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# Exploring Ways of Utilizing ATR in the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria

*Obafemi Jegede*

## Abstract

The question of corruption and the problem of political and economic stability raise several discussions and arguments among Nigerian citizens. The popular opinion is that if the problem of corruption is addressed, it would spell an end to the Nigerian predicaments. Religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, have been known to play significant roles in the development of many nations of the world. For many centuries of their existence in Nigeria Islam and Christianity have not offered the same benefits to the country as those which they offer to the Middle East and Europe respectively. Nevertheless, these religions are spreading in Nigeria more than in many other parts of the world. The new awareness, however, is that Christianity and Islam have not optimally served the purpose of development in Nigeria. There is a legion of opposition to Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. Islam and Christianity are called *Èsìn àjẹ̀jì* (foreign religions). It is adduced that the foreignness of these faiths has made it impossible for them to adequately serve the purpose of development in Nigeria. There is, therefore, a frantic search for the alternative, which has been found in African Traditional Religion (ATR), otherwise called *Èsìn àbàláye* in Yoruba parlance. So, there is a brewing revolution that is leading to the resurgence of ATR, which previous studies have not adequately articulated. The popular demand, which is brought to the fore in this paper, is the need to mainstream ATR into stemming the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments. The chapter is pitched on the theory of religious engineering as conceived by Spies and Schrode, which states that religion should be engineered for the transformation of the nation. Using the qualitative research method, the chapter raises the following research questions: What are the values and tenets of ATR for stemming the tide of corruption and the Nigerian predicaments? How can the power and prowess of the *Orìṣà* (deities) be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption? Thus, this chapter provides a fresh prism through which certain qualities and contents of ATR can be mainstreamed to help Nigerians out of their predicaments. It also recommends these qualities and contents in ATR as useful for stemming the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments.

## Introduction

The question is: if there were no Christian and Islamic missionary enterprises in Africa, would there still be what is called ATR? This fundamental question is raised against the background of the fact that the idea of ATR was coined by Christian missionaries in Africa. According to Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar (2012, p. 457), religion cannot be distinctly singled out as it is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes a religion and, as a result, it is also difficult to locate boundaries. One can say that religion is everything and everything is religion.

Pobee (1976) problematized these three words namely: *Africa*, *traditional* and *religion*. In his view, these words are not appropriate given the vastness of Africa as a continent, the pluralism of its cultures/religions and the multi-headed hydra nature of existence. In describing the indigenous faith of Africa, Lucas used the word *Yòrùbá religion*; Parrinder (1954) used *West African traditional religion*, while Idowu (1973) used the term *African traditional religion* (ATR). Recently, the argument is centred on whether it is African traditional religion, religions, or African indigenous religion(s), or simply African religion(s).

The controversy around the right name of a phenomenon puts its existence in doubt. The obvious problematic fact is that it is geographicalised; that is, it is named after Africa as a geographical location. It is also culturalised; that is, it is traditional. Like most other religions, it is not named after a specific founder or central ideology or doctrine and so it is difficult to give it a supposedly accurate name. The religion itself was described by theologians, sociologists and archaeologists, many of whom were Christians, and, as a result, their background in Christian theology influenced their writings. Idowu (1973) noted the pejorative and dyslogistic scholarship with which studies in ATR were riddled. He noted this when he did an analysis of what he called derogatory terms against ATR such as animism, savagery, paganism, magic, fetishism, idolatry, juju, primitive, heathenism and ancestral worship. By implication, these terms cannot be acceptable definitions or names of indigenous religion(s) of Africa. Idowu (1976) and Awolalu (1979) attempted to use Christian lenses to see ATR, and this is the basis for their comparative study of religion. For example, Idowu (1962), in his book *Olódùmarè: God in Yòrùbá Belief*, attempts to situate and equate *Yòrùbá Olódùmarè* (Supreme Deity) with *Yahweh* (the Hebrew Deity). Recently, this position has been hugely contested.

Anthropologists and historians argue that the concept of religion itself has been defined implicitly with the scaffolding of Christian and Islamic terms. This is exemplified in the data that are treated as “religion”. What happens is the location and transfusion of Christian, Judeo-Christian and Muslim templates as a way by which religion can be seen to have been in existence in Africa before the invasion of Christianity and Islam. By so doing, there is an outright mistranslation and misrepresentation of African worldviews and practices. Ideally, what is seen as ATR is based on the oral traditions of the Africans. These traditions are transitional, which means that the basic values and ways of life are passed from elders to younger generations. These traditions cannot appropriately be referred to as religion, but a cultural identity that is passed on through stories, proverbs, myths and tales.

Logically, what is termed ATR in this context is the notion that people have the capacity to master and manipulate forces or energies in space; it is the indigenous technology for the manipulation of energies in and outside of the so-called physical realities toward achieving personal or collective objectives. This is the phenomenal aspect of culture in sub-Saharan Africa. ATR can be interpreted to mean those cultural devices generally employed by indigenous people to cause or solve problems in Africa or Nigeria before the invasion of British colonialists. In this context, therefore, ATR is the belief in and activation of the *Orìṣà* (divinities; gods/goddesses), magic, medicine, charms, occult and occultism, rituals and other practices, including the application of these to solve problems or to achieve personal or selfish desires including causing problems. The application of these elements is still deeply rooted in African societies, in spite of the overwhelming influence of modernity. In the view of a number of scholars, it has rather increased (Brain, 1982, p. 382 and Drucker-Brown, 1993). In complex situations, even in times of war, drought, during political campaigns, political meetings, protests and other national upheavals, people still resort to the power of *Orìṣà*, magic, occult, ritual and others as obtainable in ATR (Kohnert, 1997, p. 1347 and Jegede, 2013, p. 44).

Previous studies have emphasised the capacity of ATR to cause problems rather than solve problems. The notion of ATR as a phenomenon that can be harnessed to solve problems has not been adequately brought to the fore, which is the gap this chapter has filled. The portrayal of ATR as an evil-causing phenomenon is partly the reason for its marginalization in Nigerian religious space. This is also the reason why Christianity and Islam have been properly mainstreamed into the national development agenda with little or no involvement of ATR in national affairs (Jegede,

2010). Like Christianity and Islam, ATR is a positive phenomenon and ought to be seen as such. Admittedly, like any other (religious) phenomenon, there are other aspects of ATR that are used for evil. However, these aspects can/should only be seen as expressions of the misuse of a religious tradition. This study, therefore, is designed to inspire discourses on the need to harness the positive aspects of ATR for curbing the problem of corruption in Nigeria.

## **Corruption and the Nigerian State**

With almost 200 million inhabitants, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. Endowed with countless mineral resources, Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil exporters, and has been the continent's leading economy for several years. Nevertheless, the country faces immense challenges. Today, about 87 million people in Nigeria live on less than 1.90 US dollars a day, making it one of the countries with the world's highest number of people living in extreme poverty (Yahoo Finance, 2023). To make matters worse, the country's economy is only slowly recovering from a severe crisis that began in 2014 and bottomed out in 2016. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the unemployment rate has risen annually since the onset of the economic crisis, reaching a provisional high of 23.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2018 (UNDC, 2019). However, the number of unreported cases of unemployment is probably much higher. In addition, the country's birth rate is around 5.2 children per woman, leading to a rapid population growth that is set to continue in the future. Further, as the UNODC (2019) indicated, the country would need to achieve double-digit economic growth in order to develop and offer its people prospects for the future.

Other indicators that shed light on the difficult situation in Nigeria include the fact that around 60 percent of the population is not connected to the electricity grid; 13.5 million children do not attend school, and an estimated 58,000 women die in childbirth every year (WHO, 2015). The country's power supply and education system are as underdeveloped as its health care system, and its dilapidated roads are in desperate need of repair.

On top of this, the security situation throughout the country has deteriorated significantly over the past decade. The Islamic terror militia called

*Boko Haram*, and the splinter faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have been destabilizing the northeast of the country for the last ten years. In central Nigeria, deadly clashes are escalating between ethnically mixed but predominantly Christian farmers and Muslim Fulani herders. Organized banditry in the northwest and the oil-rich south, along with daily kidnappings and robberies throughout the country, are all aggravating the security situation. The conflicts claim thousands of lives every year and have driven more than two million people from their homes (Adetola, 2021).

Corruption destroys a working system such that the system is not able to function and, therefore, it is unable to attain the desired optimal benefits for the people. Corruption is more visible in an organized system, when it is not promptly eradicated, it is capable of affecting the whole system adversely. The general opinion, as expressed by randomly selected respondents during interviews, is that corruption is any conscious or unconscious actions or inactions, processes or procedures perpetuated by an individual or group that unfairly and unduly appropriates rewards, resources, or advantages to some individuals or groups at the expense of others. Corruption is that which makes it difficult for those who operate a system to achieve collective benefits but makes it easy for them to achieve personal benefits. Participants believed that corruption has become a cankerworm eating up the fabric of Nigerian systems. The resultant effect is that whatever mechanism that is put in place will not allow the system to work effectively. More disturbing is the problem of total moral disconnection to the extent that it becomes difficult or sometimes impossible to determine or even differentiate between good and evil.

The current situation in Nigeria is largely due to the scale of corruption that has deprived the country of vital development for decades. Corruption pervades the whole of society; it is systematically practised by the ruling elite and comes in many guises, including embezzlement of state funds, clientelism, nepotism, fraud, bribery; and, as a result, large-scale money laundering at home and abroad. It permeates every level of society, from high-level politicians and civil servants to the security forces, business people and the country's poorest citizens. So, it is hardly surprising that Nigeria has remained in the lower quarter of Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index" for many years. In 2018, the

country was ranked 144 out of 180 alongside countries such as Cameroon, Kenya and Mauritania (Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index, 2021).

It is over-laboring the obvious if one should ask what the problem is since it is experienced right under everybody's nose. In politics, the leaders do not pay heed to the basic unwritten law that their private interests should not come in conflict with those of the public. We have experienced a series of political upheavals, economic malaise, social instability, and even religious crises. There is an emerging Naijaphobia as people are generally afraid of Nigerians everywhere in the world, and, as a result, they are constantly the primary suspects of every perceived crime or misdemeanour. Nigerians are subjected to special scrutiny at the airports; and people are afraid of striking deals with Nigerians even in international trade and international relations. This is glaring proof of the extent of the Nigerian predicaments. It was Okolo (1994, p. 34) who underlined 'squandermania mentality' as the central problem of Nigeria. This, he defined as a situation whereby every Tom, Dick and Harry develops a passive consumerism rather than a productive attitude to issues. There are many stupendously rich people whose sources of wealth are untraceable. Leaders, just like their citizens, are mostly preoccupied with the here and now such that they fail to see beyond the immediate satisfaction and interest of the moment. As a result, there is no provision for the future and its generations. An immersion into the world of 'now' shows some resistance to the pain and discipline needed today for a better tomorrow. Another associated problem is the alienation and marginalization of oneself from the problem and the solution, otherwise referred to as the externalisation of causes of the problem and solution. In other words, Nigerians like to project their problems as something caused by Westerners or others rather than something caused by themselves.

Things have started to fall apart, and the centre may not hold. Nigeria is on the brink of collapse; it is a near war situation calling for a "state of emergency" This is more so because the corruption problem in Nigeria is so intense that no conventional solution can address it squarely; hence, the need to adopt unconventional solutions to the problem. The data as reflected in the indexes of international agencies measuring the fragility of the Nigerian State, is unfavourable. For several years, Nigeria has remained firmly rooted in the top 20 of the weakest and most fragile states in the world. When the assessment started in 2005, the country was ranked 54. In the 2021 report on the Fragile States Index (FSI, 2021), a

study carried out by the Fund for Peace (FFP) focusing on weak and failing states, Nigeria was ranked as the 12th most fragile state in the world. By implication, Nigeria has declined by two further steps. In the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, Nigeria has steadily remained the 14th most fragile state (FSI, 2023). What these reports reveal is that the country's position is not getting better; it is rather getting worse. It means that all the efforts that have been put in place to remedy the situation have not yielded any meaningful results. The assessment, which started 16 years ago, is an early warning system for analyzing domestic threats that have the potential to escalate to a major national crisis with grave international outcomes. In 2016, a report by Fund for Peace identified Nigeria as one of the states the international community must keep in view, having scored a relatively high figure, which places it in the "alert" category trailed only by countries with long-standing political and security woes like the Central African Republic, Sudan and Afghanistan. An individual FSI score is usually any number from zero to 10 that depicts the intensity of the pressure exerted by each of the 12 social, economic, and political indicators on conditions within each of the countries on the index. The lower a country's total score, the more stable it is.

Corruption in Nigeria manifests itself in many ways: It expresses itself in misappropriation of resources, kickbacks, forgery, bribery, embezzlement, tribalism, nepotism, money laundering, and outright looting of the treasury, and so on. Corrupt actions can be done secretly and sometimes openly (Obuah, 2010). Some parameters used to index the fragility of a state are: insecurity and violence, a legacy of conflict, weak governance and the lack of capacity to deliver an efficient and just distribution of public goods and services (Mcloughlin, 2012). There is a consensus in the literature on the existence of a relationship between corruption and fragility, but causalities are difficult to establish (Hussmann, Tisné, Mathisen, 2009). Corruption is the brain-box of the Nigerian predicament; when it is dealt with, it is easy to eradicate all other vices.

The fragility of the Nigerian state is reflected in the series of killings, maimings, kidnappings and all other vices that indicate the volatility of the country. Like an emerging pandemic, the *Japa* syndrome is presently a common vernacular currency in Nigeria. *Japa* is a locution of a *Yòrùbá* word, which means to run away from one's own country in search of greener pasture. Sadly, some people are leaving the country and aimlessly wandering around in strange lands. The fundamental reason for emigration is frustration; the people can no longer bear the distressing issues we

have always fussed about, namely issues of corruption, poverty, insecurity, neglect and an oppressive government, which calls the bluff of the weak citizens and treats them with disdain.

## Qualities and Contents of African Traditional Religion (ATR): Toward Religious Engineering

More than 90% of Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims. Therefore, the religions are institutionalized, and their tenets are seen to be able to guide not just the individual followers but also the nation. Christianity and Islam pervade the lives of most citizens, leaving their marks on the society and the topography of Nigeria to the extent that these religions are deeply ingrained in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of Nigeria. This makes religion a very powerful force for profoundly influencing the Nigerian people and society. Therefore, when a nation fails, the prevailing religions in that nation should be implicated. This is basically the reason why, in this study, we seek certain aspects of the values and tenets of ATR that can be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. What are the values and tenets in ATR that can be harnessed to stem down the tide of corruption and Nigerian predicaments? These qualities include the mysterious power of the ethical *Òrìṣà*, the justice of the uncompromising *Òrìṣà*, and the philosophy of *omoluàbí* (the epitome of goodness). The first two tenets constitute the bedrock for the last. In other words, Nigerians would internalise and exhibit *ìwà rere* (good or incorruptible character) in the face of the mysterious power of the *Òrìṣà* cum their divine justice system. Foreign religions have failed in this regard. The futility of foreign religions is attested by the prevalence of *ìwà odájú* (evil or corrupt character) in Nigeria. The futility of Christianity and Islam is evident in the fact that for many years of the use of the Bible and Quran for oath taking, especially by public officeholders and in the Court of Law, the problem of corruption and how to eradicate it remain unanswered.

In this study, therefore, I would like to invoke the idea of religious engineering as conceived by Spies & Schrode (2020). In their view, religion should be engineered for the transformation of the nation; this is the purpose of religion. The theory is borne out of the idea that if religions are properly harnessed, they could serve the purpose of development. However, Schrode and Spies's concern, as succinctly expressed, is mainly premised on Islam and Christianity. By religious engineering, in this study, I mean the conscious application of tenets and practices in ATR to

the development of Nigeria, particularly in the search for a solution to the problem of corruption. Paula Schrode and Eva Spies's religious engineering is in consonance with Van der Merwe (2008, p. 1299), who states that the traditional religion of a people is strategic for problem solving; thus stressing the phenomenology of traditional religion with particular emphasis on practices. According to Atanda (1980), the stability of the *Yòrùbá* in the nineteenth century hinged on the development of religion, which formed an important aspect of the life of the people. In the Yoruba religion there were norms which regulated the people's social life and gave the people a high standard of morality; in fact, the whole existence of man and the sustenance of the Yoruba universe are hinged on the people's religion. For this purpose, a morally sound life is fundamental to the religion and vice-versa.

In looking at the transformative contents of Islam and Christianity, the questions regarding the extent to which these two religions have served the purpose of transformative development have not been exhaustively examined. However, it was expected that the two religions would engender a social-ethical transformation of the people in the country. However, the popular opinion is that Christianity and Islam have not adequately served this transformative purpose in Africa and, particularly in Nigeria. Despite the wide spread teaching of Christianity and Islam in Africa, the problems of corruption have continued to aggravate. The underlining statement of the problem is that there is an emerging pushback, leading to a growing hatred for Christianity and Islam in what Otiko (2023) refers to as the contestation of space. In this context, people are declaring the Bible and the Quran as ordinary books that are not capable of serving transformative purposes. The reason, as advanced by these people, is that the massive teaching and spread of Christianity and Islam have not had an adequately positive effect on national development. To demonstrate the profanity of these books, people now openly burn the Bible and the Quran. Some of the adherents of ATR who are used to practising their religion surreptitiously now practise it openly.

The general idea is that, given the fragility of the Nigerian state as a result of corruption despite the massive spread of Christianity and Islam, many Nigerians now deem it fit to reconsider ATR as a succour as well as a solution to their problems. Many people now choose adherence to ATR not just as a religion but also for the purpose of personal transformation, the role that Christianity and Islam are considerably unable to perform adequately. In the views of many of the new converts into ATR, following

Christianity and Islam simply provides identity and class formations with no salvific function. As earlier defined, ATR means those methods handed over by ancestors by which complicated and seemingly intractable problems are solved. This understanding emanated from the theoretical standpoint of *ó ní bí a, se n, sé* (that is, there is always a way by which complex problems are solved). This is necessary when the problem is complicated and unfathomable; when all popular, available and conventional solutions are not able to tract the issue, people are lured to go beyond the ordinary. This prompts the need to seek the support of *Òrìṣà*: energies and forces in space who in their own way are believed to control the affairs of the world.

## Mainstreaming the *Òrìṣà* (Deities) in the Fight against Corruption

How can the power and prowess of the *Òrìṣà* (deities) be mainstreamed in the fight against corruption? The African universe, I opine, is not just eco-systemic or eco-centric. This is because the general knowledge, as argued by literature on science, is not holistic or all-inclusive. The scientific literature on ecosystems argues that an eco-system is about plants and animals that live in a particular area together with the complex relationship between them and their environment (Kathleen, David and Gene, 2012). In my many years of ethnographic exploration among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, I have realized that the idea of the visible and the invisible is a complicated ontological issue among the indigenous people of Africa. This is because reality is seen as a whole with an interconnectedness of forces, and so it is alien to differentiate or dichotomize the so-called physical and the metaphysical. The African universe, therefore, is an inclusive universe locating realities not just in animals and plants or other physical realities but also in the so-called invisible entities. The African universe cannot be seeing as an eco-system, in fact, it is neither systemic nor systematic. It is a conflicting, complex and unfathomable universe full of innumerable energies or forces imposing and compelling relationships as the basis for equilibrium. These supposedly invisible realities are called *Òrìṣà*, *Irúnmòlè* and *Ìmòlè* which are translated in English as deities, divinities and gods/goddesses. This is the reason why the Yoruba called our universe *Ayé*, derived from *Àiyé*, which means the incomprehensible phenomenon (Jegede, 2012, p. 112). The Nigerian predica-

ment, therefore, cannot be detached from the problem of anthropocentrism, the notion that man is at the centre of the universe; hence, man is the most valuable of all creation. *Ayé* (world) from the African point of view is akin to Rudolf Otto's understanding of religious experience called the numinous dread or awe-fullness or *mysterium tremendum*, that is to say, that man's encounter with and experience of the world is a mysterious yet fascinating reality; it is attractive as well as repelling (Phillip, 1885; Todd, 2000, p. 123).

So, in this complex phenomenon called *Ayé*, the overemphasis on anthropocentrism (a theory that puts only humans at the centre of the universe) will be incapable of fostering cosmic balance even when the reality of human corruptibility is incontrovertible. If humans are corruptible, it is foolhardy to hand over the total running of the universe only to the humans. *Oḍù Ogbè-Yónú* lends credence to the corruptibility of man. In *Oḍù Ogbè-Yónú*, *Ifá* says:

<i>Òrúnmilà ní èyàn wón</i>	<i>Òrúnmilà</i> said (good) humans are scarce
<i>Ifá mo ní èyàn sòro</i>	<i>Ifá</i> , I said humans are complicated
<i>Òrúnmilà ní kò s'èyàn mọ</i>	<i>Òrúnmilà</i> said there are no good humans
<i>Ó ní t'ala a sun mọ?</i>	He ( <i>Òrúnmilà</i> ) said who shall we draw closer to?
<i>Ó ní t'alaà bá se?</i>	He ( <i>Òrúnmilà</i> ) said who shall we relate with?
<i>Ó ní t'alaà bá mulè tí ò leè da ní?</i>	He ( <i>Òrúnmilà</i> ) said who shall we make a covenant with that will not betray one's trust?
<i>Oòsànla ni òun ni</i>	<i>Oòsànla</i> (arch divinity; god of creation) said he is one that can be trusted because it is he who will not betray trust
<i>Ògún ní òun ni</i>	<i>Ògún</i> (god of iron and technology) said he is one who can be trusted
<i>Sàngó ni òun ni</i>	<i>Sàngó</i> (god of fire, lightning and thunder) said he is one who can be trusted
<i>Èsù ni òun ni.</i>	<i>Èsù</i> (god of law, order and justice or the divine enforcer) said he is one who can be trusted
<i>Mo bá Oòsànla mulè, ó dà mí</i>	I made a covenant with <i>Oòsànla</i> , he betrayed me
<i>Ó bèrè sí je ìgbín ati iyán elòmíràn</i>	He started to eat somebody else's snails and pounded yam.

<i>Mo bá Ògún mulẹ̀, ó dà mí</i>	I made a covenant with Ògún, he betrayed me
<i>Ó bèrè sí gbé ajá elòmíràn níbi gbogbo</i>	He started to take somebody else's dogs everywhere
<i>Mo bá Sàngo mulẹ̀, ó dà mí</i>	I made a covenant with Sàngo, he betrayed me
<i>Ó bèrè sí gbé àgùntàn àwọn èniyàn</i>	He started to carry away people's ram
<i>Mo bá Èsù mulẹ̀, kó dà mí</i>	I made a covenant with Èsù, he did not betray me.
<i>Èyàn wón</i>	Good people are scarce
<i>Mo bá Èsù mulẹ̀</i>	I, therefore, made a covenant with Èsù

Why should it be only humans who dominate both the moral and physical universe as if other beings are inconsequential? Other beings are, therefore, itching for inclusion, seeking cooperation with humans so that they can be properly mainstreamed into the running of the affairs of the universe. Given the intensity and the bewildering nature of corruption in Nigeria and the fragility of the Nigerian state, it is apt to state that corruption in that country is transcendental, and thus requires a transcendental solution. There is largely a need for a conscious and systemic mobilization of other realities within the space in cooperation with human beings to stem the tide of corruption in Nigeria.

## African Traditional Religion (ATR), Oath-taking and the Fight against Corruption

Phenomenologically speaking, oath-taking is premised on invaluable components of the judicial system of the indigenous societies. The idea of oath-taking emerges from the understanding of human limitation. In its essence, the very idea of human limitation dehumanises humanness. Oath-taking among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is *Ìbú-ara*, that is, to abuse humanness. This means that humans are expected to be incorruptible. However, there is also the recognition of the possibility of corruptibility. Because humans are corruptible, humans are therefore vulnerable. Incorruptibility is the basis for which an individual is considered capable of holding a position of trust and in trust; the need for oath-taking is, therefore, predicated on the limitedness of the humans. This is expressed in *Ifá* verses thus:

<i>Imú ji, ó kàn ǹwòran òòkán.</i>	The nose wakes actively but can only see the front
<i>Àtàn pákò ji ó kàn ǹwòran òna</i>	The toes wake up and only watches the road
<i>Òòkán ni gbogbo wa níwò, a ò raye</i>	Man only looks a little far away but unable to see the world where he lives
<i>Omo èniyàn fò ojú inu, èdà kò gbòn tan</i>	Man's inner eyes are blindfolded; he is not totally wise
<i>Èni tí ó lójú méjì tí ò mọ ibi tí ǹlọ</i>	Man, though with two eyes, does not know where he is going

So, the vulnerability of humans to do evil is the reason for oath-taking. The problem here is the liturgy of the oath. For over 62 years since the independence of Nigeria, the oath-taking patterns in the Nigerian public service still follow Christian and Muslim oath liturgies. Nevertheless, the volume of corruption and corruptibility has continued to rise higher and higher. The liturgies of these two religious traditions are too watery, little, ordinary and therefore inconsequential. Each one of them is an oath-taking liturgy that is bereft of powers and energies in the universe that can make the oath-taking consequential. This explains why political leaders do not fear the oath they swear before coming into office. The oaths have no direct adverse effects on the oath-taker and are therefore inconsequential. Most of the public office holders do not see oath-taking as anything anymore because the institutions, whose judges swear them in, are not even strong because corruption has equally eaten deep into the very fabric of the judicial system.

As gleaned from the interview sessions with the respondents, in Nigeria, it is interesting to note that business owners, communities, and other groups including social and political associations, have resorted to private oath-taking patterns that are not in line with the constitution of Nigeria. Rather, they follow rigorous indigenous oath-taking patterns using *Ògún*, *Sàngó*, *Ayélála* and others. Many Christians and Muslims, including Christian ministers and members of the general public, are now agitating that traditional deities (*Ògún*, *Sàngó*, *Ayélála*, etc.) be used together with the Bible and the Quran to swear-in public office holders. The general opinion is that curses should be attached to the tools used during the swearing-in of public officeholders. They are saying that the government

should utilize indigenous religious tools to battle financial corruption, instead of relying only on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which sometimes ends up losing cases against corrupt leaders.

### *Ògún as an anti-corruption ethical divinity*

In the precolonial Yoruba community, *Ògún* was concerned about the peace and stability of every community. *Ògún* is, therefore, called upon to help punish an offender or vindicate an innocent person. This explains why *Ògún*'s shrines were everywhere in the precolonial Yoruba. One would always find his shrine at the entrance, centre and outskirts of the community. In the indigenous Nigerian society, no deity commands as much attention and veneration as the *Ògún*. He is the most indispensable of the *Orìṣà* (Idowu, 1996). This is because *Ogun*'s eyes were believed to be everywhere so as to identify corrupt people and as well punish them. In everyday living, one comes into inevitable contact with him as one cannot for once do without *Ògún*. A chant in his honour evinces the essentiality of *Ògún*:

<i>Àpòṣà má-pògún</i>	One who praises all sorts of divinity and refuses to call <i>Ògún</i>
<i>Ara e l'ó tǎnjẹ</i>	Only involves himself in self-deceit
<i>Ó dá mi lójú gbangba</i>	I am pretty much sure.

The influence of his reality is obvious in virtually every part of Yorubaland despite the overbearing influence of modernity. In Yoruba mythology, *Ògún* is a primordial *Orìṣà* whose first appearance was as a hunter named *Tobe Ode*. He is said to be the first of the *Orìṣà* to descend to the physical realm from *àjùlé òrun* (sky heaven) to *àjùlé ayé* (the earth) to find suitable habitation for future human life. In commemoration of this, one of his *Oríki* (praise names), is *Ògún lá ká ayé, Qsìn Imọlẹ* (meaning, one who is honoured all through the earth, first of the *Orìṣà* to come to the earth).

Olawuyi (1988) said Soyinka describes *Ògún* as “essential god of restorative justice”. Also the most popular and widespread *Orìṣà* in Yoruba, in Nigeria's postcolonial period, has been *Ògún* (Matory, 2005). Among the divinities in Yorubaland, *Ògún* is one of the highest. In Yoruba lore, *Ògún* and the other gods climbed down from sky-heaven to earth on a spider web. As Soyinka in Olawuyi (1988) explains:

The shard of original Oneness which contained the creative flint appears to have passed into the being of *Ògún*...With creativity, however, as its complementary aspect, *Ògún* came to symbolise the creative-destructive principle as well as terrible guardian of the sacred oath.

In the cult of *Òrìṣà*, *Ògún* appears in seven different dimensions which are emblematic of his multidimensionality and multifarious responsibilities. Each of these facets is connected with the other. The facets are; *Ògún Ogbòrò*, *Ògún Onírè*, *Ògún Mòlámòlá*, *Ògún Ìkòlá*, *Ògún Onígbàjámò*, *Ògún Alàrá*, *Ògún gbènágbèná*.

No one who believes in *Òrìṣà* would dare lie after swearing to tell the truth on *Ògún*. When we speak of truth, in *Ògún's* ethical theory, it does not mean some idealistic vision of the way things should be. *Ògún* searches for the truth about the way things really exist in the world. Harping on *Ògún's* attribute as a god of justice, Babalola (1989, p. 155) asserts that *Ògún* is an Aeneas or a figure of Robin Hood, showing kindness towards the poor and the needy with the abundance of his riches. By his nature, and as an essential aspect of his attributes, he is a protector with inner and outward eagerness to respond to the appeal of the oppressed. *Ògún* is, therefore, a warrior against injustice. The saying of the Yoruba regarding *Ògún's* ability to see what is in the innermost part of man is: *Bí mo bá sèkè, bí mo bá dalè, Ògún rí'nú* (If I secretly did evil, if I betrayed trust, *Ògún* sees me inside out). *Ògún*, by virtue of his attributes is able to severely punish a corrupt individual without going through the complex judicial systems.

*Ògún* is the patron of smiths and is usually displayed with his attributes: gun, machete or sabre, and rum; hence, fabrication and creation in the blacksmith shop is possible only through the conflictingly interacting force of iron and fires which symbolizes the capacity of *Ògún* to bring sanity to the society which in turns result to the equilibrium of the cosmos. According to the Haitian tradition, it was *Ògún* who is said to have planted the idea, led and given power to the slaves for the Haitian Revolution of 1804. To date, he is called upon to help people obtain a government more responsive to their needs.

The key incident in the *Ògún* myth is *Ògún's* traversing of what Soyinka calls "the transitional gulf" like a spiritual colossus, *Ògún* bestrode the beginning, I mean the ancient times (before history). According to Soyinka in Olawuyi (1988):

When long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they (the gods) tried, but failed, to demolish, *Ògún* was the only deity who sought the way, and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man.

*Ògún*, having plunged through the abyss, called on the others to follow, hence, the saying *Ògún ló lànà dé 'fè* (*Ògún* made the way to Ife). When creation was completed, the gods realized that people needed to clear

more land in the forest where they lived. Unfortunately, the only tools available were made of soft metal, a material not suitable for cutting down trees. However, Ògún had been given the secret of iron by *Ọrúnmìlà*, son of the supreme god *Ọlórún*, and he used an iron axe to clear the forest. Ògún later shared the secret of iron with the other gods and with humans. He also showed them how to shape the iron into weapons.

### *Ayélála as an anti-corruption ethical divinity*

*Ayélála* is a female deity whose epiphany epitomized the vastness of African universe and the mystery of reality. In the legend of *Ayélála*, we see the innerness of humanity, the very source where actions are conceived before being executed, and this is itself a mystery, thus incomprehensible and unsearchable. That is to say, the depth of man's action is hidden in utmost mystery. This, of course, is the reason why there is the suffering of the innocent, and as a result many people are suffering the consequences of the offence they never committed. Most times evils are done surreptitiously. An apparent demonstration of human evilness is the fact that no one can foretell what man can do. Most of the times, it is circumstances or situations that determine the action anybody takes. Is it not possible for a man to eat his child as meat in the time of famine? The Yoruba say: *Tí ilé bá dá, àgbalagbà á kó oḣeje* (if there is nobody in the house, an elderly man can steal soup in the pot). Most of the times the divine attributes of a human are manifested through suffering. The suffering of the innocent has in most cases served as the leeway for the trans-connection with the divine reality in the heavenly realm.

There are many conflicting myths regarding how *Ayélála* came to be regarded as a divine personality. The common thread that runs through the myths is that she was either rightly or wrongly accused of stealing or adultery. One legend states that she was forcefully offered as a sacrifice to seal the covenant of peace treaty and avoidance of killings, stealing, witchcraft and sorcery between the two warring parties. Before she died, she shouted *Ayé mà lá la o! Ayélála!* (the world is a huge and incomprehensible phenomenon). By virtue of the fact that she had joined the ancestors, she was saddled with the responsibility for enforcing the terms of the covenant by punishing anyone who refused to abide by it. An account as narrated by Fafeyiwa (2003, p. 3) is that *Ayélála* was killed because she broke the *Orò* taboo which forbids women from coming out to see *Orò*. She was killed gruesomely. It was said that she was buried alive with her head outside as a punishment for either adultery or stealing. With her head in the open,

she shouted several times *Ayé mà lá la o! Ayélála!*, after which she died. The word *Ayélála* therefore serves as Africans' concept regarding the nature of the world, crime, criminality and punishment. It is epistemological as it can serve as a theoretical stand point with which the African concept of the cosmos, crime and criminality can be discussed. The probing of crime by law enforcers is not able to confront the criminal with facts, and evidence is in many cases partial, discredited and susceptible to fixing. To bring about an essentially pragmatic and empirical legal system, humans are therefore confronted with the indispensability of the god's oriented holistic jurisprudence. According to Awolalu (1975, p. 42), the prompt judgment of *Ayélála* brought about fear of engaging in any evil. There was a general understanding of the devastating judgment of *Ayélála*, and the resultant effect was justice and fairplay. This suggests to us the need to move away from de facto dichotomy to multiple conceptions of justice by using state and non-state instruments: legal, semi judicial and non-judicial techniques.

## **Malediction/Curses and the Fight against Corruption in Nigeria**

Modernization and missionary religions such as Islam and Christianity forbid the use of curses or malediction. According to Leeson (2012, p. 193), a curse is an appeal to a supernatural power to physically, emotionally, spiritually, or otherwise bring harm to another person or a people. In African traditional religion (ATR), malediction is considered to be an avenue through which negative energies are invoked and activated to create fear and prevent the advancement of evil. It is the invocation of negative energies in space so that they fall upon the evil doers especially in a situation where government agencies and other apparatus of law are ineffective. In such cases, people can resort to self-help especially against predators. In the indigenous African society, particularly among the *Yòrùbá*, curses are very important and powerful. They are used to hurl evil consequences upon the person or people responsible for the evil that bedevils a people. Curses enable people to express themselves with powerful emotions thereby venting out their anger. They are used to safeguard the integrity of the people because curses are able to create fear of doing evil in the people. They allow for justice without the court of law and judgment without judges.

In many parts of the indigenous *Yòrùbá* society, especially before Western modernity, there were festivals, rituals and liturgies of curses. These were used to guide and checkmate people in positions of authority as well as the general public. By so doing, the people's anger would then be turned directly against those who engage in any form of corruption that brought calamity upon the people. There are examples of cannons of maledictions among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. In the ritual and liturgy of curses, women lead. This is because among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, women are regarded as carriers of greater spiritual energies than men. They spread ashes on their heads and other parts of their bodies, appear half-naked by opening their breasts, moving round the communities and hurling all forms of calamitous curses on evil doers. In doing these acts women can invoke energies in nature and ask them to fight evil and evil people. Women, children and even men are mobilized, filed in two or more long lines and they hurl curses in a litanic and liturgical manner following a form of versicles and responses. It could be musical, mythical, proverbial, or a strong verbal expression, even a combination of all these. For this to be effective, there must be cursors and those to be cursed. It must be grounded in target, existing beliefs and unfalsifiable.

When a malediction satisfies all the above conditions, it becomes an effective institutional substitute for conventional agencies of security and law enforcement, especially against corruption in Nigeria. The use of curses to stem the tide of corruption has not been explored adequately in contemporary Nigeria. This is because of the pervading modernity, the enthronement of Western rationality and the spread of Christianity and Islam which forbid the use of curses. The lethargy in the use of curses is also linked to the increasing role that legal authorities and other agencies of law play in the maintenance of law and order. But the fact remains that foreign religions and the secular judicial system have woefully failed to stem the tide of corruption in Nigeria.

## Ritual of *Ìmulẹ̀* (Covenant)

*Ìmulẹ̀* (Covenant) is an institutional method of regulating human behaviour and bringing sanity to the community in the Yoruba societies. It is a special form of oath-taking that bonds the people together in doing what is right and is able to bring sustainable development to the people. With *Ìmulẹ̀*, it is dangerous to do anything contrary to the covenant one has made. One of the hunters interviewed by the researcher claimed that

*Ìmùlẹ̀* is what necessitates utmost carefulness and caution among them. He further claimed that *Ilẹ̀* (the earth) is able to swallow anyone who does something contrary to the covenant he has made.

*Ìmùlẹ̀* (covenant) is the drinking of the earth. *Ìmùlẹ̀* implies that the drinking of the earth is fundamental to harmony in the space. *Ìmùlẹ̀* presupposes that if humans eat food, drink water, build houses, walk on the surface of the earth, then the humans constantly drink from the earth and are sustained by the earth. The earth is, therefore, the host and humans are her guests. The ritual of *ìmùlẹ̀* (covenant taking) is fundamental in many Yoruba indigenous communities. Among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, the earth is regarded as a delicate phenomenon and, therefore, has to be treaded upon carefully. This is because the earth may bend, and this might portend grave danger to other human species. To do the ritual of *ìmùlẹ̀* is to covenant with the earth by seeking justice from the earth. The basis for this assertion is the fact that the earth is the ultimate authority. Since humans do everything on the surface of the earth, this means that they have a strong unbreakable bond with fellow humans and other realities on the surface of the earth. In fact, to live on the earth is to engage in a covenant with the earth. This is the essence of human existence, as humans are supposed to cooperate with the earth for the equilibrium of the cosmos. This is why the following Yoruba saying is apt:

<i>A gbórí'lẹ̀, a je'ku o</i>	We live on the earth to eat rat
<i>A gbórí'lẹ̀, a jeja</i>	We live on the earth to eat fish
<i>A gbórí'lẹ̀, a se'bajẹ̀</i>	Yet we live on the earth to do evil
<i>Aṣe wa dọwọ̀ ilẹ̀ ta jo mu.</i>	The ultimate authority belongs to the earth that we drink together.

The whole of the lives of the indigenous Africans, particularly the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, is covenantal. All humans engage in *ìmùlẹ̀* in one way or the other. However, there are rituals of *ìmùlẹ̀* in which people who hold public positions in trust are made to drink the earth. By so doing, the people seek the judgement of the earth if the person engages in evil acts that may be detrimental not just to the survival of the people but also to the equilibrium of the cosmos.

The ritual is done in such a manner that one is made to go through several secret places, drink and eat all kinds of concoctions. There may be need to taste the blood of an animal as well as to make pronouncements by hurling curses. These are done to seek direct judgement of *ilẹ̀* (the earth) if the individual does anything that may be inimical to the survival of the

people. Very crucial to the *imulè* (covenant ritual) is the digging of the earth and pouring of water on the hole and the covenantee is made to bend directly to drink water from the earth. It is in doing this that the consequences of corruption can be seen to be fatal.

In the search for solutions to the problem of corruption in Nigeria, indigenuous voices have been silenced deliberately, and the fight against corruption is unduly too anthropocentric, neglecting the essentiality of other realities. If other realities in the universe are corruptible, humans are also corruptible beings, so humans cannot absolutely regard themselves as the only beings that are able to direct the affairs of the universe. Nigerians have continually relied only on the colonial justice system that is so inappropriate and complex. Instead of solving the problems of corruption, this system has rather aggravated it. The United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People (2007) affirms that indigenous people are equal to all other people and therefore deserve to be respected and not to be repressed. Integrating certain practices from African traditional religion in the fight against corruption reinforces the saying that *ó ní bá a se má a nse* (there is always a way we handle complex situations). This is imperative given the fact that corruption is the key problem responsible for the Nigerian predicaments and the fragility of the Nigerian State. There is increasing desperation to stem the tide of corruption so that Nigeria might not be consumed. Given the failure of the oath-taking patterns in Christianity and Islam and the inadequacy of the western legal and judicial systems, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its tenets should be explored in Nigeria to bring an end to corrupt practices. If not, we will not be able to overcome corruption anytime soon.

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