

## **African Traditional Religion and Crime Control in Igbo Traditional Society: Challenges in the 21st Century Nigeria**

**Wilson E. Anowia; Emeka S. Ejim & Okechukwu O. Anozie**  
Humanities Unit, School of General Studies  
University of Nigeria,  
Nsukka

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the concept of crime and crime control in African Traditional Religion (ATR), using the traditional Igbo society of South Eastern Nigeria as a focus. In African Traditional Religion, crime is a serious violation of standardized ways of behavior, customs and traditions of the people as approved by the Supreme Being, the gods and divinities. The fundamental issue in the study of crime is the search for causes and subsequent control of the evil. In view of that, Ethnographic methodology with the application of social control theory was used in this study. It was discovered that the challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century weakened African traditional religious method of crime control in the Igbo society, leading to high rate of crime in the contemporary society. The paper recommends a synergy of the positive methods in ATR with the modern methods of crime control for an effective crime control in the modern Igbo society and Nigeria at large.

**Keyword:** Crime, Crime control, Igbo Society, African Traditional Religion.

### **Introduction**

Crime is a social problem, a cankerworm that destroys the fabric of any nation. It is applicable to every society in the world. However, each society has different ways or institutions of controlling crime at each point in time. The underlying essence of the crime control institutions in any society is to guide against deviance and sustain conformity to peace and order, and established rules, norms and values in

the society. In the traditional Igbo society of South-eastern Nigeria, African traditional religion, as their natural religion played a unique role and was the bedrock of crime control, especially before the infiltration of external influences. Cultural practices and religious beliefs were intertwined in the traditional society. Religion was so woven with life that the sacred and the profane were inseparable. Everything was done religiously, seen religiously and interpreted religiously.

A strong moral base was built in the traditional society by the traditional religion because the adherents took the precepts of their religion very seriously. In most cases, crime was said to be an 'abomination', *alu*, which attracted dreadful punishments like sanctions, ill-luck, disease and death from God and the gods not only for the culprit but also his immediate family and close relatives. As a result, people were afraid of offending the gods whose punishments were grave and immediate and, therefore, strived to conform to the norms, customs and traditions of the society to avoid any of the dreadful consequences. In the light of that, there existed relative peace and equity, good conscience and moral probity, uprightness and honesty, and respect for elders, constituted authorities and customs and norms of the society. People slept with their eyes closed, ate from one plate, drank with one cup and gave correct testimony to any case in witness. Crime rate was controlled to the barest minimum through the instrumentality of the prevalent religious culture.

The religious culture of the Igbo is enshrined in their moral code, *Omenala* or *Odinala*, literally interpreted as 'traditional customs'. It formed the fundamental moral characters in the traditional society, hedged round with a lot of taboos (prohibitions) and was held sacrosanct by the traditional society. It was from the above that the traditional society derived their impetus and methods for maintaining conformity to norms and order in the society. Though primitive as it were, and not codified, the traditional methods were very useful, in the true

sense of it, as it was a well established means for controlling crimes and maintaining social order in the Igbo traditional society. Thus, Ezenibe (1999) states that "these traditional methods of crime control were means the society used to encourage conformity to norms and order." Today, with the advent of Western civilization amidst the attendant vicissitudes, the society has become more complex. As a result, the traditional methods are seriously challenged and increasingly disengaged from the process of crime control and maintaining conformity to law and order. Consequent to that, crimes like insincerity, dishonesty, bribery and corruption, hypocrisy, armed robbery, willful murder, incest, rape, kidnapping, white collar crimes, and all sorts of evil have become as complex as human nature and polarized in the society. This unsavory development has generated a lot of concern amongst scholars, religious clerics, non-governmental organizations and government (Emmanuel, 1999:12). It is therefore the prime objective of this study to ascertain the historic antecedents to the rate at which the traditional religious crime control, which is the age long tradition of our fore fathers, is fading away. It seems to do this by identifying the traditional religious agents and methods of crime control and ascertaining the challenges to such traditional methods in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Understanding Crime and African Traditional Religion (ATR)**

Generally, crime, as defined by Elias (1978:8) is "an act of commission

which tends to prejudice the community and is forbidden by law under pains of punishment inflicted by the state." According to Microsoft Encarta (2009), crime refers to acts of omission that violates the law and is punishable by the state. Crimes are considered injurious to society or the community as distinguished from tort and breach of contracts. Crime is a socio-legal subject, a wrong committed against the society that is punished by the Court and controlled by legislation and not merely as moral phenomenon conterminous with sin or moral guilt (Opata, 1975: 5). However, in Igbo traditional society, any act or conduct that violated the cherished norms or values of the community or group, and which was visited with severe sanction, can be referred to as crime (Igbo & Ugwuoke, 2013:162). Crime in traditional religious Igbo set-up could either be secular or sacrilegious. Secular crime directly offends man or the society, while sacrilegious crime offends the Supernatural being(s). It is this type of crime that disrupts the ontological order and strains the relationship between man and the supernatural forces. Crime in traditional religious Igbo society could also be grouped into major or serious crime, otherwise referred to as 'abomination', *alu* or *nso-ala*, and minor crime, *nmehie*, depending on the circumstances and the propensity of such crime to arouse strong indignation and condemnation among the people. Both Igbo (2007:143) and Onyeozili and Ebbe (2012:33-34) agree that offences which were generally regarded as abominations include murder, adultery, rape, incest, suicide, killing or eating a domestic animal

dedicated to the gods; or any other offence against the gods; and minor crimes '*Mmehie*' as burglary, robbery, stealing, etc. There is, however, no watertight demarcation in the classifications of crime in the traditional Igbo society.

It should also be noted that the type of crimes experienced in the traditional society reflects the value of the time. For example, there were no bank robberies as there were no banks. Ayuk, Owan, & Uyang (2013) argue that no community has remained unaffected by the negative consequences of crime. It adversely affects the community, hampers the quality of life to be led by the citizens and threatens human life and rights to freedom. Generally, crime puts the society in a state of sorrow, disintegrates the whole community and spells out disaster and certain stigma on the family, group or village concerned. In modern society, the physical and emotional impact of crime can be devastating both for victims and their families and friends. Depending on one's situation, he or she may experience a combination of reactions, feelings and symptoms that signal cognitive and emotional effects. Cognitive may be in forms of Disorientation, Confusion, Memory problems, Poor attention spans, Disturbed thinking, blaming someone, Distressing dreams, etc. Emotional Responses, on the other hands may manifest through Fear/anxiety, Anger, Grief, Depression, Guilt, Feeling helpless, Feeling isolated, Desire to withdraw/hide, etc. In most cases these reactions, feelings and symptoms are temporary but persist in few cases.

Ogiowo (1978:56) has defined crime control as various means by which a society exercise its authority over its members and enforces conformity to its norms. Crime control seeks to hold the volume of crime in effective check, to keep it from spreading, to restrict and prevent crime infection and the attendant contamination, to prevent crime from breaking out and spreading into new places and new areas and protect the society against the activities and aggressions of abnormal and habitual offenders (Oputa, 1975:21). For the purpose of this study, crime control will be defined as those agencies and means employed by the society or community to counter and punish behaviours or acts that violate its norms. In other words, they are the "proscription and prescription of any community or society which watch and regulate the behaviour of its members."

Madu (1997:132) describes African Traditional Religion as a way of practicing religion by Africans before the advent of the missionary religions. This is in agreement with Awolalu (1976:275) who defines it as the indigenous religion of the African. It is the religion that has been handed down by the forebears to generations of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living and practicing it. Ekwunife (1990:1) summarizes ATR as

those institutional belief and practices of indigenous religion of African which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive

African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales, songs and dance, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy saying and names), sacred specialist and persons, sacred space and object and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities. It is therefore, a religion of Africans whose God is supreme, with representatives or agents. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshiped; a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young and old.

### **The Igbo and their Religious Belief**

The Igbo are people who geographically occupy the Southeastern part of Nigeria. They constitute one out of the three major tribal groups in Nigeria. The people speak Igbo and are mainly Christians who may have been converted from ATR. Igbo is located between the parallels of 60 and 81/20 longitudes and 41/40 and 70 north longitudes (Arinze, 1970). At present, they occupy Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi States and parts of Rivers and Delta States. According to Christian (2014:2), "Igbo people speak a number of related dialects, occupy a continuous tract of territory and have many features of social structures and culture in common, "but they were not formally politically united." No wonder an Igbo adage says, '*Igbo Ama*

Eze' (the Igbo know no kings). However, Ifemesie (1979: 16) had described the *modus Vivendi* of traditional Igbo society as based on 'humane living'. That is, "a way of life emphatically centred upon human interest and values, a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy, consideration and compassion for human beings." In other words, "the social order and character of traditional Igbo society guaranteed honest living and maximum security of life and property" (Ekwuru, 1999: 7).

As earlier noted, the original religion of the Igbo people is African Traditional Religion (ATR). As a matter of fact, African Traditional Religion is so woven with life in the traditional society that life means religion and religion means life. Whatever religion forbids or condemns, the society also forbids and condemns, and whatever religion approves, the society also approves. Thus, in a unique nature, religion, morality, spirituality, tradition, law, both divine and human, are interwoven in the traditional society and geared at not just social engineering but total integration of the entire aspect of human life. In other words, what the religion believes is what the traditional society believes and practices because the precepts for peaceful co-existence and life in the society hinge on the above symbioses. Mbiti (1980:2) summed it up thus,

Religion permeates into all the facets of the life of our people. In whatever they do, they are expected to be aware of their religious obligations as well as its sanctions and prohibitions.

As Radcliffe Brown (1975) puts it, "the religious sanctions are constituted in any community by the existence of certain beliefs which are obligatory; it is therefore within a religious community that these sanctions exist." Behaviours contrary to the religious expectations are frowned at.

African (Igbo) Traditional society has the fundamental belief in the existence of a Supreme Being, the source of all beings, which, according to Ugwu (1999:47), is called 'Chineke'. Added to this is the belief in the existence of other deities considered as agents of 'Chineke'. Examples of these deities are 'Ala' (earth goddess), 'Amadioha' and 'Kamanu' (Thunder) and ancestors. Of these, the earth goddess, 'Ala', and the ancestors serve as binding forces for the members of the community. Man also occupied a paramount position in the belief system of the Igbo traditional society. According to Oguejiofor, in Eluu (2015:58), "for the Igbo, existence is meaningful in so far as it affects the life of man." It is also believed that man, the head of all creatures, was created a moral agent, gifted with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong; that the Supreme Being and his agents (the divinities and Spirits) are interested in what goes in the world of man. They keep watch over human behavior, reward men favorably when they observe the rules of conduct as laid down and punish them dreadfully when they go contrary to such rules. In fact, the Igbo believe in God and also have the fear of God and the ancestors in their day-to-day dealings with human beings. The recognition of the existence of

God, the fear of God and the ancestors which can manifest in keeping the laws of God and taboos of the ancestors, other spiritual forces and man in society, the regular offerings and full participation in religious rituals in the community, all help to turn the traditional religious Igbo adherent to a sacred person (Eluu, 2015:58) who would prefer pious life, righteous life, truthful life, life of moral probity, life of innocence, life of sanity, etc., to dubious life, immoral life, life of bribery and corruption, insincere life, adultery, shedding of blood, etc., and anything that would incriminate them to the wrath of the gods.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Social control theory was employed for the analysis of this study. The theory was linked to delinquency which Reiss (1951), Nye (1958) and Toby (1958) define as, "...behavior consequent to the failure of personal and social controls." It assumes that human beings can be induced to behave in conformity with societal standards and expectations (Haskell and Yoblonky, 1970). According to control theorists, what causes conformity is social control over the individual, and therefore the absence of social control causes deviance (Thio, 2001: 27). According to Hirschi and Michael (2005), Theory of Social Control is not without specified ways to organize the various control mechanisms that are already 'in place' in society. In fact, the theory specified that it is the responsibility of these control mechanisms, like the law and order enforcement teams and the physical paradigms within each

community, to effectively and periodically address delinquent behaviours. There are three versions of the social control theory which are relevant for this study.

The first is the 'containment' version developed by Reckless (1967). The argument here is that the society differently exercises control over individuals as a means of ensuring immunity against the urge to engage in criminal behaviours. Hirschi (2002) strongly supported the theory and emphasized the role of society in the control of criminal behaviour. Society is meant to provide reinforcement of dictated values to keep any type of causal or motivational delinquency traits at bay. The second is the 'social bond' version developed by Hirschi (1969) which focuses on individual's self control occasioned by the strength of the individual's social bond with intimate groups like the family, church, school, etc. Thio (2001: 28) corroborated this by stating that, "conformity depends on the degree to which people are attached and committed to, and involved and believe in, conventional people and institutions." One would not like to disappoint or lose one's beloved family, kiths and kin, church or school by misbehaving or indulging in anti-social or criminal conducts. The next version is the 'shaming theory' developed by Braithwaite (1989). The strength of this theory lies in social disapproval and humiliation of the individual offender. The truth here is that whether it came on the offender as a re-integrative (corrective) or as 'disintegrative' (disowning or rejecting) measure, it has a great

negative stigma on both the individual and his intimate social bond groups.

Social control theory proposes that people's relationships, commitments, values, norms, and beliefs encourage them not to break the law. Thus, if moral codes are internalized and individuals are tied into and have a stake in their wider community, they will voluntarily limit their propensity to commit deviant acts. This is true with the traditional Igbo society that had all the trappings of a close-knit group. The traditional Igbo society is pivoted on strong social bond or solidarity with the nuclear and extended family system as well as the kin group and community. The people prided themselves much as "being their brothers' keeper", in health and in sickness, in all circumstance (except perhaps in crime). Thus the social control theory is preferred and mostly relevant for this study.

#### **Agents of Crime Control**

In the traditional religious Igbo setting there are several agents of crime control which in the modern days are performed by the police, law courts and prisons. Some of these agents are entirely sacred and spiritual while others are secular and human. The sacred are rooted in religious institutions and the secular in human institutions. The sacred includes: Traditional Priests, Diviners, Deities, Ancestors and Masquerades. The secular are; Age Grades, Village Assembly, Elder's Forum, Youth Forum, *Umuada*, Women Association and the Vigilante. For want of space, only the deities, ancestors, masquerade, age grade, village

assembly and women association will be discussed here.

**Ancestors:** Belief in the ancestors is a major element in African (Igbo) traditional religion. Parrinder (1974:24) writes that "All Africans believe in the ancestors, as ever-living and watchful." The ancestors are recognized, respected and feared due largely to the fact that, even though they are dead, they are still living and keeping surveillance over the affairs of the living. Because the dead ancestors are buried in the earth, the earth goddess, *Ala*, is believed to work in close conjunction with the spirits of the ancestors to produce the moral codes with which the family or community lives and regulates its affair. Strengthening the above belief, Adibe (1992:15) expressly remarked that Taboos and *Omenani* as Igbo moral codes are powerful legal sanctions derived from the deity. The faith and moral life of the Igbo people revolve around them. The *Ani* or *Ala* deity sanctioned the prohibitions or moral norms and the dead ancestors communicated same to the living. The living makes sure that these prohibitions are not contravened because of the destructive consequences it will bring to all of them. Therefore, as the guardians of morality, the ancestors take note of any crime, sin or misdeed, no matter how innate, and subject the perpetrator to a dreadful punishment or even to death. Consequently, people behave in accordance with the interest of the ancestors to avoid any catastrophe it may bring to them, their clan or lineage.

**The Deities:** According to Awolalu (1976:275), Africans hold that man is vitally related to and even dependent upon Deities and their agents who watch over human behavior and can reward or punish man, as the case may be. In traditional Igbo society, some communities had deities which were believed to be powerful and capable of mirroring people's intents and actions and punishing bad ones dreadfully. In the same vein, some misfortunes that happen to people or groups in the olden days were seen as punishments brought upon them for their evil deeds by the deities. Prominent among the deities is *Ala*, (the earth goddess) which is believed to sanction, together with the ancestral spirits, the moral code (*Omenani*) of the people in conjunction with customary taboos and to guard it against any breach. Ilogu (1975:40) stresses that religious conception of '*Ala*' is very important in indigenous Igbo morality when he said that, "*ala* (the earth goddess) is the most important divinity in ... moral life." *Nso-ala*, (abominations) are considered as offences against the earth deity, *Ala*. The deity is avoided by all, including the custodians and the chief priests, because it is feared that '*Ala*' and the ancestors will inflict dreadful punishment on the offenders who violate prohibitions and customary taboos of the land. Breach of *Omenani* is also spoken of as *nso-ala* (abomination or sin against the earth deity). It was believed that an offender of that sort would either die mysteriously or with a protruded stomach (*ito afo*) after openly confessing his sins (*isa asisa*), as a punishment by *Ala*; or the person

might be inflicted with terrible calamities by the deities. Such offenders were buried in a tabooed (evil) forest. From the above backdrop, the influence of deities in Igbo traditional society was so widespread that it impinged on the psyche of the people and constrained their inclination to engage on serious misconduct, thereby working for the community as a potent deterrence against crime (Igbo and Ugwuoke 2013:164). Some other examples of these dreaded deities were: the *Ibinukpabi* oracle of Arochukwu, *Igwe ka Ala* of Umuneoha, the *Agballa* of Awka, the *Onyili-Ora* near Nri and the *Ogba* of Ogbunike (Dike and Ekejiuba, 1990; 130-131).

**Masquerade:** The Masquerade was a powerful agent of crime control in Igbo traditional society. Generally, Masquerade members often appear at nights, but in some places and cases during the day with masks to hide their identity. They play the role of supernatural being or spirits with the mission of denouncing or attacking offenders. According to Onyeneke (1993:6), the personal identity of the animator of the masquerade is hidden, suppressed and strictly guarded as a secret. Isichei (1976:23) has also noted that the anonymity of the members and their supernatural aura made the society a potent sanction against crime. Ifemesia (1979:80) observed that they can detect crime, penalize culprits and enforce harmony in the community. The masquerades could also seal off the person's property, arrest, detain, fine or kill the offender (Dike and Ekejiuba 1990:288). They could also destroy things around the



compound that will affect the ostracize victim. As a result, people are compelled to behave well to avoid incurring their wrath. Such masquerades include: the 'Ekpe' and 'Iyamba' of Aro, the 'Odo' and 'Omabe' in Okpogho community of Ezeagu, Enugu State, the 'Egbele' in Afikpo area, the 'Oshereji' of Oguta and the 'Okonko' of Ngwa. Some of these deities were the highest courts of the traditional society.

**Traditional Priests and Diviners:**

Some priests attached to certain shrines, diviners or soothsayers are believed to have the power to trace criminals and to punish them by pronouncing curses against them. Their pronouncements on any matter seemed like the pronouncements of gods and their efficacy were believed without doubt. As a result, people do everything possible to avoid criminal behaviors and such pronouncements on them.

**Age Grade:** Age group is an organization of adult males who fall within a certain age range. These people co-operate mutually in the socio-economic interests as well as carry out the decision of the policy makers. According to Arinze (1978:3), they help to maintain law and order, bring suspected criminals before the elders, collect fines and give general help in social work. Also, as Eisen (1982:122) puts it, "Age grade in a society is a prerequisite of a society for the socialization of the young and their development into adulthood." Age grades instil discipline among members of the society and they are the police of the people. For example,

when decisions are taken by the village council to ostracize a person who has committed a sacrilegious crime, like incest, murder, stealing or armed robbery etc, it is the duty of this age grade to carry out such decisions. They can also mobilize to bring to book offenders of the law before the village assembly for appropriate punishment.

**Women Association:** Apart from controlling crime they also organize themselves into a formidable association which exerts strong influence on fellow members as well as other members of the society especially, unmarried girls. According to Chika (2009), when any of their members commits a very serious crime, they will send to her a clay pot musical instrument with its mouth covered. This indicates that such a member has a hard nut to crack with them. Later, after the village council must have tried the offender and meted appropriate punishment, they will come back and demand for their musical instrument, which will be returned with a fine given to her. The women associations like the *Umuada* (Lineage Daughters), also helps in checkmating teenage pregnancy and cases of infidelity among members.

**Village Assembly:** Of all the crime control agents, the village assembly is the most formidable and important. It could be regarded as an informal supreme court and, *ipso facto*, the highest court of appeal in the community. Arinze (1978:7) attested to the powerful position of the village assembly as he states that "the Igbo greatest political organization was

often the village assembly. It coordinates and monitors the crime control activities of the other agents. It has judicial powers over and above other agents. They make laws that guide the citizens, as well as try cases of breaking. Fines are imposed on law breaking where there are threats on one's life; the village assembly would require the traitor to take an oath for the offence committed. Any action that negates communal co-existence are frowned at by the village assembly. By this, the society is controlled and the citizen made to abide by the norms and rules of the society.

#### **Methods of Crime Control**

The strength of traditional crime control mechanisms lies in its effectiveness on the psyche of the preliterate man. The traditional man has a deep reverence for tradition and custom, an automatic submission to their biddings. He obeys them 'slavishly', 'wittingly' and 'spontaneously' with the fear of public opinion or action of supernatural punishment. Some of the methods in traditional Igbo society are:

**Ritual Cleansing:** In the traditional Igbo society, certain crimes were considered as pollution of the land (*aru, nso ala* or *imeru ala*). In such circumstances, the first remedial measure was ritual cleansing or sacrifice to appease the earth goddess, Ala. In that case, the offender, as mark of punishment, must provide the items for the sacrifice, not minding the cost (which was usually very high), and do other things he was asked to do for the ritual cleansing to be done. Any refusal, either to provide the required

items or to comply with the instructions given, always resulted to more severe sanctions.

**Banishment:** This refers to the deliberate act of sending an offender away from his community, either for a long or short period. This is dangerous because a banished person is entirely lost in the crowd. He is on his own both in life and in death. It is believed, as Onyeozili and Ebbe (2012:34) argue, that in death, he would neither be able to transmigrate nor reincarnate; and this thought of non-reincarnation and transmigration after death keeps the members' behavior in check. This method served to expel dangerous criminals and miscreants in the traditional society and is dreaded because it brought disgrace both to the offender and his kinsmen.

**Oath Taking:** Oath taking is a strong factor in the traditional Igbo belief system. It is a popular method of checking the excesses of men. Oath taking is used as the last resort when all other avenues have been unsuccessfully exploited to resolve an issue or to authenticate a suspicion. As an invocation to the supernatural being or its agents (protesting your innocence), punishment for an infringement for oaths fall automatically on the culprits. After taking an oath, each individual must swear that he will not work to eliminate the opponent. If after one year nothing happens to the individual on whom the oath was administered, he would then be proved innocent.

**Ridicule:** In traditional society, ridicule was one of the ways used to check crime. That is in tune with the Igbo adage that says, “*nmebo emeboro ogaranya ka ogbugbu ogburu ya*” (Death is better to a respected man than to be disgraced or ridiculed publicly). This involves subjecting an offender to serious public humiliation to serve as a warning to others. For instance, a married woman caught in adultery or stealing might be sent back to her paternal home necked with a company of other women following and singing derogatory songs for her. Or she could be paraded round the village necked with the male partner in the adultery. This is so dreaded that many culprits committed suicide before or after the dehumanizing exercise, to save themselves from such humiliation.

**Ostracism:** In the traditional indigenous society, an Individual was a member not only of his immediate family but also of his extended family, village and even the larger society. Each belonged to his group in every practical sense and his principal satisfaction was found in co-operation with that group. Within this group, each individual has perfect security and succor, for the group cared for him in cases of illness, accident, old age, insanity and other emergencies. Against this backdrop, ostracism which means deliberate severing of social contacts of groups, relatives and friends of an offender such that everybody isolates and deserts him, as punishment, entails a lot of social and psychological pains. To be out adrift from one's group was to be a living dead, thus sanctions of ostracism was like outlawry in feudal England. As

also observed by Onyeozili and Ebbe (2012, 34), an ostracized person was lost in a crowd, because if his fire went out in the kitchen, he would not go to his neighbours to get another. Those benefits accruable to integrated members of the community would be denied him/her.

**Curses:** Another method of crime control in traditional Igbo society is the use of curses. The basic principle here is that if a person was found guilty, evil will befall him according to the words used in cursing him. Causes carry dreadful consequence of protracted sickness, sudden death or other forms of calamities. Village elders, *Umuada*, some traditional Priests or a person can curse a known or an unknown offender accordingly. If the offender repented, the curses might be revoked with certain rituals, if a serious one. However, curses to an innocent person or for personal hatred are never efficacious.

### **Challenges to Traditional Religious Method of Crime Control in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

There are many challenges facing the traditional method of crime control in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. They include:

**Modern Religions:** With the arrival of the modern religions like Christianity and Islam, the minds of the Igbo people has been taken captive; thus weakening the structure and hold of our African (Igbo) traditional religion on the society. Ugwu (1999: 56) stresses that, the belief in ancestors and the power to punish offenders had been drastically affected by the introduction of Christian religion.

Christianity has not only changed the traditional belief system of the people, but has also taught their converts to oppose and discredit all the traditional institutions, beliefs and practices of the people which were used for crime control, including belief in the earth deity, *Ala*. It introduced new code of law which was often differing from those of their natives. Through it preaching, a lot of converts were made, who, having internalized the new system of beliefs (the Whiteman's belief system), were instructed not to take part in traditional rituals or belief system. This made traditional methods of crime control ineffective in Igbo traditional society. The new religion is now anti-tradition and, under the guise of religion, people began to perpetrate evil without any remorse and with the belief that God is merciful.

**Western Education:** The introduction of western type of education and culture in the traditional Igbo society which has replaced the informal (family) education of the traditional society is an unrivalled challenge to ATR. According to Achunike (2004), the colonial missionaries started by establishing primary schools for boys and girls and later secondary schools and teachers training college in Onitsha. As a result, the natives were enlightened on the human rights as citizens of the community or society. Issues of 'freedom of this' and 'freedom of that' were brought which destabilized corporate morality and community solidarity; and introduced individuality. Taking of oath, going to deity and other traditional means of controlling crime were then left to

individual choice. Foreign cultures were introduced which largely brought about disbelief in some of the people's traditional culture and ways of life. With western education, the colonialists introduced native authority courts or the customary court in the society, replaced the traditional check systems and declared some of the traditional methods of crime control illegal. The existence of police and law courts have weakened the power of the traditional socio-political structures and mechanisms and subjugated their authorities. The modern legal and judicial system classified offences into criminal and civil, so that there is a clear-cut distinction between the categories of offences. Some of the offences regarded as very serious in the traditional setting, such as ritual offences like violation of taboo, incest, witchcraft and sorcery, may now be looked down by police and the modern courts for want of evidence. Thus, one can commit an offence in modern society and get away with it easily, unlike in the traditional setting where the offender either receive social sanction or the wrath of the gods.

**Modernization:** Modernization is a process which indicates the adoption of the modern ways of life and values in preference to the traditional or old ways. Modernization is a factor that seriously challenges and weakens traditional religious method of crime control in the modern Igbo society. It affects different aspects of people's life, relationship and culture. It produces countervailing effect on cultural orientation, erodes cultural

heritage and counters traditional practices and beliefs. Modernization has caused the breakdown of traditional family structure leading to poor socialization, weak social ties and cohesion in the family which further results to poor orientation and inculcation of norms and values of the society to the younger generation by the elders. This has adversely affected the traditional Igbo cultural practices, beliefs and lifestyle and opened opportunities for criminal acts and delinquent behaviours. The rate of crimes like rape, incest and adultery, have increased because people applaud nudity in the name of modernization. Girls wear skimpy dresses and put on men's wears while homosexuality and same sex marriages are now in vogue.

**Globalization:** Globalization squeezed the world into a small village such that nothing is hidden under the sun at present. The modern means of communication is the "high tech" which include, internet, telephone etc. These modern means replaced the traditional or local ways of communication, limited and eliminated the purposes they serves in checking crime in the traditional set up. For instance, when the community plan to carry out some assignment "secretly" against evil men in the community, especially robbers, due to the modern means of communication the message will circulate before it will be publicly announced and, at times, it terminates such plans. Therefore, the modern means of communication made the traditional method of crime control ineffective because it disregards the local or traditional

governing body thereby encouraging or promoting crime. Today, cyber-crime and other technology-related crimes are on the increase.

**Urbanization:** According to Njaka (1974:27), urbanization is defined as making a rural area, or a village, more like town or city by building a lot of houses, factories, pipe born water, roads and electricity etc. With these, people migrate or travel out to the urban centres to enjoy city life. In the city, the person will meet and mingle with people of different cultural and religious backgrounds and by the time they come back, their former traditional way of life has been replaced with new and strange ways of life some of which facilitate criminal behaviors.

#### **Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion**

Pertinently, it was discovered in the course of this study that African Traditional Religion provided effective mechanism for crime control in traditional Igbo society. However, since the human societies are said not to be static but dynamic in nature, the society undergoes changes in varying magnitudes and in diverse directions which separated the individual from corporate morality, customs and traditional solidarity. Consequently, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many challenges confront the traditional religious methods, limits and eliminate its hold on the people and open up opportunities for crimes. The findings argue that modern religions, western education, urbanization, modernization and globalization has encouraged the culture of borrowing

which resulted in all sorts of crimes like prostitution, incessant rape, sexual abuse, drug trafficking, cyber crime, kidnapping, ritual killing, etc. The impression one gets is that the modern crime control mechanisms cannot provide adequate check on the people's attitude and deviant behaviours. This is a lapse on the contemporary Igbo society according to social control theory that society is meant to provide reinforcement of dictated values to keep any type of causal or motivational delinquency traits at bay. The traditional norms and patterns inherent in Igbo society have no firm root any more.

In conclusion, therefore, the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria should guide herself with what could keep them from total decay. Total disregard to these traditional norms and practices would make the society porous and the people now resorted to modernization. Some of the norms, rules and regulations guiding the Igbo in the past are not barbaric in nature. Christianity and biblical injunctions could have done it better if the people were keeping to it. They were only using it as a cover to their evil intentions. The Bible did not encourage people to go against the institutional practices that keep them but to avoid evil dealings that do not promote love, hence the Igbo tradition and the theory of social control. The study, therefore, enjoins the Igbo society and of course, Nigeria as a nation to keep, defend and promote the values, norms, customs, traditions and laws that keep them from pollution and make the society a place suitable for peaceful co-existence. The study, therefore, seriously

recommends a reinvigoration of the modern crime control mechanisms. Above all, there should be a synergy of the modern with some valuable traditional religious method's effective operational crime control mechanism in Igbo society and Nigeria at large.

## References

- Adibe, O. (1992). *The crisis of faith and normality of the Igbo Christian of Nigeria*. Onitsha: Tabansi Press.
- Arinze, F.A. (1978). *Sacrifice in Igbo Religion*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Awolalu, J.O. (1991). "Sin and Its Remission in African Traditional Religion" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44/2,275.
- Ayuk, A.A., Owan, E.J. and Uyang, F.A. (2013). "Traditional Methods of Crime Control and Community Security in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River-Nigeria" in *Journal of humanities and social sciences*. Vol. 14, issue 5. Pp.61-66
- Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame and reintegration*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Chika O. (2009). "Crime and the Igbo" *This Day*. 20<sup>th</sup> August 2009.
- Christian, A. (2014). "The Igbo as a Nation" *Daily Independence* 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014.
- Dike, K. O. and Ekejiuba, F. (1990). *The Aro of south eastern Nigeria, 1950-1980*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd.
- Eisen, E.N. (1982). *Essay on Comparative Institutions*. New York: John Wiley Sons Inc.
- Ekwunife, A. N. O. (1990). *Conversation in Igbo Traditional Religion*. Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd.
- Elias, T. O. (1978). *African Indigenous Law*. Enugu: The government Press.
- Eluu, P. E. (2015). "Views of African traditional religion on corruption: implications for Nigerian society" in

- Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol. 9. Pp56-61.
- Ekwur, G. E. (1999). *The pangs an African culture in travail (The Igbo world in disarray)*. Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd.
- Emmanuel, O. N. (1999). "The impact of vigilante group" *Nigerian Chronicle*. November 26. P12.
- Ezenibe, S. U. (1999). *The nature of crime and delinquency: an introduction*. Calabar-Nigeria: Seasprint Publishers.
- Haskell, M. R. and Yoblonsky, L. (1970). *Crime and delinquency*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Co.
- Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hirschi, T. (2002). *Causes of delinquency*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.
- Hirschi, T. and Michael, R. G. (2005). "Punishment of Children from the Perspective of Control Theory". In Michael Donnelly and Murray A. Straus. *Corporal Punishment of Children in Theoretical Perspective*. New Haven, UK: Yale University Press.
- Ifemesia, C. (1979). *Traditional human living among the Igbo: A historical perspective*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Igbo, E. U. M. (2007). *Introduction to criminology*. Nsukka: University Press limited.
- Igbo, E. U. M. and Ugwuoke, C. O. (2013). Crime and Crime Control in Traditional Igbo Society of Nigeria, in *Developing Country Studies*. Vol. 3, No. 13, Pp160-167
- Ilogu, E. (1975). The problem of Christian Ethics among the Igbo of Nigeria; in *Ikenga, Journal of African Studies*, vol.3, Nos. 1 and 2. Ibadan: Nigeria printed corporation, p.40.
- Madu, E. J. (1997). *Fundamentals of Religious Studies*. Calabar: Franedoh publishers (Nig) Ltd.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1980). *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
- Njaka, E. N. (1974). *Igbo Political Culture*. Evanston Northwest: University press.
- Nye, F. I. (1958). *Social control theory*. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social\\_control\\_theory&oldid=612336448](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social_control_theory&oldid=612336448)
- Ogiowo, O. (1978). *Introduction to Sociological Studies*. Ibadan: Heinemann Education Books (Nig).
- Onyeneke, A. (1993). *Africans traditional institutions and the Christian Church: A sociological prologue to Christian enculturation*. Enugu: Snaap Press Nig. Ltd
- Onyeozili, E. C. and Ebbe, O. N. (2012). Social Control in Pre-colonial Igbo land of Nigeria, in *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*. Vol. 6, Ns 1&2. Pp. 29-43.
- Parrinder, E. G. (1974). *African Traditional religion*. London: Sheldon Press.
- Radcliffe-B. and Forde O. (1975). *African System of Kinship and Marriage*. London: Oxford University Press
- Reckless, W. C. (1967). *The crime problem*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts
- Reiss, A. J. (1951). *Social control theory*. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social\\_control\\_theory&oldid=612336448](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social_control_theory&oldid=612336448)
- Thio, A. (2001). *Deviant behavior*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon
- Toby, J. (1958). *Social control theory*. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014 from [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social\\_control\\_theory&oldid=612336448](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Social_control_theory&oldid=612336448)
- Ugwu, C O. (1999). *Man and his Religion*. Nsukka: Jobus International Press.
- Werber, S. J. (2009) Microsoft® Encarta® Redmond. WA: Microsoft Corporation.