THE PLACE OF MORAL SANCTIONS IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY: SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERPECTIVES

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Abstract
The search for the emergence of a thriving Nigerian society has remained a recurring decimal in our collective quest for survival and relevance among the comity of developing and developed nations. These searches unfortunately which has spanned several decades appear to be moving the nation in an anti-clockwise direction due to the problem of unending economic under development in Nigeria which is driven by poor socio-political and cultural values. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to examine the place of moral sanctions in the Nigerian Society. The work employed a survey approach. This work discovered that there is an upward rise in religious violence, murder and so on. Unfortunately it further identified that only the law enforcement agencies or the application of the constitution which has been in use to tackle these evils have not done much. Consequently it called for the incorporation of moral sanctions education into our educational curriculum as a part of citizenship education as a means of promoting moral awareness and accountability. Besides it submitted that moral sanctions should draw from objective platform or ethical foundation that cuts across cultures or are universally acceptable to protect same from local or regional abuse. Moreover the work called on the government to create National Ethics Committee which should be charged with promoting and sustaining quality control in the deployment of moral sanction as a developmental platform. Equally the religious community, industries, institutions, community and government must work in partnership to develop a common sanctionable conducts and their appropriate penalties. Most importantly it stated that the people in political leadership must provide the motivation for good conduct by ensuring that moral sanctions are not deployed to punish only the poor and non-powerful members of the society.
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Introduction: What we witness today in Nigerian society is not just the societal unscrupulous behaviour or indecent and unethical attitudes of the people, but the embrace of moral decadence which has resulted to the reduction in moral values. The impact of this moral declination is rapidly re-defining Nigeria as immoral society. Very few Nigerians understand that the real challenges facing the country do not begin and end with poor leadership, tribalism, ecological disaster, security issues, economic trouble and religious partition. There is more deep-rooted issue which Nigeria and Nigerians must tackle; which is degeneration of morality.

What we have tried to do in this work was to locate the cause of this moral decay and we therefore discovered that among the factors that necessitated this ugly moral situation includes reduction in parental training, negative influence of social media, collapse of discipline in schools and disorder of the traditional communities which guaranteed community consciousness in Nigerian societies. The aftermath of these are the societal evils which we observe in Nigeria like banditry, kidnapping, rape, armed robbery, election malpractices, examination malpractices, religious violence, and murder and so on. Unfortunately only the law enforcement agencies or the application of the constitution which has been in use to tackle these evils have not done much. Our position is that moral sanction can ameliorate this ugly situation. Iheoma (1997) had this view when he states that experience has shown that the threat of sanctions helps to keep many people from breaking the law. However while he notes that external sanction alone does not provide sufficient deterrent he submits that since police cannot be present everywhere and every time to deter potential criminals the use of religious sanctions are unavoidable and inescapable (p.45).

Moral sanctions as an instrument of social control has been employed in the struggle of enthroning strong and democratic nations since Middle Ages. It has therefore served as a purveyor for fostering and sustaining development among nations. Granted that moral sanctions, alone may not be sufficient in promoting social control nevertheless there is the need to explore it’s place in Nigeria’s quest for economic development as the nation continues to witness vicious cycle in her efforts towards aligning with the committee of advanced nations. This view was corroborated by Ibeh (2013) when he states that in spite of the limitation of moral sanctions in addressing questions of national development, it however can be deployed to “bring significant pressures to bear on public behaviours as well as within institutions under the control or influence of civil society”. Furthermore he submits that moral sanctions are deployed as vital tools of reforms and social change alongside with all forms of resistance in dealing with fundamental conflict unleashed by tyrannical powers.

Writing from the African traditional religious point of view, Ewelukwa (1992) equally said; “such laws were therefore happily obeyed, not because policemen and law enforcement agencies were standing by to punish offenders, but because they were in conformity with the wishes and desires of the people, their ancestors and God” (p.vi).
The above two authors linked religion with morality and we are aware of the age long scholarly arguments of whether morality is a product of religion or not. We do not intend to delve into that argument in this paper. However, we want to draw attention to the points made by them which states that the people do not keep the law because of the fear of police arrests or because of the law of the land, but because of the moral sanction.

In an effort to show how moral sanction could inspire national development, Mbaegbu (2012) expressed how obligations to the supernatural powers and community can ensure peace and order, he said that “Duties towards God and the gods and the community in general; duty towards individual fellow beings... are aimed at achieving justice, peace and order in the community” (p.329). This explains that both the duties to the invisible and visible beings which are the societal moral sanctions are aimed to achieve peace and order in the community or society. And when there is peace and order, then the society can achieve national development. What this means is that the religious community can deploy non-violent platform in the name of moral sanctions in birthing values and ethos that foster economic values and development within the polity.

We are not unaware of the absolutist and relativist arguments on morality, but this study is not to take side in the argument. We can recall the absolutist argument that there is a universal moral standard for all men. For them, moral diversity is because of ignorance of the actual morality. However, the relativist maintains that there is no universal right and wrong which binds all men. The relativist claims that moral standard depends on the structure of the society where one finds himself or herself.

The position of the paper is that morality is versatile and particular. It is both, but may differ in application. Onwuejeogwu (2007) remarked this view and opined:

Morality is both universal and individual. The morality of homicide, honesty and so on, exist in all societies, but differ in how they are applied in various societies, for number of reasons. Also, certain aspects of a people’s morality may be related to the social structure, while others may not be ...

### Theoretical Framework

Divine justice theory according Schwartz (1989) holds the view that the weapon necessary to defend against evil is justice. By this he posits that evil must not only be seen as evil but also treated as evil. Furthermore he also notes that it is by rejecting any form of alliance, compromise or accommodation with the irrational or put more pointedly it is by forcing the irrational to stand naked and unaided that one makes evil to be adjudged as evil indeed.

The term justice according to Thomas Aquinas as cited by Obodo (2016) is defined as the firm and constant will to give each man his due. Moreover he describes it as the process of maintaining the balance of social relationships by rendering to each his due (p.91ff). The term justice comes from a Latin word Justitia which implies “the regulation of men’s action towards one another in accordance with a fair and constant standard. The standard consists of that mutual rights and co-relative duties of man.” It is a broad concept that relates to the
entrenchment of equilibrium in the social network and interactive process whereby each man fulfils his duties and receives his due.

Justice is rooted in the nature of God and therefore Obodo (2016) holds the view that it should serve as the platform for moderating or regulating human conduct and relationships. Moral sanctions is grounded on the objective fact that the evil that manifests in forms of injustice, dishonesty, irrationality, deception, greed amongst others is by nature against reality which is embedded in truth and life. What this means is that society must see evil as evil by placing a tag or sanction on it which shows it not only as being negative and harmful but also as having negative repercussions. It is against this backdrop that divine justice theory is adopted as a theoretical perspectives or road map for national development through the engagement of moral sanction as a sieve gauge.

The Old Testament underscores the above view when it reveals that God is a God of justice who demands that wickedness or evil should not go unpunished (Proverbs 16:5). Besides He demands that he that rules over men must do so in justice and in the fear of God (Proverbs 23:3). Moral sanction therefore becomes divine instrument in the hands of kings for fostering harmony and order within the milieu of interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Pauline theology corroborates the above view when he states *inter alia*:

> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power resists the ordinance of God and they that resist shall receive in themselves damnation. For rulers are not terrors to good works but to the evil (Rom.13:1—3).

**Conceptual Definitions**

In this section we shall attempt to engage in conceptual definitions of some key terms relevant to this study. This no doubt would help to provide background information into the subject matter under study.

**Sanctions:** The word sanction is defined by Merriam Webster online Dictionary as the act of attaching a penalty to the violation of a right, an obligation or command. The Chambers Dictionary (New Edition) also defines the above term as the rationale or motive for obedience to any moral or religious law (ethics). Furthermore it describes it as the penalty or reward expressed to non-observance of a law or treaty. Equally it states that there are also trade and economic sanctions. Ayn Rand Institute (1980) in its contribution states that it is a moral instrument which could be considered to be just or unjust, right or wrong. Okafor (2019) in his illustration states that it is customary in Igbo land for a fine to be imposed on an individual who commits a misdemeanor as a way of making reparation as well as promoting deterrence. Besides, he notes that the sanction may go beyond monetary penalty to outright ostracism (*ilifu madu, iwupu madu, isupu madu, ilochi madu*) in extreme cases (p.89). From the foregoing it is an instrument of threat that serves as penalty for disobeying a law or rule.

According to Pattison (2015) sanctions has often been criticized on account of being indiscriminate and for leading to widespread suffering as well as being sometimes erosive
of people’s civil and political rights. For instance he pointed out that the comprehensive sanctions regime against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq in particular was highly seen as reprehensible, given the reported deaths of 500,000 children under the age of 5. It has however remained a positive tool for fostering justice in modern world for according to him while citing UN report of 2012 he states that moral sanctions has continued to play a central role in the tackling and prevention of mass atrocities.

Society: The word society relates to the people of one country or a community taken as a whole. It is used to refer to Nigerian nation as a people bound by political, religious and geographical bond.

Religious: Religion according to Plog et al 1975) as cited in Agha and Nwaoga (2012) is defined as “any system of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that make life meaningful and intelligible.” (p.4) Furthermore they state that for Durkheim (1961) however religion is not a mere set of beliefs, values or ethos but rather relates to a broader picture of a country’s moral values and their collective beliefs whatever it might be. They therefore submit that religion should be seen as a cultural instrument and that to evolve the Nigeria of our collective dream her citizenry should uphold the values of virtue, peace, brotherly love, unity and accountability as sacred road map for evolving a single moral community. Religious as used in the above context is that which relates or is committed to religion. Religion is the cultural index that is concerned with a people’s perception of the supernatural reality called God and their inherent demands and benefits. It is the cosmological platform that helps man to give meaning to his existence within the context of the creator called God.

Moral: According to Chambers Dictionary the word moral relates to character or conduct considered as good or evil; ethical or adhering to or directed towards what is right. In his own contribution, Amunnadi (2016) states that the above word has to do with morality which he refers to as a the principle of showing respect for and obedience to rules of right conduct. Besides he notes that the word has to do with social rules, customs, traditions, beliefs or practices which moderates or defines proper and acceptable terms of conduct (p.203).They therefore relates to the standards or parameters for regulating individual or group behavior with respect to what is considered good or evil, acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong. Against these backdrop moral sanctions therefore refers to those penalties that are placed on individuals, groups or societies that violates moral rules which may be anchored on social, religious, cultural, political or economic traditions. It is those material or non-material liability imposed upon individual or groups who defaults prescribed social rules, beliefs or customs.

Socio-Religious Implication of Moral Sanction in National Development
For many years, it has become a well-known fact that poor moral attitudes have contributed to the Nigerian poor national development. This has placed the nation on an unending search for ways to align herself among the community of ethically developed nations. Chiegbo (2012) noted this fact when he wrote:

For more than a decade Nigerian leaders have been looking for means and ways to inculcate in Nigerians the basic and necessary virtue of discipline …
In spite of newspaper, radio, television, propaganda mounted to affect the above objectives, Nigerians have become scarcely more moral (p.218).

From the above assertion, Nigerian leaders are yet to achieve the necessary virtue of discipline despite all the efforts. However, Madu (1997), while citing 1979 constitution observed that the use of ethical control to achieve discipline is sacrosanct when he states as follows: “The National Constitution of 1979, (Chapter5, para 1, sect 62) advocates for code of ethics and means of ensuring professional discipline, since it states that dishonest person if discovered should be disqualified for elective offices” (p.121).

We can now say that the difficulty in achieving the virtue of discipline in our national character which unfortunately has continued to fuel the engine of underdevelopment is partly predicated on the failure to deploy moral sanction as a developmental paradigm. This is because no society can achieve discipline or ordered society when its values and norms are not driven by moral sanctions. In fact, research have shown that laws or norms of the society are maintained more when the people link moral sanction to the supra mundane.

As the Nigerian nation continues to seek for new ways to bring about the moral revolution that would kick start her on the path to sustainable development, there is the need to explore the place of moral sanction as a vehicle for promoting high ethically driven society. To achieve this, our educational system must be reformed to integrate research, development and administration of sanctionable offences outside the normal legal judiciary system. Furthermore education at all levels and all discipline should incorporate morality. In other words informal and formal education, be they science and technology, humanities, law, engineering, medicine and so on must be grounded on morality. If every education is founded on morality, education would not be for egoistic interest of a few, but to ensure benefit for all.

Madu (1997) resound this when he linked morality with religion by positing as follows:

This idea is also echoed by the formulator of the national policy on education (Rev.1981) when they said that religion should be taught for the purpose of inculcating moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations, for the survival of the individual and society (p.121).

What this shows is that education which is the midwife of national development ought to be linked to moral sanctions education to achieve a greater result in Nigerian society. To support our view that moral sanction is needed for national development, we again reflect on what Madu (1997) submits that the constitution emphasizes the need to promote religious education in schools as an avenue for the production of disciplined citizens for the nation who will work for the development of the nation.”

The concept of morality in Africa points to the importance of moral sanction in achieving national development in Nigerian society. Contrary to the Western Moral system which is driven by obedience to the conventional ways of behaviour, African morality on the other hand holds its foundation to the people’s belief. Kanu (2015) corroborates the above view when he states inter alia: “In the Western moral theory, the social order is mere conformity with conventionalized behaviour; however, for the African, morality and moral laws are
based on belief and unshakable principles that are tied to ontology and held from conviction” (p.166).

Metuh (1999) also affirmed that African morality has its foundation to the ontological view. He said this when he disclosed about morality of the Igbo people as follows:

Igbo morality is linked with the ontological order set up by God and any infringement of the precept disturbs the ontological order. The balance must then be restored by appropriate rituals … Sin is conceived primarily – though not exclusively – as an infringement of the natural law (p.135).

The fact that morality in Africa bases its framework on the Africa ontology make us to maintain that application of moral sanction in Nigerian society can ensure national development. Immoral behaviour or evil that deter development is linked to the supernatural being; which means immorality is not seen as evil against the physical only, but also against the supernatural forces. On this note, people inculcate moral behaviour to avert the wrath of the spiritual forces and by this, national development is achieved. Quarcoopome (1987) held this view of connection of morality with the divine power when he made the following submission:

God is then invited to punish the moral offender. This is because as the final guardian of law and order he punishes man in this life for any offence against social and moral order … Thus, the world belongs to the God; the social and moral orders are according to his ordinances far above all divisions and races. The divinities also provide sanction for moral and ritual behaviour (p.161).

Kanu (2015) equally linked morality to ontology by maintaining that actions are adjudged evil in consideration to the ontological understanding when he avers that moral sanction provides people the belief that God punishes moral offenders who go against His laws. And to avoid the punishment by God, people avoid committing offence. What this means is that with the application of moral sanction people try to avoid committing offences which are capable of discouraging national development.

When moral behaviours are exhibited in every section of national development for the sake of the invisible being, then Nigerian society will excel. For instance, if those in health section which includes the doctors, nurses, laboratory scientists, pharmacists and so on carry out their duties with the mindset of averting the divine wrath, many people especially among the work force who would have died out of negligence of duties would have been prevented. In the same vein if those who are in charge of Nigerian education perform their duties from the African ontological point of view, many abnormalities in Nigerian education sector would have been averted. And when education sector is gotten right, national development will be a huge success. In fact, if every sector in Nigeria like the electoral, judicial, legislative, educational, medical, agricultural, law enforcement agencies and so on performs its duties focusing on African ontology, the national development would no doubt be highly positioned on the path of forward motion.
Community consciousness which is an expression of moral sanction occupies a big space in African socio-religious view. In Africa, persons are defined by reference to their community, and therefore community or societal world takes priority over the individual. Mbiti (1969) wrote from African traditional religious point of view and disclosed this when he said; “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am” (p.108).

In Africa, individualism is encouraged for the betterment of all in the community. Individualism is harnessed for collectivity. As a result of collectivity, there is a link between moral sanction and the community. For example, when one commits a crime, the offence is not only on the offender, but on the entire community. Consequently, it is believed that an injury or harm to one is an injury or harm to all. Speaking from Igbo traditional religious perspectives, Edeh (1985) explained this fact thus:

> From the Igbo idea of community founded on love and brotherhood, it is easy to discern that for the Igbos any evil, physical or moral, even though personal, has a community dimension. An evil is considered such because it fractures the ultimate whole of life; it causes a break in an existential unity (p.106).

Quarcoopome (1987) added to the above view when he states that a person’s individuality is given meaning or expression within the context of the community. What this means is that all forms of evil that a person suffers or metes out on others cannot be evaluated merely on their individual context. In other words evil must be appraised within the context of its impact on individual persons as well as the community. And to show how important community is for the Africans, Njoku (2004) wrote to explain how Africans even perform rituals to pacify the community; “The African man had many taboos to observe, and many daily rituals to perform, either to appease the community or the divinity”(p.57). Writing from Christian morality and support to the relevance of moral sanction, Ilogu (1974) relates Christianity, ethics and community by positing as that Christian ethics, basically speaking grew out of the Bible both as a guide for individual life, as well as direction for participating in the corporate lives of believers in Christ in the fellowship of the church and of the community in the world (p.138).

From critical observation of the Christian morality, one can understand that the morality is based on the teaching of Jesus Christ on love of God and love for fellow man (love for fellow man is love for community), and also the other teachings from the bible. In these teachings, one can observe the significance of moral sanction. Emphases are on morality through Jesus Christ by living pious life, good social life in the community/society; share peaceful existence with neighbours and in this can be summed up as art of developing accountability to God. The teachings also show punishments that await offenders who fail to live moral lives. These punishments are not according to the constitution of the land or by the law enforcement agencies, but spiritual punishments. Our opinion is that Christians live moral lives because of the belief in Jesus Christ and focus on the heaven and its benefits; not necessarily because of the constitution or fear of the law enforcement agencies. Again Ilogu (1974) corroborates Christian moral approach this way:
Evangelical moralistic approach to life, was adopted and in most sermons vivid pictures of the tortures of hell and the joys of paradise were given ... belief among Evangelicals of the Victorian era and later, that the sum total of the good moral life of the redeemed (who in their fear of hell will abjure evil) will produce a just society, was evident (p.140).

What we want to express is that, in Africa, emphasis is on community and not individual. For example, if one embezzles public fund, it is not seen as offense committed by the offender only, but as sin committed by the entire community. If Mr. ‘A’ is from ‘B’ community, and Mr. ‘A’ embezzles money provided for national development, in the eye of the people, it is a man from ‘B’ community that embezzled the money. In some cases, people do not care to know the name of the culprit, what is important is where the culprit comes from. Therefore, if this type of moral sanction or consciousness could be our reflection in Nigeria, we can progress in our socio-religious angle which will therefore ensure national development.

However, this emphasis on community does not exonerate individuals from the offence committed by them. In the application of moral sanction, Africans which includes Nigerians believe that there are consequences of sin on every particular offender. Anyone who commits sin suffers the punishment either here on earth or the hereafter. Quarcoopome (1987) remarked this thus:

However, in spite of the corporate nature of the traditional society with its loss of social and moral responsibility and accountability, the traditional religion like the Hebrew religion emphasizes individual sin and guilt ... Thus, a moral offender whom misfortune overtakes is said to be under the lashes of God (p.167).

Conclusion
In the comparative study of the adherence between moral sanction and legal or constitutional laws, we can understand that moral sanction which has been the code with which the people live their practical daily lives impact more in the efforts to national development. We can understand this more when we think of the facts that moral sanction has common features with religious views; and Nigerian like other Africans are very religious as was observed by Mbiti (1969):

Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crops, he takes it with him to beer parlor or to attend funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university, if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliaments (p.2).

Moral sanction shares the same view points with the religious perspectives, therefore when one observes the dos and don’ts of religious dictates of any of the three major religions in Nigeria one equally observes moral sanction. So, when the moral sanction is applied in every sector, people observe it strictly and therefore achieve national development. In communities, moral sanction tends to regard actions or duties as imposition from the supra mundane. The
moral ideas by which people exhibits good behaviour to their neighbours create conducive environment where people can come together to discuss issues that can lead to national development. What this mean is that interpersonal relationship which is expressed in the observation of moral sanction can result to national development.

The foundation or object to which morality or moral sanction is referred to determines the attention it draws. As a religious society, morality in Nigeria is grounded on the person of God and this no doubt makes moral sanction to be seen as divine imperatives that carries grave consequences for defaulters. Basden (1966), noted this when he explained Igbo attitude to morality. He wrote; “Certain delinquencies like murder, theft and adultery, are considered heinous crime and deemed contrary to the will of God and punishment will surely follow.” (pp.38-39). Parrinder (1969) equally noticed this and said; “God is generally regarded as upholding moral laws, and judging man after death in accordance with their actions.” (p.24). And Metuh (1999) echoed the same view when he said; “God exercises His control over morality in several ways; first through His universal providence over the universe; second through His direct punishment of wrong doing in this life” (p.144).

In agreement with the views of the above authors, we wish to say that moral sanction by its grounding in the personality called God is best suited in providing social, cultural, political, religious, economic, educational and technological restraints or social functions with a view to building and sustaining harmonious and progressive society. What this means is that key stakeholders in national leadership should not only promote growth in positive development i.e. virtue and technology through education and research they should also strive to promote social control though establishment of moral sanctions that would moderate illicit lifestyle be it in the political, industrial, religious, technological, educational, cultural or domestic/family. Against this backdrop the family, Churches, Schools, Industries, government and non-government organizations must work in synergy to promote sustainable national development anchored on strong moral foundations or sanctions. Nigerians who are religious people would stride to evolve moral dictates or sanctions that would help to regulate the entrenched evil practices like embezzlement of public fund, election mal practices, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, rape, education mal practices, insurgence and so on that have continued to undermine her quest for national development. And by checkmating these evils by conforming to moral dictates, Nigerian society would achieve national development.

Recommendations
The following are some recommendations made as an attempt at charting the way forward.

1) Moral sanctions should draw from objective platform or ethical foundation that cuts across cultures so as to be universally acceptable.

2) Moral sanctions education should be incorporated in our educational curriculum as a part of citizenship education from the nursery to tertiary level of our educational system as a means of promoting moral awareness and accountability.

3) The government should create National Ethics Committee which should be charged with promoting and sustaining quality control in the deploying of moral sanctions as a developmental platform from the local to national level. In other words moral sanction
while serving as a para-legal tool for social control must be regulated by law to avoid the abuse of people's fundamental human rights.

4) The religious community, industries, institutions, community and government must work in partnership to develop sanctionable conducts and their appropriate penalties.

5) The people in political leadership must provide the motivation for good conduct by ensuring that moral sanctions are not deployed to punish only the poor and non-powerful members of the society.

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