard in Nigeria from the colonial days. The third is use of moral suasion and campaigns. In Nigeria, there was the ethical revolution declared by President Shehu Shagari in the 1980s, War against Indiscipline (WAI) by General Buhari (1983-1985) and War against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) by the General Abacha government (1993-1998).

In recent times, Nigeria uses independent anti-corruption organisations modelled after the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in Hong Kong. Two anti-corruption agencies have been established since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule: the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The ICPC was inaugurated on September 29th, 2000 to receive complaints, and to investigate and prosecute offenders. It is also meant to educate and enlighten the public about the detrimental effects of bribery, corruption and related offences. Of particular interest is its role of reviewing and modifying the activities of public bodies, where such practices may aid corruption. The ICPC has been able to prosecute a few public officers and has several cases pending in court. It is collaborating with anti-corruption civil society organisations, including faith-based organisations, and has established anti-corruption clubs in schools. It has also set up anti-corruption and transparency monitoring units in ministries and parastatals across the country. The EFCC on its part is empowered to prevent, investigate, prosecute and



penalise economic and financial crimes, and is charged with the responsibility of enforcing the provisions of other laws and regulations relating to economic and financial crimes such as the Money Laundering Act 1995, the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act 2004, the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act 1995. The activities of these organs have made newspaper headlines. The EFCC was instrumental to the October 2005 arrest in London of Alamiyeseigha former Governor of Bayelsa State, who was eventually impeached, tried and convicted on corruption and money laundering charges in Nigeria (Aiyede, 2008).

Increasingly, faith-based organisations have been critical of governance reforms in Nigeria as part of civil society. Religious organisations have not only stimulated political participation as the country moved towards political liberalisation, they have also promoted integrity in government. Religious leaders have encouraged Nigerians to bring the political-moral values of honesty, service and godliness to bear on governmental conduct and political processes in the country (Suberu et al 1999:37). Some Christian churches have been directly engaged in anti-corruption activities (Adesogan 2006:154). In some parts of the country, anti-corruption efforts have reverberated in the search for what can break the hold of self-interest and the quest for material pleasure, taking the form of a call for the implementation of sharia law in many northern states of the country. Some of these calls have associated immorality with Western secular societies with its individualistic and materialistic values (Harnischfeger 2008:220).

#### **Corruption in Religious Discourse: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion**

Nigeria, though officially a secular state, is really a multi-religious state. This claim is justified by its religious diversity, vibrancy and actual state involvement in religious matters like pilgrimages to which public funds are committed. The centrality of religion in the life of the average Nigerian cannot be ignored. Islam and Christianity have expanded and become firmly entrenched since the 11th and 19th centuries respectively. Nigeria has also been exposed to a considerable range of esoteric and metaphysical movements like the Holy Grail, Eckankar, Rosicrucian and Hare Krishna. Sat Guru Maharajji, a Nigerian, presides over a religious community in Ibadan, as self-styled *living perfect master of the moment*. The Northern part of Nigeria (largely Hausa-Fulani), is predominantly Muslim with a substantial number of Christians among the minority groups. The South East (mainly Igbo and Catholic), and southern minority communities (largely Protestants) are predominantly Christian, while South West (largely

Yoruba) is near evenly distributed between Christians and Muslims with a vigorous pluralism in terms of the existence of indigenous churches and praying sects. Throughout the length and breadth of the country, African traditional religion thrives even among those who profess Islam and Christianity and has experienced an upturn since the renewed increased sub-nationalism following the political crisis of the 1990s (Suberu et al 1999).

#### **Christianity and Corruption**

Nigerian Christians use corruption to refer to wrong doings such as dishonesty, exploitation, bribery, fraud, venality, depravity and perversion among others. Generally, corrupt practices are perceived as an evil which Christians should not engage in. According to Hager (2002:74), a Christian leader, it "entails all manner of sinful acts of disobedience to God, which include lack of love, humility, self control, moral rectitude and drunkenness, hatred, malice, cruelty, laziness, abusive language, etc. It implies a lack of justice, lack of love and mercy and lack of humility." Thus, for the Christian, corruption is not just a moral issue; it is a sin, an offence against God. The Catholic Bishop's Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in their pastoral letter to mark Nigeria's independence in 1960, emphasised that "Nobody can be a true member of the church who is not a good citizen of the state...An important part of the moral effort of the church goes towards ensuring that Christians are upright and intelligent members of the political community" (CBCN 2002:6). But through the history of Christianity, corruption has been a major challenge both within the church and in the world in which the church is situated. Thus, the effort to combat corruption has been a perennial challenge for Christianity.

The earliest account of corruption in the Christian Holy Writ, the Bible, has been traced to the story of creation. According to that account, greed made the first humans to succumb to the deceit of the serpent and disobey God's commandment (Genesis 3:5-6). Ever since, man has remained in this corrupt state. He lost the favour of God and was driven out of the Garden (Genesis 3:24). In the words of Chuta (2004:8), Area Chairman of the Scripture Union (Nigeria) Nsukka Area, "By that single disobedience, Adam drew all his progeny into corruption and ruin."

Pentecostalism constitutes a major social movement that continues to dominate the media by their sermons, healing services, miracles and breakthrough programmes in Nigeria. The Pentecostal churches speak directly to the spiritual and material needs of their members, adoption of very aggressive public self-advertisement styles in the newspapers, billboards, handbills, and on radio and television, inviting people to come and experience changes in their lives and circumstances. According to Matthew Ojo (2004), the Pentecostals



offer ideas on how to manipulate the invincible forces to one's favour by an encounter with Christ and teach the effective use of faith, prayers and other religious actions. Thus, although the Bible has broadened the outlook of Pentecostals and Charismatics, their faith continues to reflect traditional African thought and believers are concerned with power in its various manifestations. The success of Pentecostal churches has led to the adoption of their style of worship liturgy by some orthodox pastors. This became a problem even in the Catholic Church. In response, CBCN issued a guideline for its members in 1996, observing that there had been an abuse in the exercise of the charism of healing in the clergy, religious and laity, men and women around the period. The guidelines emphasised that:

Healing is not a reward for faith but an expressed gratuitous will of God. Faith that is required for healing is the same with which the individual believes in the word of God...seeing demons where there are none, blaming them for all troubles, having obsessive fear of them, and preaching about them excessively, are marks of a superstitious trend that does not find support in Christian tradition. Instead the church cautions against such undue preoccupations, and counsels reservation and prudence about diabolical intervention and miracles (CBCN 2002:339).

The emphasis on healing, success, prosperity and deliverance are all rooted in the appropriation of power in its traditional and modern forms. The Pentecostal movement generates a local understanding of Christianity even though it expresses a rejection of African traditional religion. Their view on corruption is described succinctly by Ojo (2004:9).

Although Charismatics and Pentecostals do not support any political ideology or party, they have rather supported individual political leaders as a way of expanding Christian influence in the competitive multi-religious society. A Christian upholding fundamental religious principles brings up the image of the triumphant, good God while a bad government indicates the operation of evil forces to retard development and make Christians to suffer. As far as ethics are concerned, these new churches with their emphasis on malevolent and demonic forces or spiritual attack as the basis of illness, misfortune and accidents give the impression that they create fear in order to be able to offer solutions.

A scholar, and Catholic priest, has described the leaders of some of these congregations as "pastors scavenging for fortunes in the name of leading souls to

God through the organisation of endless *spiritual trade fairs* called revivals and vigils... hoodwinking and deluding ordinary citizens away from the culture of hard work and the need to develop a truly Christian ethic to wealth (Kukah 2007: 37-38).

Kukah is a catholic priest and a former Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. His views reflect a general and common criticism levied against the Pentecostal pastors with their flashy lifestyle and showbiz approach to evangelism. A few of them move around the world in private jets, when their congregations are largely impoverished, the majority of who live on less than a dollar a day (*The Guardian* April 1, 2009). They associate with politicians that are notorious for abuse of office in Nigeria. Indeed, President Obasanjo who attempted to change the constitution in order to stay in office for a third term was a regular feature at the annual Holy Ghost Festival of the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Emphasising this criticism of the Pentecostal movement, Akinola (2009:58) states:

Whereas authentic religion and genuine worship necessarily involves sacrifice and self denial, what appears to be popular in our environment today however is a religion of convenience that glamorises wealth, pleasure and power, and makes little provision for sacrificial love, self-denial and self-abnegation. The Indian sage Mahatma Ghandi had identified this kind of religion without sacrifice as one of the most deadly social sins of our age.

However, Pentecostals vary as they come. As independent churches, their orientation is akin to the American televangelism tradition. The central tenets of these churches are motivational renditions of biblical passages of the possibilities of enjoying the material fruits of civilisation as a spiritual blessing consequent on the acceptance of Christ and submission to God's will. These evangelists represent the Christian faith as a message of hope in a condition of hopelessness, generating a confidence in the possibility of change placed on the existence of a power that superseded the premonitions of objective reality. Thus, they function as an impetus for social change and as a 'source of empowerment, beauty and hope in the face of acute suffering' (Ilesanmi 2001:264). Their teachings and practices need to be further investigated vis-a-vis developments in Islam and ATR in the attempt to explore the role of faith-based organisations in corruption in Nigeria.



### Islam and Corruption

Over many centuries, Islamic Jurists and other scholars of Islam have developed abstract concepts of what is good or evil. Izutsu (1966) has located the origin of morality in Islam within the eschatological framework provided by God in the Quran, which makes the ultimate destiny of man dependent on his conduct in the present world. Thus, for man to attain moral goodness as described in the Quran, his conduct should reflect some of the commonest conceptions for ethico – religious excellence. Behaviours that are good or evil are itemised in the Quran, good is desirable and should be cultivated while evil is to be avoided or dispelled. Some of these are:

- **Salih:** This term is translated as “righteous” or “good”. The importance of this concept is shown in its constant association with faith (iman) such that “alladhina amanu wa amilu al *Salihat* (those who believe and do *Salih* deeds) is one of the most frequently used phrases in the Quran” (Izutsu, 1966). Good deeds or *Salihat* include the acts of giving alms and prayer, and “believers” are often called the “*Salih*” (servants) of God.
- **Su:** - The opposite of *Salihat* in the Quran is *Sayyiat* which is derived from the root word *Su*. Therefore “those who believe and do *Salihat* works” are opposed to those who commit *Sayyiat*”. Quran verse iv, 122-124 shows that those who commit *Su* and *Salihat* will receive their recompenses, accordingly. Therefore, true believers should aim at *Salihat* and avoid any *sayyiat* in their conduct.
- **Birr:** This term is similar in meaning to *Salih*, but is subtly different from the latter term. The term may be interpreted to mean “piety” or “righteousness” or “kindness” as verse 11, 172/177 of the Quran. It is explicitly related to the fear of God, which leads individuals to fulfil all obligations, religious as well as social. The term *birr* therefore shows that it is not just keeping the taboos that constitute faith, but all social obligations and duties should be observed for a true faith.
- **Fasad:** This term is used to denote various kinds of evil doings such as stealing, homosexuality, violent oppression (e.g of the Israelites by Pharaoh), and the acts of sorcery and other acts of corruption.
- **Ma’ruf and Munkar:** *Ma’ruf* is defined very often as what is acknowledged and approved by the divine law (Izutsu, 1966). The literal meaning of it is “known”, that is, what is regarded as known and familiar and therefore, also socially approved. Its opposite term, *Munkar* means what is disapproved precisely because it is unknown

and foreign. *Ma’ruf* is contrasted with *Munkar* to show that while the former indicates acts performed through due formalities and acknowledged legal provisions, the latter implies acts that are disapproved and should, therefore, be repelled because they conflict with God’s commandments.

Other Islamic scholars have expressed views that show the abhorrence of corruption in Islam. In their view, Islam does not sanction any form of fraud or corruption, which is categorised under the major sins (Shehu, 2007). For emphasis, any wealth that is earned through any corrupt or fraudulent means is unlawful and illegal (*haraam*), and if one desires to make a decent living, it has to be through honest means and hard work. Also, abuse of public responsibility by leadership is seen as one of the grievous forms of fraud. This is because leadership and public responsibility are a trust, which the believer would be called to account for on the Day of Judgment. This is the unequivocal repudiation of fraudulent behaviour in public capacity, which Islam preaches (Shehu, 2007:83).

Additionally, Islam condemns any form of accumulation from the public treasury. Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio has identified some of the obligations of the ruler. He recommended that “whoever is found to have wealth above what he earns from his work, the ruler shall confiscate and restore it to the treasury.” The ruler should investigate the case and where found to be true, punishment should be meted and the corruption stamped out (from the translation of Shehu Yamusa, in Shehu, 2007:85). As such, public officials should abstain from any form of fraud or corruption. Fraudulent enrichment while holding public office involves any form of payment or gratification that is received while performing public duties to subjects or clients. Another form of fraud identified by Shehu (2007:87) involves dealing unfairly with undue discrimination against some, while favouring others.

The importance of observing correct or ordained behaviour and shunning incorrect or evil behaviour is attached to these ethico-religious conceptions of the Quran. In several verses of the Quran, there is an outstanding emphasis on justice and charity. Piety cannot therefore be attained unless it is manifested in and motivated by various works relating to practice of justice and love towards others (Izutsu, 1966:207).

Indeed, a Qur’anic verse 2: 11 says, “and when it is said to them, make not mischief (corruption) on earth, they say we are only peacemakers”, and



“every activity (or thinking) that is going against human nature or God’s rule is recognised as corruption”. The words for right and wrong *ma’ruf* and *munkar* thus refer in the first place to what is universally approved or disapproved by human nature when it has not been perverted. Religion itself is viewed in the Qur’an as the religion of the true (uncorrupted) nature or *fitrah* of man, knowledge of which is ingrained in human beings.

Thus, Islam is not without a rich tradition and heritage of high moral standards, ethics, values and norms of behaviour, which govern a Muslim’s personal, professional and business life, and anything that goes contrary to these natural inclinations is considered to be corruption. Examples of such acts are listed in *Islam Forbids Corruption* as follows: Disbelief in existence of Allah, Abuse of power and office; Fraud; Bribery (giving or taking); Forgery; Embezzlement; Money laundering; Exam malpractice; Age falsification; False Witness; Giving inaccurate measure; Concealment of faults in merchandise/marriage; Contract sum inflation; Project abandonment; Character assassination; Disobedience to constituted authority; Tax evasion; Smuggling and Pipeline Vandalisation. This list dismisses the notion that it is only the people in positions of authority that can be corrupt. According to *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, No. 252, “...surely, everyone is a guardian and responsible for his charges.” From this Hadith, it is clear that all are, and ought to be, custodians of different trusts and responsibilities which must be discharged irrespective of economic and social status. One can either choose to discharge it dutifully and with accountability or become corrupt.

Further, Muslims believe that he succeeds who obeys and performs all that Allah ordered by following the true faith of Islamic monotheism and by doing righteous good deeds; and indeed, he fails who does otherwise, including every kind of evil and wicked deeds. Therefore, as regards Islamic rulings on corruption, all manner, types or kinds of corruption are vehemently rejected by Islam. Towards this end, Allah and his noble prophet Muhammad have warned of severe punishment both on this earth and in the Hereafter, for corrupt people. The Glorious Quran (11: 85) says, “And O my people! Give full measure and weight in justice and reduce not the things that are due to the people, and do not commit mischief in the land, causing corruption.” Here, the weighing applies not only to scales in the case of merchandise, but also in the sense of passing judgment. The true believer then, for Islam, is he who people’s lives and wealth are secure with; and Al-mujahid (the one who struggles) is the one who struggles against his own soul (self) to follow the commandments of Allah.

In spite of these prescriptions, however, some Islamic scholars and organisations have been accused of condoning corruption, and in some cases,

engaging in practices that are characterised as corruption or fraud. For instance, adherents of the Islamic sect- Izala, and other critics of the public style of the Islamic scholars in Kano, Nigeria, have often accused the leaders of the Sufi Orders Qadirriya and Tijjaniyya, which also have some of the largest Islamic followers, of some forms of corrupt<sup>4</sup> and fraudulent activities. Indeed, Mallam Lawan Kalarawi, one of the foremost critics of both Tijjaniya and Qadriyya religious orders, challenged the leadership of these associations over:

...collecting your money and destroying your faith (Imani)...they do sell to you the paradise (Suna sayar muku da Aljanna)... They embezzle people’s wealth corruptly. What is more corrupt than the idea of selling paradise to you? What is more corrupt than the attempt to show you Allah (God) by collecting your money? (quoted in Imam, 2005:147-148).

Kani (2006) also quotes one of the patrons of Izala sect in Kano (Muhammad Habib Gado Damaso) as challenging the Tijjanis who claim that:

He who kills seventy unbelievers and recites the salat al-fatih once is redeemed from his sins... The only reason why people join the Tijjaniya is that it promises salvation, including to people who have committed all the sins in the world... Another reason why our people join the Sufi Orders is their love of wealth. The Sufi Orders pretend that their leaders hold the keys of enrichment and impoverishment. All those who want to get rich without (hard work) become members of the Sufi Orders. At some point paradise was being sold to the people” (Kani, 2006, 111-10).

For this purpose, Sheikh Ja’afar Mohmud Adam, an Izala adherent, prior to his assassination in 2007, actively campaigned for the implementation of Sharia in Kano. Thus when Malam Ibrahim Shekarau became the State Governor in 2003, he appointed the Sheikh into the Hisbah Commission, a key organ of government that concentrated on inculcating Islamic values among the populace. However, by 2007, the Sheikh resigned his appointment on the Hisbah Commission. He went public to distance himself from the Commission and the

<sup>4</sup> Two of the largest Sufi orders in West Africa, have been assessed as practising corrupt behaviour and encouraging it among their followers (Imam, 2005, and Kani, 2006).



government in power saying that various activities of the commission and the government were not conducted in the interest of the people. This position characterised most of his sermons. He openly alleged that the government of the day, and especially the Muslim scholars that are found in public sphere, were corrupt. These comments reflected the preaching of Kalarawi whose polemics were often directed at the leadership of both Qadriyya and Tijjaniya religious orders, whom he deprecated as false scholars (Imam 2005).

In any case, enjoining goodness and prohibiting evil is at the heart of Muslim ideas of good governance, and the debate about Sharia law and the effort at its implementation is indeed an outstanding feature of Islamic Ummah (Community) in all historical epochs of Islam. The collective and common obligation of all Muslims is to support the implementation of Sharia because it is based on the need to achieve this principle of enjoining *Ma'ruf* (good deeds) and prohibiting *Munkar* (evil deeds) (Shehu, 2007).

For Muslims, "a set of rules exists, external, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of man, which defines the proper ordering of society...These rules are to be implemented in social life" (Gellner 1983:1). Thus, there is no separation of state and religion in Islam. According to M.I. Rafindadi, General Secretary of the Council of Ulama of Nigeria, Islam means unconditional submission to the dictates of Sharia in all spheres of life, social, political, economic, legal and so on. Under Sharia, right and wrong are well-defined, comprehensible to all believers regardless of their level of education (Harnischfeger 2008:89, 170). Citing Khuram Murad, Lateef Adegbite (2006:146) states:

Islam is not a religion or faith in the western sense, nor is it linked with their sort of power, politics and state. It cannot be reduced to any of them, though it must include each of them. It is a total and unified way, both religious and secular, it is a set of beliefs and a way of worship; it is a vast and integrated system of law; it is a culture and a civilisation; it is an economic system and a way of doing business, it is a policy and a method of governance; it is a special sort of society, a way of running a family; it prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress and etiquette; food and personal hygiene; it is a spiritual and human totality; this-worldly and other-worldly.

That is why for Adegbite, "the disrespectful rating of Nigeria as the third most corrupt nation in the world would not arise in the Islamic context, as Sharia, properly administered, would have taken care of all corrupt elements in society" (p.147). Thus, for Nigerian Islamists, the road to a corruption-free society is the adoption of Sharia, the Islamic code of law. In this sense, dissatisfaction with corruption in public life has often fuelled radical movements for the adoption of Sharia in the northern parts of Nigeria that are predominantly Muslim. It has also led to the emergence of new sects and movements like the Izala led by Sheik Abubakar Gumi and Shi'ite inspired Muslim brothers. The Izala has been the vanguard of the Sharia movement. These movements are usually fundamentalists and are, therefore, often associated with demands for the transformation of Nigeria into an Islamic state.

#### **African Traditional Religion and Corruption**

African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Nigeria and the rest of Africa is usually associated with particular cultures and linguistic groups; hence to talk of African Traditional Religion is to talk about a plurality of experience and practices, and diversity doctrines. In terms of worldviews, values and ethics, there seems to be similarities among the various traditional religions. A point of emphasis is the belief in the existence of an invisible world distinct, but not separate, from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world. Immaterial forces operate in the material world. These forces are made of individual spirits and have implications for the justice system. The invisible world can be influenced in many ways and sacrifice and divination are important among these.

African traditional religions have an elaborate system of morals and levels of discipline that are expected of different groups of people. For instance, priests of shrines are known to be different, and they are often believed to pursue rigorous ascetic existences which give them dispositions to encounter the world of spirits and transmit messages from the supernatural order to the material world. Just as ATR perceives continuity between the supernatural and the natural order, so it provides a repertoire of ethical prescriptions for everyday living.

Egberongbe (1988:123) observes that the traditional Ifa corpus associated with the Yoruba of South west Nigeria imposes dos and don'ts on man's activities in relation to nature's dictates. This is to make an individual conscious of his role in the community to be a good citizen and contribute to social stability and prosperity. Ifa "encourages hard work, emphasises honesty and devotion to duty, abhors dictatorial action given to human mentality, promotes more consultation with the esoteric for divine guidance towards good



governance on earth, condemns in totality the attitude of rumour mongering, back biting, telling lies, stealing, arson, defecations, murder, suicide, ostentation, fraud, pride, avarice, and a lot more of the vices that many a human commit...Bad behaviour is not tolerated and is usually visited with instantaneous justice." He is of the view that the justice system received from the West is part of the causes of the problem of corruption because it is too slow and in practice is virtually empty of the spiritual. That is why Nigerian leaders can swear on the Bible or Quran to preserve the constitution and uphold the public interest and then proceed to prey on the state. With "Ifa or any other deity, one cannot display acts of dishonesty and go scot-free, because the foundation of co-existence among the 'Irunmole' is based on absolute piety." He goes further to argue that foreign religion has led to a salient lackadaisicality in the lifestyle of leadership which has become an indirect parasite on the nation's wealth and ability to develop (Egberongbe 1988:124). This perspective is espoused by Komolafe (1988: 207) who writes that:

Many of our past leaders swore fires with the holy books of imported religion only to loot the nation's treasury and export the wealth abroad. This is because the alien faiths have little relevance to their past, present and destiny. They could not relate effectively with imported faiths no matter how hard they tried. It is very difficult to produce morally sound leadership through foreign religions.

Similarly, Ejizu (1988) has argued that imported religion has been unable to completely displace traditional religion, but that it has affected and eroded the traditional attitudes and value systems of African societies thereby producing the kind of moral environment that is conducive to corruption in public life. The dominant academic view from the Western social science perspective portrays traditional religious practices, especially when they are practised by post-colonial leaders, even those who are avowed Christians or Muslims, as a mark of backwardness, the result of some form of stunted development or stunted modernisation. Traditional religion is usually described as superstition, resort to magic or animism. Practitioners of ATR see these portrayals as the tool of colonising religions to denigrate and subjugate their society. Such practitioners argue that ATR is natural to the African and that moral depravity is the consequence of relying on an 'inauthentic' adherence to an alien religion. According to Ajayi (1988:292), "Societies in which traditional religion holds sway tend to be a quintessence of virtue. This is especially the case in any society

whose daily living has been religionised as was the case in many African societies prior to the hegemony of Christianity and Islam". Religions being the custodian of morality or ethics, the practice of ethics becomes problematic when the source of such an ethic is a foreign religion or culture. In Komolafe's view:

Without fear or favour one can say easily that our country has found it progressively difficult to evolve a lasting leadership because we have deviated too sharply from our tradition. Most of us are neck deep in religious cultures alien to our hopes and ways of life. We have tried in vain to fit a square peg into a round hole and the fitting has neither been comfortable nor stable (1988:207).

Although exponents of traditional religion exalt the values of ATR and their usefulness for uplifting the morality of society, and although they locate the current moral crisis and corruption in an alien religious incursion, they fail to chart a way out of this crisis except to ask for a return to traditional religion and values. They therefore fail to deal with the reality of cultural dynamism, the question of adaptiveness to modernity (not Westernisation) as well as the possibilities of universal values. Every religion and culture definitely relates to the other. This is even more so in our global and post-colonial world. That is why in the debate on the secular status of the Nigerian state, many argue that Nigeria is a multi-religious state rather than a secular state. It is impossible to return everyone to practices of traditional religion (even if we all agree to do so), given that some of those practices are no longer acceptable in our contemporary world for human rights and health reasons. Indeed, there are many cultural practices associated with ATR that are inhuman, harmful and abhorrent, like the killing of twins, the burning of witches, human sacrifice that cannot be morally justified.

The question of adaptiveness also points to the fact that some of the traditional values and practices may be hindrances to progress in terms of modernity. But more important is the fact that traditional religion practitioners fail to deal with the question of the effects of traditional religiosity on individual ethics and attitude towards corruption. Indeed, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria are perceived to be different from Islam and Christianity elsewhere, in the sense that such religions have been affected by ATR. Some churches are described as syncretic because of close relations between their practices and those of ATR. Such churches and sects include El-Messiah Spiritual Temple, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, Arousa Cult, Kingdom of God (in Delta State), Godianism, Cherubim and Seraphim, Church of the Lord, Christ



Army, Celestial Church of Christ, Christ Holy Church (Gaiya 2002). Islam and Christianity have also influenced each other in Africa. Also, the assumption that if traditional religion dominates the public domain corruption will be reduced is not borne out by experience in pre-colonial African societies as such societies were not devoid of corruption in any sense of the word as shown in oral traditions and literary works by Africans depicting pre-colonial African societies. It is also debatable to claim that such societies were more stable and humane than post-colonial societies.

The adherents of ATR hardly engage in a systematic manner with the question of modernity and the ways in which the transition affects morality. Modernity is often construed as an opposing force that erodes positive traditional attitudes and values in ways that generate crisis. Yet, the possibilities and capacity of ATR to deal with such challenges in ways that retain positive traditional values are rarely addressed. This is largely because the discourse on modernity and tradition in Africa was for long dominated by Western scholars and African scholars who are not adherents of ATR. One clear problem area for ATR is the deployment of supernatural powers for corrupt purposes. It is common for the police to display on television and other media the charms and amulets that armed robbers have procured from traditional religious priests to fortify themselves when they embark on criminal missions. Traditional rituals are also part of the resources in the positive vigilante activities of some politico-cultural groups like the Oodua People's Congress and the Bakassi Boys in the early days of Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. These two groups enjoyed public support for their defensive activities and were perceived to possess supernatural powers that make them invincible during their encounters with robbers (Smith 2007, Adebani 2005).

Such supernatural powers are also often deployed for corrupt political purposes. Recently, there was the case involving Sam Edem, the dismissed Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)<sup>5</sup> Chairman, who was reported to have squandered N1 billion on a 34-year old *juju* priest, Perekabowei Ogah, from Bomadi, Delta State, Nigeria (Agbese 2008:11). The native doctor was hired and paid, among others, N800 million to either hypnotise or eliminate Governor Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom and Timi Alaibe, the Managing Director of

<sup>5</sup> The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up in 2000 to replace the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), due to the failure of the latter to achieve the objectives for which it was set up. It was established to provide infrastructure and social amenities as part of the effort to respond specifically to the development needs of the Niger Delta region after several years of violent protests.

NDDC. The relationship between the two started in 2007, when Edem realised that he was to be relieved of his appointment as NDDC chairman and sought spiritual powers that could stop it. It was then that Kakas Amgbari, who works with Edem, introduced Ogah to him as a native doctor who was capable of helping (Ajaero 2008:12). After the necessary rituals, which cost Edem N15 million, which he paid to Ogah's executive savings account with Oceanic Bank in Ughelli, Edem was retained as NDDC Chairman. In another account, former Governor Chris Ngige, in a bid to ensure that he would not disobey his political godfather<sup>6</sup>, Chris Uba, was made to swear at a shrine in Okija. These are instances where traditional powers were sought to carry out clearly immoral or corrupt activities. Thus, there is a need to clarify the concept of good and evil, right or wrong, corruption and honesty within ATR, especially as it relates to power in the context of the modern state.

### Conclusion

Corruption in a heterogeneous and multi-religious post-colonial society like Nigeria must be conceived as a complex phenomenon that cannot be limited to a legal or political or economic concept. It indeed goes beyond the idea of right and wrong, legal and illegal, socially-acceptable or socially-disapproved behaviour, abuse or misuse of power. It touches on fundamental questions of good and evil and the complex interactions through which we make sense of these notions. In this sense, corruption is so overwhelming that there is a resort to the supernatural in the effort to combat it. That is why it relates essentially with religion. Religion in Nigeria is in the same vein a complex of belief systems, not just in terms of people being exposed to multiple faith systems but also in terms of people espousing principles that straddle several religious opinions and beliefs that appear unlikely to sit together<sup>7</sup>. The ways the apparent opposites mingle as people encounter social and material situations challenge us to adopt a methodology that is both interpretative, sensitive to, and grounded in, empirical data in any engagement with religion and corruption.

<sup>6</sup> A political godfather in Nigeria is a politician who is often unqualified to rule but enters into a contractual agreement with an individual (godson) who he installs into public office by devious anti-democratic means in order to rule by proxy. (Okoosi-Simbine 2005:25-26; Human Rights Watch 2007:33) for an understanding and the ramifications of this phenomenon.

<sup>7</sup> There are congregations in Lagos and Ibadan that use both the Quran and the Bible as their holy writ. These are described as adherents of Chrislam (Christ and Islam).



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