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DYING TRADITIONS IN IGBOLAND: *IKU OFO* AND THE MODERN JUSTICE SYSTEM

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Abstract

*This paper examines the neglect of some traditional methods of punishment that prevented crimes and sustained the ethics and moral codes of the Igbo people before the modern institutional legal process. The dying practices of **ikwa ala**, **ipa mkpo**, and **iku ofo** are three obvious methods that guarded against incest, crimes like stealing and other forms of wrongdoing. Also threatened are **eshe** and **ituaka** that honour the dead at burials in order to maintain or restore the dignity of a family as well as prevent envy and attack of ancestral spirits. However, Christianity is opposed to these practices. This paper interrogates the dilemma of the Igbo society caught between these practices and the constitutional legal practice in the 21st century, which has greatly reduced the practice of these effective traditional methods of punishment in most communities. It thus questions the hope of a crime-free society in the foreseeable future given the allowances of modern justice system and the conflicts posed by questionable moral culture of modern Nigerian society. With illustrations, the paper examines some of these punishments in (ancient) Igbo land, how they kept crimes in check, some reasons for their decline, and the attractions of the modern justice system in the Nigerian society.*

Key words: Tradition, Justice, Igbo, *Eshe*, *Aladimma*

Introduction

Tradition embodies a people's *custom* and *belief*. It is defined as a way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people. The inclusion of belief means that tradition is almost inseparable from the people's form of religion while customary connotes that such a practice has become institutionalised in the people's culture and way of life. Most African traditions have ancestral backing owing to the fact that it dates back to thousands of years as inherited practice. *Iku ofor* and others

that shall be discussed in this paper are just a few of them. For instance, Nze Gogo Osuagwu of Ibeku in Okwuato autonomous community in Imo state at the age of 110 says:

Iku ofor is our people's way of punishing evil (*aru*), especially a very serious crime against the land (*ala*). Our forefathers passed down the practice to us. But these days, people quickly run to the **police** or the **court**. They say we are **Christians**, but we know that is not the main reason. They are afraid of *ofor* (Interview 2007).

"But these days..." is information that the old ways of doing things have given way to a new form of practice. For change to occur, some intrusions must make it possible. The information above presents some pointers. It is common knowledge that "the police" is the organ of government constitutionally empowered to interfere by force, mediate in conflict situations and stall further actions from proceeding. "The court" on the other hand is constitutionally empowered to interpret the law, determine which action is right or wrong, and dispense justice by prescribing appropriate punishment. "We are Christians" is the third and final pointer, and the fulcrum on which the morality of the European justice system rests. It did not come without a political arrangement with an enduring capitalist structure. This is the modern tradition that keeps traditional practices constitutionally weak and legally inoperative.

A Disrupted Status Quo

Modernity, its meanings, identifications and discourses revolve around the transition of societies, peoples and their cultures. Reviewing the works of classical theorists of modernity, Ritzer and Goodman (2004: 541-578) note that Karl Marx favoured the advancements brought by a capitalist economy where exploitation by any means is to the detriment of the weak. Weber, on the other hand, dwelt on the superiority of one form of "rationality" over the other and the emergence of the "iron cage" to the point of mental self-imprisonment. Durkheim appears more explicit on the thesis of the present article owing to the emergence of new religious postures and the desire for new socio-political positions. In his view, "modernity was defined by its organic solidarity and the weakening of the collective conscience" (542). The new order presented its own unique problem, that is, lack of uniform social or moral standards. George Simmel could not be ignored because he identified the new environment that emerged and which also provides those

within it the power to change. He asserts: "The city is where modernity is concentrated and intensified" (542) owing to the money-driven economy and its extended influences. The opinions are diverse, far-reaching and all embracing. In some cases, industrialisation, imperialism and war have been major influences, while colonialism, religion and social change have been major complements.

The few submissions above appear to be the destructive forces behind the erosion of rustic cultures, strong tradition and morals especially in Africa. Drama as the mirror of humans in transition has always keyed appropriately and timely into reflecting these changes. The East African novelist and playwright Ngugi Wa Thiong'O reflects them in *The Black Hermit* that is about a young man who tramples on his people's expectation culturally and politically because he has acquired the White man's education. Speaking the English language, wearing a suit and a tie, and eating with fork and knife, he finds his people's traditions and reasoning unacceptable.

Adaptations of *Things Fall Apart* by the most accomplished Igbo novelist, Chinua Achebe, convey a message of disintegration and the gradual shift of the Igbo tradition and culture toward the refuse dump with the coming of the White man. The oneness of a people splits from the nuclear families to the whole society. Ironically, it starts from the household of the iconic defender of his people's tradition that quickly embraced the White man's culture through religion. That beginning was how a man from Okonkwo's bloodline becomes the quintessential white boy in black skin or a "civilized" version of a "primitive African" in *No Longer at Ease*. Subsequent adaptations of *Things Fall Apart* into drama and television serial were major ways of showing the tragic picture to all discerning minds. As Africa's benefit from modernity, the Black man in suit becomes the smart outlook of rebellion and outlaw against his own tradition. It previews the picture of a corrupt society with an unwinding tortuous road to justice. Again, Obi Okonkwo in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* is an example of what the elites were to become in independent African countries.

Modernity in Africa, particularly from technological, mercantile and religious perspectives, is an appendage of colonialism. Thus the major external influences on modern African cultures are based on three principal factors of colonialism, religion and urbanization. This is contrary to its imperialist counterparts where modernity was triggered off by industrial revolution and technology, rather than religion, and imposed social order. Africa has not only been the dumping ground of foreign cultures but it has also continued to be the importers of foreign ideologies to the detriment of authentic indigenous socio-cultural heritages. Even though many rural

communities that were far from the immediate reach or direct colonial influence were spared the shock of bastardization, no part of Africa was completely immune to its corrosive effect. The protagonist in *The Black Hermit* testifies from the angle of European education by failing to be the superman the community expects. Gabre-Medhins's *The Oda-Oak Oracle* (1965) attacks tradition purely from the angle of Christian religion. The play is carefully plotted to castigate the people's oracle through cannibalistic demand and faulty prediction.

The tragedy facing Africa's traditional institutions is the rebound effect preached by its educated people (Shanka in *The Oda-Oak Oracle*, Remi in *The Black Hermit*, Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*), and those who have experienced metropolitan cultures left behind by colonialism. Citing Nwubu, Nwoko notes, "Igbo migration in the twentieth century took the form of movement from the countryside to colonial cities within the Igbo homeland as well as other centres outside Igboland" (2011: 240). The impact of this aspect of modernity especially in the rise of "popular cultures" and ultra-religious views based on foreign tastes can only be described as a postcolonial tragedy of sorts. The Igbo society of southeastern Nigeria watches with nostalgia the eroding of cultural norms of its people as traditional forms of punishment become subordinate to the European legal system. In fact, it is at the brink of extinction.

Unfortunately, the adjudication process of European legal system is not only manipulative but also makes justice and punishment a lengthy process. Thus European justice system is a weak tool used by outlaws and men of power and influence to pervert society and extend social injustice and moral decadence. The level of corruption in Nigeria generally has in recent times cast aspersion on foreign religious faiths especially Christianity, Islam and their accompanying legal systems for their failure in curbing corruption and heinous crimes. In 2009, Rev. King, a religious cleric in Lagos, was alleged to be engaged in varying degrees of torture and murder in his church. He was arrested and interrogated, but the legal process continued for many years, and when a death sentence was finally pronounced, he proceeded to appeal against the judgment. In addition, countless political office holders accused of corrupt enrichments have manipulated the judiciary to escape conviction. The cases of the former Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives Dimeji Bankole and the former Governor of Delta State Ononafe Ibori were high profile cases that were "bigger" than the Nigerian judiciary. In fact, Satguru Maharaji, a popular but controversial religious leader in Nigeria in *Fireworks*, a debate programme on Television Continental (2012) advocates that political office

holders should take the oath of office by swearing by Ogun (the blazing God of iron). The proposition is a clear indication that these traditional deities do not spare political offenders who act contrary to their oath of office sworn to before them to serve society for the benefit of humanity.

Igbo Administration and Hegemony

Before the coming of the White man, the traditional Igbo society was a collective one even without a central government. That is, if compared to the colonial style of political administration and leadership, or the established Obaship or Emirship system of the Western and Northern Nigeria respectively. Conservative as the Igbo society was, it believed in individual freedom of expression and mutual respect that also guided its people morally to oneness. According to Achebe (2000: 1-36):

The Igbo nation in pre-colonial times was not quite like any nation most people are familiar with. It did not have the apparatus of centralized government but a conglomeration of hundreds of *independent towns and villages each of which shared the running of its affairs among its menfolk according to title, age, occupation, etc* (6. Emphasis mine).

Since there was unity, social harmony and economic progress, Achebe concludes, "Igbo people would regard such a recognized leader as the very defining principle of their social and political identity" (4). It goes without saying that governance and administration was based on humble mutual understanding of the principle of *custodianship* rather than *lordship*. The traditional heads fulfilled this function in a simple but effective communal leadership arrangement through their traditional title holders like *Ndi Nze, Ozo* and other eminent members of the community as defined by age, achievement and occupation. Prior to Ezeship in Igbo land, Nze title holders provided leadership direction for the people of Mbaise. Nze is a title for highly esteemed and virtuous men. They are respected for their unquestionable integrity, honesty, and reliability. In small communities like Okwuato Mbaise, the virtuous Nze maintained his integrity despite the higher political power of the Eze. This does not mean that certain Igbo societies elsewhere did not have a complex and efficient political administrative system based on the kingship model. The Onitsha political organization was one such Igbo society (Dioka 2007:33-58).

Belief, Tradition, and Morality

Belief, tradition and morality are worldwide phenomena. To date, Indian villagers smear themselves with colours during the *Lathmar* holy festival (web). In Belarus, the eating of pancake and physical shows of strength remain major features of the *Maslenitsa*, a pagan holiday that marks the end of winter (web). The Jews as well celebrate the holy day of *Purim* which marks Jew's salvation from genocide in ancient Persia as told in the Bible's book of Esther. But it has become so transformed that sometimes "a float decorated with a huge sculpture is driven through a street..." or people could dress as clowns juggling during the parade (web). These are traditions. The first two describe the public ceremonial aspects, which culminate at the temples for the sacred aspects. It is needless to say that they have gone through changes despite their sacred founding.

Hundreds of festivals in Nigeria, like the Osun Osogbo festival (southwestern Nigeria) and the New Yam festival (southeastern Nigeria) that owe their origins to deities of healing, cleansing, fertility and procreation, compare to the Indian and the Belarusian ones. Africans hold the belief that certain acts could desecrate the land in the course of the year that could anger the gods in a manner that would affect the peace, development and wellbeing of the society. Many African ritual dramas have projected these worldviews and their subsequent methods of redemption. The offences include murder, stealing, incest and other forms of abomination or injustice. The Igbo society is highly conscious of these forms of social and criminal acts.

Demographic changes and migration lead to culture dilution. Introduction of Christianity gave African converts audacious freewill to bastardize and condemn indigenous cultural practices and in some cases abandon them outright. European education and white-collar jobs provided fertile ground for the elite to cultivate a superiority complex and look down on illiterates and poor rural dwellers. The same educated class also displayed flagrant abuse of traditional norms without fear of punishment. For instance, many town dwellers visit home only to violate certain communal norms and break taboos. In *The Village Lamb*, Akamere "came from the city to defy the prettiest girl of our clan" (Sc.2: 22). Another case is when a tie-wearing "elite" comes home to order his parent to cultivate a portion of land under dispute because he has the wherewithal to invite the police and prosecute a court case. Such people have also refused to appear before the traditional council of elders or the traditional judicial council but would opt rather to go to court. The third reason is that many elders of the community have converted to Christianity and so hardly support *iku ofo*

against an offender. Again, the inability of the elders to apply punitive measures against wealthy individuals on account of government laws that protect human rights has led to ambivalent attitudes among the youths.

One spiritual observance or the other inwardly and outwardly guides the behaviour of human beings in what Jim Unah calls “daily commerce with the world” (1995:74), an arena where economic, political and social changes inevitably affect a person’s relationship with tradition or the Creator, depending on how life unfolds. No wonder, some authorities contend that religion is “a set of personal belief about God and worship *which can be isolated from a person’s general culture and can be changed without necessarily upsetting that person’s culture or his worldview*” (Ajayi 1965:1). While this position may be true, it is not particularly right that the status quo remains unaltered. In fact, the two sides of a human being ceaselessly engage in constant shifts in order to find a comfort zone. Ajayi captures this contrast that a significant new order begins when one’s religious belief and worldview changes. Since religion is “an affair of the community so intimately bound up with its way of life that *a change of religion necessarily involves a change of culture and the development of a new conscience*” (1). This second view is more applicable in Nigeria and, perhaps, the Igbo society in particular. The difference between the Christian religion and the traditional religion has always been clear and evident.

In Ahmed Yerima’s *Idemili* (2006), Mgborie’s illness presents a peculiar temptation between Oheja (a catholic priest) and Mgborie his mother (a traditionalist). Unlike in Ngugi’s *Hermit*, the young priest in Yerima’s *Idemili* pushes aside the previous wonders of his father’s god to convince his mother that Idemili’s ability precludes salvation and redemption. The difference is even more prominent when the believer changes from an orthodox Christian to a Pentecostal Christian. Despite the attractions and glamour of foreign religion, Western education, white collar jobs and new social status, indigenous traditions and cultural practices remain alive in villages and rural communities as well as in the minds of the so-called Christians.

Iku Ofor: Offence and Administration of Justice

Traditions hardly die off completely; they just become unpopular because a new form has come to take their place. If the old tradition is not outlawed, a good number of people will continue to practise it. A clash may occur between the two with or without physical danger to persons. Clash of cultures is when there is a rift between the old culture and the new one that

tries to displace it. This is the case between *Iku ofor* (the people's voice) and the English Justice System.

Ogechi Anyanwu took an exhaustive view of Emile Durkheim's *conscience collective* to foreground her article on "Crime and Punishment in Pre-colonial Igbo Society" (2007:45-71). Like many Igbo scholars, she pointed out the three ethical and moral foundations on which the sense of ancient Igbo traditional justice was based. According to Anyanwu:

For the pre-colonial society, the deeply held religious beliefs embodied the codes of *ala* (Earth goddess) and *Omenala* (custom) shaped the definition of *Aru* (crime), defined the boundaries of social, political and economic relations, and, moreover, created and affirmed the "collective representations" that held the Igbo society together (2007:45).

It is not the aim of this article to delve into the intricate difference between belief, tradition and morality; the fact is that they are like beads held together by a string, thrown into the shrine and left for the diviner to untie. Consequently, expectations and fears of individuals are still tied to the norms and traditions of a community and its taboos need to be strictly observed. Different forms of oath-taking usually begin the process of discovery of an offender. Rules guiding ethical practices are based on the spiritual trust in their Gods, ancestors and the respect for their fellowmen. (Ogbulugo 2007: 57-70). Administration of oath is usually public and clan heads that are also on oath to observe equity and discharge justice usually perform it. It thus provides a solid foundation and guidelines for the application of the principle of collective conscience by the customary court when it emerges. According to Ifemesia, the Igbo "centre their affairs on human interests and values that they had had to show empathy, and consideration and compassion for human beings" (1979:31) and Njemanze expounds the adjudication processes (118-125). The major reasons are that the traditional deities whose codes guide the moral conscience of the people do not condone evil. Consequently, penalty follows within a specified time frame leading to instant application of justice once evil is perpetrated.

The most beautiful aspect of traditional Igbo society is the judicial system for the administration of justice. Elders conduct the judicial traditional process in the village square or community hall. This gathering is called *aladimma* among the Mbaise people of Imo State. The process is apt, clear and effective. Okwuato is one of the autonomous communities in Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo State where the

Aladimma traditional judicial system still maintains a strong hold, but it is gradually being marred by divided loyalty. Christianity remains in vogue and the belief that God will punish the evil-doer in his own time has created less fear and promoted crime. Good men call for traditional oath-swearing which produces visible results, even though the elders do not have the power to override the government law enforcement institutions. The following excerpt from an interview with Nze Gogo Osuagwu corroborates Anyanwu's account of the basis on which Igbo traditional judicial decisions are founded. Even though the norms have not changed, enforcement of punishment has weakened considerably:

John Iwuh: Nze, there seems to be a lot of changes culturally, how have these changes affected the traditional institution?

Nze Gogo Osuagwu: I agree with you that a lot has changed, but the fear about the dying culture of our people is only in the minds of educated people in the big towns. Here in our village, our people speak our language, even in the original dialect of our forefathers. We eat our local food pounded in wooden mortars, and we still celebrate our festivals and some still swear by *ofo*.

John Iwuh: How about clothes?

Nze Gogo Osuagwu: I would not blame the youths for that. Our children in the village want to dress the way you do; often their brothers and sisters from Lagos supply these clothes to them. But don't they dance the *ekpe* in the White man's dress? It is in the mind.

John Iwuh: How about crime and punishment, is *aladimma* still effective in Okwuato?

Nze Gogo Osuagwu: Indeed, *aladimma* has remained the best platform for the resolution of disputes and arbitration of justice for the people of our community. However, some people who know that their actions contradict *omenala* quickly run to the government law court to obtain what they call interim court injunction rather than swear an oath. That injunction is like a rope that ties a goat to a tree. So *aladimma* can no longer *put mouth* until they agree to withdraw the case back to *aladimma*.

John Iwuh: What principles guide *aladimma* in its judgments?

Nze Gogo Osuagwu: The same principles that guide us as Ndiigbo. We believe that every man is a copy of the other; respect him and take him as yourself. The land is sacred; it is the only shelter of our ancestors, do not soil it. Moral rectitude

is the key to spiritual harmony; avoid every instrument of *ekwensu* (devil). That is all, and there will be peace and harmony in our community. This is our message to the youth and those who suddenly acquire wealth. The other question...oh, *Aladimma* combines witnesses with commonsense as our guide since circumstances leading to offences differ.

John Iwuh: When *aladimma* reaches a consensus or judgment, how is crime punished?

Nze Gogo Osuagwu: There are different kinds of offences. If it is sexual misconduct between two youths of our community, they will cleanse the land (*ikwa ala*). If it is stealing, the offender will carry the *mkpo* around the community, etc. Often, decisions involving complex issues are reached through oath-swearing. However, the problem today is that many claim to be Christians who wish to swear on the bible rather than by *ofo*. That of the bible has not helped us.

John Iwuh: What about murder?

Nze Gogo: In the past, if the offender says his hands are clean, the priest will place *ofo* over him. If he is guilty, *ofo* will kill him within one year. If he confesses and pleads guilty, he will appease the land and carry out the full conditions of cleansing to the letter or face banishment. But in recent times, that has become very sensitive; we must report to the police first. (December 2007).

Iku Ofor

Ofor is the messenger of justice in Igbo justice system. It is an instrument of truth. There are two types. The first one is held and applied by the priest of the oracle; it is by ordination. The oldest member of the family who is usually the family head or the first son holds the second *ofo*; it is transferable from father to son. *Iku ofo* is the release of the discernible spiritual messenger of justice by the priest.

Criteria and Mandate

Even though *ofor* is customary, it is not dispensed until the people demand it. The offender does not have to be seen or known, but the offence must be of a grievous nature that affects society's moral or cultural sense. It applies to all forms of crime against the society: stealing, murder, covetousness,

kidnapping, etc. Since *iku ofor* receives order from the people, it is applied as a last resort.

Some Cases

Ofor is a self-searching spirit. It does not require human assistance. Cases generally fall into two major categories: the one affecting the society and the one between two individuals. Where the evil-doer is not known, especially in cases against *ala*, *ofor*'s first mandate is to expose the person. Since actions have no boundary, the incest involving Odewale in Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* fits into our example. If it is an allegation by a kinsman against another, then *ofor* is left to decipher because *ofor* is a self-searching spirit. It does not require human assistance.

The Mandate

Ofor is not dispatched without specific instruction. The order is to free the accused if he or she has been found guilty by any human error of judgment. On the contrary, the mandate is to disorient, maim or kill if indeed the accused is guilty as charged.

Modus Operandi

In order to kick-start the judgment process, the people must agree to rout the source of such evil from their community, whether in human or spiritual form. Thus, as a people-based communal justice system, the *Aladinma* may go ahead to empower the priest of *ofor* to act if the suspect fails to come up for confession within the stipulated period. In the case of a crime, the offender/accused/suspect must have consistently denied involvement or consistently claimed ignorance of the act. In the case of a disputed property, the parties must have consistently held claims to be the rightful owners of the property by inheritance.

Typical Cases

Incest, Rape, and Other Abominable Acts (1998)

The accused will swear to an oath and observe a given waiting period ranging from one month but not exceeding one year. A typical case occurred among natives of Okwuato in Aboh-Mbaise in 1998. The case involved a madwoman once married but returned to her village owing to madness. Since the parties involved were natives, the case was treated as a sexual act between a brother and a sister, and as well as rape. The madwoman had screamed for help all through the night after the act calling for justice. The man confessed on the day of discharge of *ofor*. The Remedy for such act is *Ikwa ala* (cleansing bath), which comprises unusual items

ranging from insects, diminutive animals of specific ages and colours (some deformed) and wild seeds.

Robbery/Murder: Last Known Case (2007).

A syndicate of youths terrorized a small community in Aboh-Mbaise, Imo State. The village maintained constant appeal to those involved for a change of heart for about two years. The village elders were convinced that foreign hands were involved, but not without the aid of natives. In the case, *ofor* was discharged without the usual option of the grace of a waiting period. Three of the culprits died in mysterious circumstances. The fourth came for confession indicting the three who died and proceeded on self-exile.

Stealing

The most celebrated cases in the memory of living elders occurred from the 1940s to the 1960s in Aboh-Mbaise Local Government Area. The penalty for stealing was *ipa-mkpo*, but if the offender found the *ipa-mko* too disgraceful, he could proceed on indefinite exile. The stigma remains until today of two notorious families in Mbaise. Two people from the descendants of these celebrated cases rose to become kingpins of advance fee fraud in Imo State, and their nefarious activities also impact the local politics of modern-day Imo State.

It can be seen that the existence of government institutions, the police, law courts, and even Christianity has provided preferred options for criminals and outlaws to extend negative influences. Some people also accuse the traditional leaders of diabolical scare if the community insists on the traditional method of crime detection and punishment. The traditional method was more effective in crime prevention for the following reasons: Members of the community fear the deities because of their wrath and punishment. This fear guides them to do what is right. Iwuh's *The Village Lamb* captures this aspect of tradition that has not ceased especially during festivals:

It is dark. The crier goes round sounding his gong: "This is the week of peace. All those that have soiled their hands in the land should go for confession and perform the *cleansing sacrifice*. You are warned.... All widows and widowers, bachelors and spinsters who have had *abominable contact*, it is time to purge yourselves for the sake of all; the gods will not spare the evildoer. Have you stolen your kinsman's goat or cock or hen...? (Sc.1: 16).

When judgment is passed on an offender, a hibernation period is set and within that time frame, the offender faces isolation, socially, culturally and even economically. A natural calamity of remote nature usually visits the guilty one - thunder, drowning in the stream, falling from a palm tree or any mysterious form of accident against the convict. Other forms of evil that could trail an offender or his blood lineage could be permanent madness or physical disability.

Some isolation usually follows the family of someone who has gone through public disgrace such as *akpu na onu* (which means *always in the mouth* or talk of the town) and ill luck in marriage or avoidance of marriage contract. Zulu Sofola captures this rebellion against tradition in *Wedlock of the Gods* when Ugwuma goes ahead to contract another marriage before the mandatory period of one year while facing charges of unfaithfulness thought to have led to the death of her former husband.

There is respect for general welfare. This human consideration encouraged them to abstain from acts capable of polluting the land and incurring the wrath of the deities. A man of evil character cannot summon the moral courage to visit the deity in search of equity. In other words, he is rarely the plaintiff in any traditional conflict resolution because he would be subjected to the oath-swearing process.

The rules guiding the ethical practices were like rules of the thumb; every member of the community is aware of the consequences. Leaders of the community especially the Nzes were as important as *ofò*, the symbol of justice, which according to Nze Njemanze is “synonymous with peace, as they were bound by their oath of office to ensure peace among the people,” (Nwoko 1999: 31). In the case of incest, rape, murder, etc., the authorities apply the instruments of the deities; otherwise, the same instruments as a repercussion will be visited on the authorities that let the divinities and the people down.

Conversely, the modern criminal justice methods permit social misdemeanor and allow offenders to escape punishment for the following reasons:

- The right of every individual and an offender in particular, to invite the police to interrupt the traditional legal process. Thereafter begin constitutionally recognized judicial proceedings based on the English law.
- The view that traditional methods are diabolical and unconstitutional.
- The diminished desire for traditional methods due to Christianity especially the growing influence of the dictates of religious leaders.

- The respite that the constitutional legal process affords the offender boosts the offender's ego and frustrates the just.
- And the various avenues open to an offender, who may also possess the influence to manipulate the course of justice.

Dramatic Interventions and Queries of Dying Traditions in Igbo Land

Although the home video industry in Nigeria has explored aspects of Nigerian culture through marriage and other domestic and inter-family relationships, however, many intricate norms that are vital to hegemony, maintenance of peace, unity and harmony of the rural community have received little intellectual attention. Some are as follows:

Ikwa ala: This is a cleansing sacrifice to appease the Earth Goddess, mother and keeper of all beings touching the surface of the earth, and it includes fertility and products of sustenance. The list required for cleansing of a polluted land is long but includes the following: goat, cock, alligator pepper, *nzu* (special calamine), *oji akadike* (special kola nut), *odo* (special maroon colour dug from beneath the earth, and egg yoke powder). There are also lots of unusual insects and exotic leaves. The priest of *Ala* in conjunction with the elders conducts the sacrifice which pleads with the Goddess to forgive and restore relationships and association (*mmeke*), protection from the sharing of food (*iso oriko* or spiritual poison) between the offender, members of the community and the ancestors. The process is tedious and tortuous especially in the search of the items required. It is itself, a form of discipline, test of endurance for emotional punishment, and dedication to the corrective process until the sacrifice is done. It is also a self-inflicted experience for self-examination for the offender as a lasting impression never to repeat such an act, and the mandate to be a crusader against it. A repeat of such an offence would attract *iku ofo* or banishment.

Ipa mkpo/Ipa mbembe (pot of shame): The *mkpo* is a metal container, usually a rotten one. Elders say that *mkpo* was carved out of wood before the White man's introduction of metal containers. The metal containers are easier to pick up. For their symbolic significance, rotten ones are recommended. They are easier to pick up and their sound suits the purpose. For the public, catching a thief is a spontaneous action, disgracing the one so caught is equally spontaneous; the disposed rotten containers meet the required urgency. *Ipa mkpo* or *ipa mbembe* is the act of inflicting public shame and embarrassment on a thief. Usually, the thief is dragged to the village square where the *mkpo* is hung around his neck and the thief carries it about the village and market square. Then the children arm themselves with all sizes of whips and keep flogging the thief while many

would gather all sorts of rotten containers to amplify the song of disgrace that accompanies the chase. This public act is meant to embarrass the thief and put a stamp of permanent stigma on the personality. By doing this, the thief's honour and integrity becomes tainted; the social standing drops, the right to hold community titles and public office becomes questionable and almost impossible. Iwuh's *Eshe (Dance of the Dead)* portrays a senator, who due to his position usurps his senior brother's right. But he is choked to death at the occasion by his dead father's spirit. If the object stolen is a sacred property, the community will evoke the *ofo* on him and the result is usually madness or death.

Eshe and Ituaka: While burial will forever remain with humanity, the traditions and practices that accompany mourning and interment have been greatly altered by the dominant orthodox religious practices. Iwuh avers:

Eshe is a funeral oration orchestrated through dance; it is an honour given to men who attained the age of 70 or more. *Ituaka* is an appendage of *Eshe* and yet the pinnacle of that ceremony and it is the birthright of the first born of the deceased. *Eshe* is ranked among *nkwa ike* and one of the few age long traditions still surviving in Igbo land. The *eshe* drummer is a specialist who speaks through 7 tonal drums to relay the great deeds in the lifetime of the deceased which the first son proudly interprets to an enthusiastic crowd (2011:1).

In Igbo land, *ituaka* is the predecessor of modern-day oration. The practice is dying out along with the *eshe* groups owing to the new dimension of Christianity and the near theocratization of the Igbo society. The church has become the unelected government of most rural Igbo communities; it makes rules of when burial should take place and how it should be conducted. Failure to abide by this order would make the Priest decline final blessing at the interment. *Eshe* has its counterpart known as *uko*. It is a rite accorded women who die at old age.

Ikwa Ibo: *Ikwa ibo* is a period of psychological confinement or retreat. It arises from ridicule or attack on one's person due to poverty, low IQ, or bad family image. The person so ridiculed could seek redress through family heads or *aladimma* for a passionate appeal to the attackers. Elders recount stories of people in ancient times so ridiculed that went to the extent of committing suicide, which is a taboo. The positive angle is that it sparks off an energy that inspires the person so ridiculed to great achievement by querying his *chi* (personal god) for a reversal of destiny. In recent times however, such remarks and ridicule push most youths in the rural

communities to the cities. Often, crime is the nearest attraction for the reversal of such destinies.

Conclusion

One effect of modernity in Igbo land and indeed Nigeria is the abandonment of some vital traditional practices without considering their advantages. Practices like *ikwa ala* controlled immoral sexual acts while *ipa mbebe* curbed stealing of all categories. These methods of keeping social ills in check have no unhealthy ritual undertones. A number of African ritual ceremonies with primordial origins may have had cannibalistic traces but the *ikwa ala*, *Eshe* and *Uko* have no such record. The *ikwa ala* is purely a purification exercise, with highly normative practice which predicts the victim's self exile if the offender fails to carry out the exercise. *Ipa mkpo/mbembe* exacts public disgrace and shame that carries perpetual psychological trauma known to be worse than a death penalty.

Crime has permeated every stratum of the Nigerian society and institutional corruption has become the trademark of government officials and political office holders. Traditionalists are calling for the introduction of traditional forms of punishment. The issue has also become a recurring topic on radio phone-in programmes in Nigeria. On the other hand, foreign orthodox religions have set up near theocratic dictates that preclude consideration of traditional forms of crime detection and punishment.

The loose moral order offered by the foreign legal and institutional practices has failed the African society. There is need for review. Despite the biblical teleological concept of end time in the form of apocalyptic prognostications, societies must find ways to secure humanity in troublous times. It may be necessary for government to revisit and adopt some of the traditional measures that sustained society morally and spiritually before the colonial intervention. In doing so, care must be taken to avoid good men with confused intentions.

Ujowundu in Iwuh's *The Village Lamb* represents a section of a society caught in conflicts between Western and African cultures. In the course of opposing the established culture of human sacrifice, he goofs when it becomes common knowledge that he is behind some villages developing cold feet over *eshe*, which is harmless to society and serves as a check on manipulations and subversions perpetrated by possessors and controllers of power (Sc.9: 85).

Given the pressures that the Nigerian society is experiencing as a result of corruption, stealing, armed robbery and religious hypocrisy, the

government should permit the use of some of these traditional methods of crime detection and control for faster justice disposal.

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