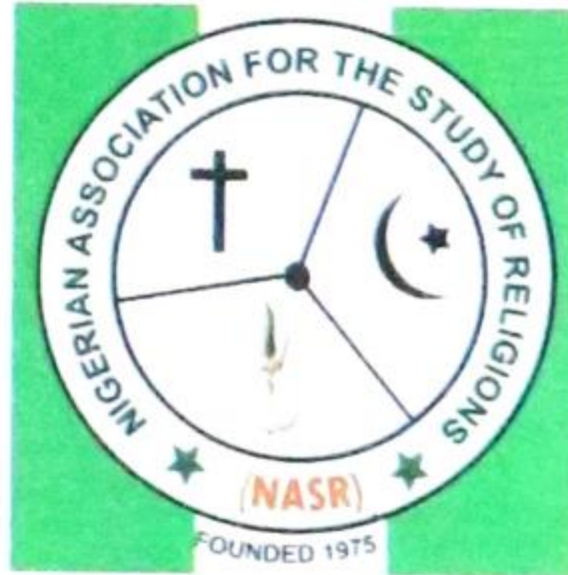


ISSN: 0794-3989



RELIGIONS
JOURNAL OF THE
NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
STUDY OF RELIGIONS
VOL.29 NO.1, JANUARY 2019

ISSN 0794 - 3989

RELIGIONS

JOURNAL OF THE
NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION

FOR THE

STUDY OF RELIGIONS
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UTILIZING AFRICAN RELIGIOUS OATH-TAKING SYSTEM AS A CATALYST FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCE CONTROL IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The debate on resource control has been on-going for some decades. The crave for resource control is a serious issue in Nigerian politics. This is not unconnected to the value attached to resources by government and the people where the resources are found. The fact that the people whose land the resources are domiciled found injustice and neglect in resource sharing call for resource control. The confidence reposed on the process of distribution has been bastardized. The normal allegiance for fair play when taking the oath of office based on the religious inclination has not been respected. The paper examines the utilization of African Religious oath-taking system as a catalyst for achieving good governance and resource control in Nigeria. The paper adopts historical and descriptive methods. The paper discovers that a large percentage of political and tenure office holders either belong to Islam or Christianity, thereby ignoring the importance of uprightness and even distribution of the resources as accrued to the people. This paper, therefore, recommends that political and tenure office holders in Nigeria should be subjected to traditional oath-taking irrespective of their religious affiliations for the purpose of achieving good governance, resource control and even distribution of the common wealth void of tribalism and corruption. The paper, therefore, concludes that traditional oath-taking is a missing link which this paper advocates for.

Keywords: African Religion, Oath-taking, Catalyst, and Resource Control

Introduction

Resource control has been an on-going debate for some decades, and it has been regarded as a serious issue in the Nigerian politics. This is as a result of the importance attached to the resources by the people where the resources are found¹. It is discovered that any attention tailored towards African religious approach is regarded as derogatory and outdated. It is the

duty of the government to provide for her citizenry, maintain, and run the administration with the available resources in the interest of the people.² The state where the resources are domiciled sees it as an obligation to create a suitable environment to its host community by giving it the right values and privileges for fair sharing.³

The process of claiming ownership on the resources led to the formation of groups that championed the agitation for the resource control. There were likes of Isaac Adaka Boro, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ijaw Youths Council (IYC), Committee of Oil Producing Areas (COPA), Ohoni Bill of Rights (OBR), Ikwere Charter of Demands (ICD), and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) to mention a few.⁴ Their activities were to influence resource control. Many times, they made strict demand from the Government and Multinational Oil Companies through issuance of threat and sanctions.⁵ These would have not happened if the statutory distribution of revenue from the Federal Account had not been controversial and contentious because of lack of true federalism.

The two opposing figures, that is, the government and the people-regarding how the resources would be allocated and shared make resource control in Nigeria a critical issue. The issue of resource control has resulted into conflicts due to misunderstanding on the part of the government and community. Governmental agencies, stakeholders, and community leaders have had round table meetings/dialogues on the issue of central control, but lack of commitment on the part of the Government, Multinational Oil Companies and corruption and betrayal by the representatives of the region have not given room for desired result for better performance. Therefore, it is the intention of this paper to examine governance and resource control by utilizing African oath-taking phenomenon for total redemption for good governance and fair sharing on the basis of resources control. Thus, this African religion oath-taking has been the missing link which this paper has set out to unraveled.

Resource Control: A Conceptual Meaning

Resource control has been locally and primitively practiced in Nigeria after the abolition of slave trade in 1807.⁶ It was discovered that agitation for resource control got to the apex when General Yakubu Gowon created a twelve state federal structure on May 27, 1967 out of the four regions that were in existence.⁷ Some of the newly created states then, such as the oil-rich riverine, Eastern, and Lagos states were clamouring for the control of the natural resources in their areas. Ekwuruke⁸ emphasized on areas that

did not get the status of statehood but were economically viable and demanded for resource control.

The demand for resource control cum the political conflicts led to political manipulation whereby, allocation of the nation's resources was being influenced. Therefore, the demand by the states and different groups in the country had been occurring often. This could be deduced from Eminue's view⁹ which says that resource control became an issue between the federal and the states during the Obasanjo's military regime. No doubt, natural resources located off-shore belonged to the state where it is located. The agitation for resource control led to the pronouncement with accent of decree and the use of constitution for abrogation of onshore/offshore dichotomy for the purpose of calculating the amount of revenue accruing from natural resources derived from any state.¹⁰

Resource control is also defined as the access of community and state governments to natural resources located within their boundaries and the freedom to develop and utilize the resources without interference from the federal government.¹¹ Douglas¹² is of the opinion that resource control is the actual control of resources by the people who live in the communities with resources for lives support. Afoyemi¹³ in his opinion sees resource control as the way and manner the government revenue is shared among the tiers of government, i.e. federal, state, and local government. And as well as how resources available are harnessed and determined. Having considered the assertions of the above scholars on the meaning of resource control, and understand how lofty they are, the researcher is of the view that the basic principle of resource control is the ability of the state government to exploit the available natural resources of the state to benefit those within her domain.

Resource Control and Area of Conflicts

The way and manner the government revenue and dividends are shared among various tiers of government and how the available resources are harnessed and determined are serious issues of concern particularly in Niger Deltan region. The protest could not be unconnected to how to redress perceived injustices and inequalities in fiscal relations among ethnic groups, regions, and political units within the Nigerian federation. On the other hand, the protest could be understood to be a fall-out of the degradation of their environment, deplorable condition of their roads, and the neglect of their conditions by the federal government. The climax of grievances, agitations and protests for resource control is for fair share of the available resources and not the neglect, injustice, and exploitation they

have suffered in the past, in the hands of the state government and multinational oil companies. It was this struggle that made Isaac Adako Boro and his compatriots to agitate for resource control. Their agitations flowered into international agitation with the Ogoni 9 (nine) spear headed by Ken Saro-Wiwa, an author and environmental activist. Ken Saro-Wiwa attracted International attention to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta¹⁴ aside mobilizing other pressure groups as discussed above. It was this struggle that led to his death and his compatriots by hanging them in 1995 during Abacha regime.¹⁵

The situation in Ogoniland was carefully played out, and that explained the anger of the people in the area of revenue allocation and the amount of derivation they were receiving. That would not have been unconnected to why the Federal Government established some agencies such as the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). OMPADEC was established through decree No. 23 of July 1992 and was commissioned to: supervise the then three percent derivation found (but now 13%) being given to the region, to rehabilitate and develop oil producing areas, tackle all ecological problems, and liaise with oil companies on matters of oil pollution.¹⁶ Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was also established through act No. 6 of July 2000 with the mandate of training and educating the youths of the oil rich Niger Delta so as to curb hostilities and militancy, developing key infrastructures, and promoting diversification and productivity.¹⁷ With these and that of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua regime's outstanding effort of presidential amnesty programme that gave training opportunity for Niger Deltan indigenes, these efforts proved inefficient as a result of corruption and lack of commitment on the part of the implementers.

The Problem of Good Governance in Nigeria

Good governance as defined by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) is the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affair at all levels. It comprises the mechanism, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, legal rights, obligation and differences.¹⁸ Good governance involves, participatory, transparent, and accountable which is effective and equitable. It also promotes the rule of law. Good governance ensures that, political, social, and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and that the voice of the poorest and most vulnerable are heard in decision making over the

allocation of resources. In view of the above, it therefore, means that, fostering positive change for the good of all will be based on acceptable values in the characteristics of good governance that is based on the rule of law, transparency, equity, and accountability that would present us the desired leadership for attaining good governance.

The above discourse is the expectation of good governance but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. The gap that exists between the anticipated role of the leaders and the actual output in guiding the society along the course leading to the desired goal with the level of corruption cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, the reasons for agitation for resource control, Nigeria is a country that possesses huge resources, but she lacks leadership to harness the resources for the development of the nation and well-being of her citizenry. There is no access to effective service delivery such as education, health care, portable water, electricity, good road, employment and other infrastructures which are prerequisites for effective human development. The effort of the civil societies in transforming Niger Deltan grievances from a mere demand for development, from the state and oil company to a political agitation which challenges the authority of the state over the control and allocation of natural resources cannot be shoveled away. The inability of the state to find a political solution to the problem has led to the demand for resource control.¹⁹ It is noteworthy to say that the level at which the federal government exercises her power over a certain resources depends on the importance of the resources based on the percentage of the gross national product. This made the Federal Government relies on oil resources at the expense of other natural resources to perform her civic duties and also at the expense of those the resources are domiciled.

It must be noted that a society that is deprived of her rights and privileges is prone to conflicts. Conflict is rooted in the naturalness of man, while conflict in resource control is occasioned at a time by the rascality and arrogance of man.²⁰ At this point in time, man craves and settles for violence. This is evident in kidnapping, destruction of properties, and murder that take place in the oil communities and carried out by militants. The above vices may no longer be news in society where corruption has eaten deep. Corruption fuels bad governance, reduces public confidence, undermine public service delivery, and entrenches round peg in a round hole on the part of our leaders. And this serves as a major impediment to governance as it is experienced in Nigeria.

Oath-taking in African Religion

When we talk of African Religion, we talk of the indigenous religion of Africans. It is indigenous because it is the beliefs and convictions which originated, nurtured, and sustained by Africans on African soil.²¹ Dopamu, went further to describe African Religion as the religion that was handed down from generation to generation. It is a religion that Africans have made theirs by living and practicing it. It has no written literature but written everywhere for those that care to see and read. The religion has no founder, and has no zeal for membership drive.²²

The above shows that this religion is a revealed religion because it was as a result of human experience of the mystery of the universe, which was concluded to have been a supernatural power, who ordered, controlled and maintained the universe.²³ In Africa, before the era of colonialism, morality was a cherished virtue. This was the era when people lived an upright life and respect integrity. Names then were more valuable than gold, and nobody would want to soil his/her name. That was the period when children were asked to consider the son of whom they were. People live in conformity to the norms and virtues of the society because morality was part of societal heritage.²⁴ However, when civilization came, when religions and culture began to interact, oath-taking that was part of the African tradition was abandoned for Christian and Islamic form of oath-taking which became legal and common in the court.²⁵

In African Religion, the practices and beliefs that are useful and adequate to the spiritual life of the people such as oath and oath taking among others, are allowed. Oath and oath-taking are integral part of the religion of Africa which cannot be divorced from African people because honesty has become the bane of the people and violations are sanctioned. Therefore, Oath and Oath-taking would be analyzed in this paper.

Oath as described by *Encarta Dictionary* is a solemn promise or expression of commitment in which religious words express how a person intends to behave in a circumstance or a particular point in time.²⁶ The solemn promise becomes legally binding and implies to be honest and tells the truth either in the court or between the people concerned. Ogunleye in his view sees oath as words of promise recited in a conventional formula when taking up an official position.²⁷ It is a period when allegiance is taken by an individual(s). The oath is sacred and must be religiously, truthfully, and loyally adhered to, failure would put the live of that individual(s) into a risk. The *Webster College Dictionary* defines oath as a solemn appeal to a deity or to witness one's determination to speak the truth or keep a promise.²⁸

Ilesanmi also sees oath-taking as a religious word and psychological enforcement of an act over an agreed situation or a confirmation of the truth by naming something held sacred, promise confirmed by an appeal to a sacred higher being that will enforce the attached sanction.²⁹ Ilesanmi's position shows that oath-taking is religious because it shows how it binds parties in mutual confidence that must not be broken by either of the party as a result of being guided by an higher power that has the sanction to punish whosoever that contravenes the statement expressed on oath.

In the light of the above definitions of oath, oath-taking is religious, a solemn allegiance is being entered into, and it also shows a form binding parties in mutual confidence that must not be broken by either party because it is guided by a higher power that punishes whoever contravenes the oath. And above all, oath of office is sacred and requires truthfulness and loyalty without which the individual or group of individuals lives are at risk. In the olden days, tribes and groups such as Ijaw, Isoko, and Igbo where there were no central political power before the coming of the British administration in Nigeria, oaths of different degree were entered into by different villages to make sure that there were peaceful co-existence.³⁰ Oath taking is to invoke power greater than oneself to uphold the truth of a declaration made by the taker, asserting a promise which he/she must fulfill in future. Where the supersensible is called to bear witness of such a declaration and calls for a curse which should befall him in the event of failure to fulfill his promises.³¹ Oath taking is normally called for among the indigenous people of Niger Delta in a case where the nature of the matter makes it difficult to discern who is right or wrong. This comes into play when human effort fails or when there is no confidence in human panel. Therefore, oath taking is a direct submission to the deity for settlement because his verdict is final. To show the efficacy of oath taking, time is set within which the defaulter is expected to be revealed by the deity either by sickness or death. With this, the rate of evil vices was reduced.

With the coming of Christianity and Islam into Nigeria, the two religions were preferred to the traditional form of oath-taking that has been in existence. The reason is not far-fetched. Any form of deviation from the traditional form of oath-taking attracts sanction with divine punishment and deter the leaders from all forms of misbehaviour and corruption. This is to say that, the fear of gods and corrective measure that favour the societies were put in place. The forms of Christianity and Islamic oath-taking have deviated from the traditional forms of oath-taking, the results

are the anomalies and corrupt practices which hinder African leaders perhaps Nigerian leaders in particular from doing the wish of the people.³² This leads to insincerity in governance as politicians and tenured officers loot public funds and use tax payers' money for personal gains. This is one of the reasons why there are injustice, inequity, and exploitation in governance and resource control.

Statutory oath-taking today has become a form of fulfilling all righteousness because it lacks efficacy. In the time past, oath was used to formally and legally make a pledge that would be binding on the individuals as a result of the invocation of God and deities that were considered sacred. For the fact that corruption is endemic in Nigeria, and different strategies have been adopted by the government, but unfortunately the incidence is yet to abate. In view of the above, this paper therefore, advocates the utilization of African Religious oath-taking system as a catalyst for achieving good governance and resource control in Nigeria.

Administering African Religious Oath-taking

The use of African religious oath-taking is not strange in Nigeria. Many cultures and communities use traditional oaths to deal with criminality till today, for crime is a malaise in Nigeria.³³ Nevertheless, administration of oath is sacred because it has the under-lining of spirituality brought to the material or physical realm.³⁴ To Africans, administration of oath in governance (statutory oath-taking) is the pledge of self or individuals to uphold the constitution of the country with affirmation and conviction pledging with loyalty to perform faithfully the duties attached to the office with the help of God.

Pertinent to one of the definitions above, that oath is seen as a statement made under penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity. And a solemn appeal to a god for something holy or reverend as witness or sanction of the truth of a statement.³⁵ The importance of administration of traditional oath is an invocation of divine agency to a guarantor of the oath-takers' honesty and integrity in the matter under question.³⁶ By implication, oath-takers must be very careful in order not to earn the wrath of gods if failed to abide by the oath sworn. The need for being careful is that, the act of obedience through oath shows the allegiance to the faith that a person is involved in, since the objects used in Oath are sacred. We are not unmindful of the fact that sacred objects are taking for granted at times. No wonder, non-traditionalists taking oath by their sacred books contravene

the command of their doctrine because they know that the sanction or penalty would not be immediate or there could be room for forgiveness.

In the administration of oath, oath taking as observed by Dopamu is not an emblem of disrespect but a link between the holy and the profane.³⁷ Holy in this sense could be a primordial, ancestor, deified personified, or God that must be accorded respect in any of the promises made through them. Salami asserted that, there are many ways that are sacred at which man can be restrained from failing to conform with the objectives entrusted to him by the society.³⁸ He went further to assert that loyalty to any medium of undertaking to which one swears shows a greater commitment on the part person involved. No wonder, Salami ascribed *Okanran Ogunda* to his issue when he says: *Ofofo ni peru, epe ni pole, ile dida ni pore, alajobi ni pa yekan eni nsebi*, (tale bearing kills the slave, curses kill the thief, betrayal kills friendship, ancestor kills a cousin that partake in evil). This *ifa* corpus pointed out some of the elements that can be used for administration of oath taking. But we look into the importance of the element that cannot be shoveled away from the corpus of Ogunda which is *Ile* (the mother earth)

In the administration of Oath, the importance of *Ile* the mother earth cannot be undermined. *Ile* is significant because it interacts with other unseen beings which are *Orisa*, that are commissioned with the maintenance of the universe and the spirituality of the environment.³⁹ *Ile*, the mother earth is not the only traditional way of administering oath but there is connection in the relationship to other *Orisa* by which Oath is carried out. In African tradition, *Orisa* regard *Ile* as the mother of sanctity that could be applauded and this is regarded as *Igbo Imole* which is traditional religious cults, which serve as a medium where they agreed on potent sanctions for any act of unfaithfulness.⁴⁰

Method of oath taking cannot be limited to the above because, it includes several icons of other *Orisa*, shrine of *Orisa* and commitment to see that the oath works out and it is done.⁴¹ Salami also mentioned that *Ilepa* i.e. sand on the tomb, combined with particular verses of *Ifa* is also used as material for swearing.⁴² Also, as identified by Lucas, the symbol of *Ogun* is iron, the soldiers regard iron, spears, and sword as sacred. The blacksmiths regard his anvil and forge as sacred.⁴³

Swearing by the god of *Ogun* is a serious form of Oath-taking. No wonder, the adherents of *Ogun* regard any false or misleading testimony under oath as a serious offence that attracts death penalty, and it applies to any other form of Oath taking. Traditional swearing is also recognized by Nigerian Government because the secularity of the country cannot be

ignored. If an adherent of African religion agrees to swear in his own religious way, the swearing or oath is administered by holding a piece of iron and later kiss or touch his fore-head. In Yoruba religion, it is believed that whoever breaks the covenant will disappear with the earth (*Eni to ba da ile a ba ile lo*). It is not surprising that the stigmatization of covenant or oath braking by the leaders have negative effect on this country locally, nationally, and internationally which has made people to see us as being fantastically corrupt and a nation that could not be respected among other nations of the world. If the rules attached to swearing an Oath taking are properly adhered to there will be sanctity in the society.

The Need to Utilize Oath-Taking in Nigerian Government

The need to utilize the African religious form of oath-taking as a catalyst for achieving good governance and resource control in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This is not unconnected with the fact that the nation is still swimming in the pool of corruption, exploitation, marginalization, injustice, and inequity because there are many leaders who have no fear of God. Our leaders in politics, tenured, and other appointments and employments have refused to align themselves with traditional forms of oath-taking so as to be accepted and relevant in the society because they professed to be adherents of Christianity and Islam. It is dis-heartening that the traditional oath rejected in the public under the umbrella of the foreign religions, has been conceded to in the secret before the deities, and must be strictly adhered to. This is because any deviation from the terms of agreement will attract severe punishment or death as the penalty, depending on the terms of agreement with the deities. In other word, the fear they have in oath-taking will propel them to behave well and not deny the masses of their rights.

For good governance and resource control to be achieved in Nigeria, and to reduce grievances, agitation, protest, injustice, marginalization, and inequity to a minimum level, the use of traditional oath-taking must be put in place. It could be deduced from the aforementioned that, the use of traditional oath-taking instills fear into the life of the oath-taker. For the fact that a sizeable number of Nigerians believe in African religion, and the adherents of Christianity and Islam patronize the deities, the use of traditional forms of oath-taking should be adopted for all our office holders. The tendency of denying the use of African oath-taking by the leaders should not be ruled out, because they would not want anybody to identify such an act with them. The secret visit of the Nigerian leaders to the traditional homes is not hidden to the masses. As a result of

this, they should not be spared from taking oath in an African religious way in addition to the statutory oath-taking.

It is understood that office holders swear with the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran, these are regarded as statutory oath-taking, which also attract punishment for perjury if they swear falsely but are scared of the spiritual impact of traditional oaths on them. In view of this, since Nigerians have taken God to be a merciful God who does not bring immediate judgment on men, and that make the leaders to perpetrate their acts of dehumanization and injustice, the use of traditional oath-taking should be enforced.

The Implications of Traditional Oath-taking in Nigeria

It was discovered among many others that:

- the use of traditional oath-taking will reduce bribery and corruption to a minimal level;

- it would prevent people from giving false evidence and ensure impartial judgment;

- it will also bring offenders to justice through guilt conscience and confession;

- the fear of punishment and death will put a consciousness of doing the right thing that will lead to peaceful communal living;

- the traditional oath takers fear gods, and this guides their conscience in any given assignment;

- the modern day Oath takers do not respect the sacredness attached to their religion; and

- lack of communion in faith among non-traditionalists has led to lack of effective and potent sanction.

Conclusion

Having examined the effect of agitation for good governance and resource control in Nigeria particularly, it was discovered that it has been the cause of the unrest in the region till date. The sharing formulas have no positive effects on the people and their environment, and it has formed the basis of the conflicts. This is as a result of the corruption, injustice, and inequity in the part of their leaders, representative, and the government at the centre. There is a serious indication that things have gone wrong with the way the resources are being controlled and harnessed. Instead of developing the region, a group of people amass wealth to themselves because there is no check and balance. More so, that the Christian and Islamic method of oath swearing does not have immediate punitive measure on the breakers of the

oath makes them take oath swearing with levity. In view of this, African Religious form of oath taking should be adopted because the violators would be sanctioned without delay. And this will caution the leaders from mismanagement, injustice, and inequality. In other words, traditional oath-taking should work in tandem with the legal frame work in order to tackle the scourge of corruption and inequity in the nation.

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