

Religion, Ethics and Attitudes towards Corruption in Nigeria

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I.1 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Religion plays a very critical role in social life in Nigeria¹ as in many parts of Africa. According to Marshall (2005: 1-2), “religion has marked importance for Africa across many dimensions...what we can find underscore the basic messages of high importance, major tectonic shifts, and complex patterns.” Even in daily living, that religion is given prominent place among Nigerians can be seen for instance in the number of Churches and Mosques and the rate at which they grow as well as posters that adorn streets, billboards and even vehicles in many cities and towns virtually advertising the activities/programmes of one religion or the other. This and other manifestations of religiosity make it easy to conclude that religion and religious activities are common place in the country. That religion is also important can be gleaned from the incessant violent religious confrontations between Muslims and Christian in major cities in the northern part of the country, most recently in Jos, Plateau state.

Religion is often, though not always viewed as positive. For instance, Marshall (2005:8) acknowledged the positive force of religion. On the flip side are those who detract from this position. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004: 2) argue that religion can be used as a tool of manipulation in resource-poor settings in Africa. Indeed, they explore how ideas about the supernatural are regularly manipulated-by the powerful, to justify and buttress their power, and by the weak, to resist and undermine it. For its positive content, it is not out of place then to expect, or at least many Nigerians do expect, that the pervasiveness of religion in the life of Nigerians should moderate tendencies to engage in corruption commonly defined as ‘the abuse of public office for private gain’ (World Bank, 1997: 8), which is also endemic in the country (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005:174-189; Williams, 2005: 17-29; Sangosanya et al, 2005: 70-77; Underkuffer, 2009: 38-39).

In addition, religions tend to connect adherents together and according to Marshall (2005:8), speaking about Christians and Churches, often have much influence on how they live their lives. Furthermore, Ellis and Ter Haar take this idea further in exploring the role of religion in political thought and action: “It is largely through religious ideas that Africans think about the world today...Religious ideas provide them with a means of becoming social and political actors”². To most Nigerians, religion and faith are important aspects of everyday life. It controls the laws, how you think and act, what you believe, what you value, and more. In a society such as Nigeria’s where faith is an integral and inseparable part of people’s lives, the ethical and moral templates that religion offers should dissuade public officers and in fact, everyone from predilections to corruption. Indeed, faith provides the language of ethics and, often, an actual ‘list’ of rules to live by, some of which can be interpreted as being of particular importance to fighting corruption.

Unfortunately, Nigeria ranks as one of the most corrupt nations in the world according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI). The organisation’s 2011 survey places her 134th of 178 countries in the world³. According to Kukah (2010),

Corruption... more than any other thing, is the greatest obstacle to personal, communal and national growth. Nigeria’s case is worse... We have no rule and no mechanisms of restraint. To respond to the peculiar nature of our situation, the abnormal has now become the normal...

This rating comes *pari passu* with a high ranking in the religiosity index using indicators such as the Pew Research Centre’s Forum on Religion and Public Life which indicates that 90% or more of respondents in most of their

¹ Religion is important for 92% of Nigerians surveyed in Marshall, K. (2005: 6).

² Ellis, Stephen and Gerrie Ter Haar, (2004) *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, p2.

³ Daily Independent, February 12, 2011.

surveyed countries identify as and are deeply committed to Christianity or Islam and yet many continue to practice elements of traditional African religions⁴. Furthermore, the 2007 global attitudes project found that a high percentage of Nigerians (over 80%), express concern about political corruption as a very important problem.

The above raises a set of interesting questions: do public servants separate public and private morality (Ekeh, 1975)? Are citizens' attitudes towards corruption shaped by their religious beliefs and devotion? Do public servants see religious teachings on ethics as implementable or practicable at work or as utopian, difficult to implement or non-operable in practice? Do specific religious practices differ in terms of attitudes to corrupt behaviour? Do the dispositions of religious leaders to corruption by way of denunciation, tolerance or even overt involvement in corrupt activities influence the laity's attitudes towards corrupt behaviour? Clearly, a better understanding of the relationship between faith, ethics and corruption will be useful to anti-corruption actors and their partners, aside making significant contribution to the formation process of attitudes towards corruption.

1.2 Research Issues and Objectives

The aims of the project on *Religion, Ethics and attitudes to corruption* are thus two-fold. First, to assess how citizens' individual religious beliefs influence their attitudes towards corruption, which in turn could influence their disposition to engage in corrupt practices and their reactions to anti-corruption initiatives. Secondly, the project examines the role of religious organisations and particularly FBOs as actors impacting upon the discourse on corruption among their members. It is hoped that understanding both the influence of faith/religion as a transmitter of attitudes regarding corrupt behaviour in the public sector, and the religious organisations as actors in the corruption/anti-corruption discourse, will provide useful lessons that could aid the design of anti-corruption strategies in Nigeria. Importantly, it deepens knowledge on formation of attitudes to corruption and opens the space for more studies into this fairly well-researched area of study.

Corruption is notoriously difficult to study, as it involves activities/behaviours that are by their very nature secretive and usually illegal. It is tough, if not impossible, to quantify corruption, even when the phenomenon is stripped down to the most basic public office/legal definition. When a moral/faith-based dimension is introduced into the equation, it becomes all the more problematic to measure or to draw comparisons across faiths. Nevertheless, the approach adopted in this study and which design is heavily influenced by a number of previous efforts (e.g., Pavarala, 1996; Doig and Melvor, n.d.; Alolo, 2006a; 2006b), facilitates the problematization and appraisal of the following range of research aims and objectives:

- 1) In the perception of respondents, what is religion and what is corruption?
- 2) How does religious belief influence attitudes towards corruption?
- 3) What differences exist, if any, between different religions in terms of influence on citizens' attitudes towards corruption?
- 4) What role does positionality play in attitudes towards corruption; in other words, does being closer to opportunities for corruption influence attitudes towards corruption more than religious belief?
- 5) Do religious organisations and FBOs themselves impact members' attitudes towards corruption?

In order to answer the above research questions and objectives, the project employs a qualitative methodology (more on methodology below).

1.3 Methodology & Data Analysis

The study is conducted in Nigeria where corruption is both recognized as a problem afflicting the state and a subject of intense religious debate. In reflecting on what the researchers perceive as the most urgent questions arising from the uncharted relationship between religion and corruption, partly based on RaD research objectives as well as the literature review, this research explores people's understanding of corrupt or uncorrupt behaviour within society; what they conceive as the causes of corruption, and how their attitudes towards corruption are shaped or influenced by their religious beliefs or practices.

⁴ <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/799/global-social-trust-crime-corruption>, retrieved on 26/8/2010.

The study is largely exploratory because there is scant literature on the relationship between religion, ethics and corruption. A qualitative approach is favoured involving personal interactions and dialogues between the researcher and the researched (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2001; Morgan, 1998; 1988; Strauss, 1987). This approach facilitates a nuanced assessment of the respondents' views on religion and attitudes towards corruption. It employs a combination of semi-structured, face to face in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case study scenarios. The respondents are carefully selected from people who are members of FBOs, or are employees or representatives of religious bodies. Others are people who occupy positions that expose them to everyday practices of corruption. Personal interactions through the use of an interview guide had been agreed among the research team as the obvious choice for gathering qualitative information, in addition to texts of religious teachings and secondary data from media reports. Texts of religious teachings were referred to by respondents and used to illustrate religious teachings about corruption; while secondary data from media reports in newspapers, libraries, periodicals and communiqués of religious groups or organisations' meetings help to conceptualise issues, discuss and analyse some of them, as well as expand, interpret or corroborate the views of respondents. The case study scenarios in particular were applied after taking the respondents through the various lines of questions in the interview guide essentially as control or to check for consistency or contradictions in their responses.

About six analytical categories or sub-categories emerged during the coding process that incorporated responses to the themes/questions addressed during the interviews, focus group discussions and scenarios presented to respondents. In this paper, only findings on three are presented.

1.4 Study Sites and Respondents

Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR)⁵ are three major religions in Nigeria and their adherents⁶ constitute the subjects in this research. It is important to observe that these religions are not in any way homogenous since they have many groups that have some major cords that bind them together, but which still differ in other respects such as in terms of mode of worship, practices, rituals, dressing and festivals etc. Thus, among Christians can be found Catholics, Protestants, Apostolics, Pentecostals and the like. Also, among Muslims can be found *Tijanniyyah* and *Qadiriyyah*- the two largest Islamic sects in a place like Kano as well as the neo- orthodox sect of *Izala*. Despite belonging to one major religion, some of these religious groups/sects can be involved in bitter conflict with each other.

In order to capture the three main religions in the country, four locations where they are predominantly concentrated and/or active, in tandem with other religions which are in the minority were selected for the research as follows: Kano in the North West (for Muslims); Abuja, the Federal Capital, in the North central (for all religions); Owerri in the South East (for African Traditional Religion (ATR) practitioners and Christians) and Ibadan in the South West (for Christians and Muslims). Ibadan in the South West of Nigeria was also the location for the pilot study.

The interviews also covered certain categories of people within these religions and within governance and society. Through theoretical and purposive sampling, respondents were identified. Through the process of snowballing, initial contacts and/or interviewees helped to identify other possible respondents who meet certain thematic issues/characteristics that require further elaboration or that are considered by the researchers as important to be captured. These were targeted in order to understand the positions that the religions take on corruption, ethical conduct and morality. In all, 120 (one hundred and twenty) interviews and 12 FGDs were planned. However, only 108 (one hundred and eight) interviews and 12 (twelve) FGDs were conducted. This means that we achieved 90

⁵ As the Pew-Templeton 2010 Survey of 25, 000 people in face-to-face interviews and conducted in more than 60 languages or dialects in 19 African Nations including Nigeria has found, "while 90% or more of the respondents in most of the countries surveyed identify as Christian or Muslim, many people retain beliefs that are characteristic of traditional African religions, such as belief in the protective powers of sacrifices to spirits and ancestors. Many keep sacred objects such as animal skins and skulls in their homes and consult traditional religious healers when someone in their household is sick" See, [pewforum.org/Press Room Press Releases](http://pewforum.org/PressRoom/PressReleases) Retrieved on 26/8/2010.

⁶ These are put variously at between 45% Christian; 45% Muslim and 10% ATR or others, <http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/people.html#christianity>; and 50% Muslim, 40% Christian and 10% ATR <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Nigeria-RELIGIONS.html>, assessed on 08/12/2010.

percent of the targeted number of interviews. However, this study as a case study on the role of religion in influencing attitudes to corruption is expected to point in certain directions but may not be generalized beyond Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1 Introduction

It was Diamond (1993) who described corruption as Nigeria's perennial struggle. This is very well so since corruption has become a feature of public life in spite of the repeated and diverse efforts to rout the menace right from the colonial days when the country emerged as one of the major outposts of the British Empire. It appeared as if campaigns to deal with the problem only served to diversify the many ways corruption is expressed and weaken the resolve to reduce it in public life. The phenomenal spread of corruption is all the more problematic when viewed against the background of the consistently increasing public codes of ethics and measures designed to punish those who practice corruption. Corruption has continued to increase even as the country experienced a revival in religious activities since the 1990s⁷. Religious fundamentalism among Christian, Muslim and African traditional religious sects has increased while corruption in public life has literally become associated with national identity. Therefore, not few have wondered whether religion as a major source of ethics or morality has any influence on the attitude of Nigerians towards corruption.

II.2 Corruption in Religious Discourse

Nigeria, though officially a secular state, is really a multi-religious state. This claim is justified by its religious diversity, vibrancy and actual state involvement in religious matters like pilgrimages to which public funds are committed. The centrality of religion in the life of the average Nigerian cannot be ignored. Although recent population censuses (1991 and 2006) have avoided data on religion, the controversial 1963 census put Nigeria's population at 49 per cent Muslim, 34 percent Christian and 17 per cent adherents of indigenous religious traditions (see Suberu et al, 1999). Religious identity is highly politicised, especially between Christians and Muslims, and conflicts between the two groups involving the death of several thousands of citizens has been a recurring event in northern Nigeria. There are also conflicts between the various sects within the major religions. These pose another challenge for an assessment of the influence of religion on an individual's attitude towards corruption. Is religion more an instrument for achieving political or sectional ends than a framework for ethical living? What do the three religions say about corruption?

II. 2.1 Christianity and Corruption

Nigerian Christians often use the term "corruption" as an umbrella word for wrong doings such as dishonesty, exploitation, bribery, fraud, venality, depravity and perversion amongst others. Awe (1997:23-24) lists three usages of the term Corruption in the Bible. The first is that corruption is seen as deviating from God's will, plan or counsel. The second usage is with reference to immoral behaviour. The third is in the sense of less than perfect. Generally, corrupt practices are perceived as an evil which Christians should not engage in. In the words of Hager (2002:74), it "entails all manner of sinful acts of disobedience to God, which include lack of love, humility, self control, moral rectitude and drunkenness, hatred, malice, cruelty, laziness, abusive language etc." It implies a "lack of justice, lack of love and mercy and lack of humility". Thus, for the Christian, corruption is not just a moral issue; it is a sin, an offence against God. In public life, the Christian is called to uphold moral principles of justice, love and responsibility. The Second Vatican Council puts it this way: "The best way to fulfil one's obligation of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs of others, even to a point of fostering and helping public and private organisations devoted to bettering the conditions of lifeif individuals and groups practice moral and social virtues and foster them in social living" (Vatican II 1988: 930). The Council denounces grand and noble sentiments without practical uprightness. In the same vein, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), in their pastoral letter to mark Nigeria's independence, emphasised that "Nobody can be a true member of the church

⁷ As a result of the introduction of Shari'ah and its implementation in many Northern Nigerian States (See Ostien, 2007) and the violent religious confrontations between Muslims and Christian in major cities in the northern part of the country, including Kaduna, Kano, Bauchi and Jos.

who is not a good citizen of the state...An important part of the moral effort of the church goes towards ensuring that Christians are upright and intelligent members of the political community” (CBCN 2002:6). However through the history of Christianity, corruption has been a major challenge both within the church and in the world in which the church is situated. Thus, the effort to combat corruption has been a perennial challenge for Christianity.

In Nigeria it is very common to hear Christians quoting Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians (Chapter 5:17) to the effect that ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new is has come.’ Thus, the acceptance of Christ absolves one of all sin, including criminal acts committed before repentance. It is in very few situations that the question of restitution is raised. Restitution is known to be preached more in the Deeper Life Bible Church than elsewhere in the Pentecostal world of Nigeria. This understanding might account for the high tolerance of corruption and the de-emphasis on restitution and atonement and thereby punishment for public officers involved in corruption in many churches in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Christian religious landscape is currently defined by the presence of Pentecostalism. Their emphasis on healing, success, prosperity and deliverance are all rooted in the appropriation of power in its traditional and modern forms. The Pentecostal movement generates a local understanding of Christianity even though it expresses a rejection of African traditional religion. Their view on corruption is described succinctly by Ojo (2004:9)

Although, Charismatics and Pentecostals did not support any political ideology or party, they have rather supported individual political leaders as a way of expanding Christian influence in the competitive multi-religious society. A Christian upholding fundamental religious principles brings up the image of the triumphant good God while a bad government indicates the operation of evil forces to retard development and make Christians to suffer.

As far as ethics are concerned, these new churches with their emphasis on malevolent and demonic forces or spiritual attack as the basis of illness, misfortune and accidents give the impression that they create fear in order to be able to offer solutions. One scholar, and Catholic priest, has described the leaders of some of these congregations as “pastors scavenging for fortunes in the name of leading souls to God through the organisation of endless *spiritual trade fairs* called revivals and vigils... hood winking and deducing ordinary citizens away from the culture of hard work and the need to develop a truly Christian ethic to wealth (Kukah 2007: 37-38). The churches associate with politicians that are notorious for abuse of office in Nigeria.

However, this criticism is beginning to apply to other traditional churches, in particular, the Catholic Church as well. This does not however diminish the point that mostly, Pentecostal churches play the role of the Marxian opium of the people as it is common for Nigerians to pray and wait on God to act rather than hold their leaders to account or transform the church into an instrument for challenging corruption in public life. The teachings and practices of Christianity need to be further investigated vis-a-vis developments in Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR) in the attempt to explore the role of faith-based groups in corruption in Nigeria.

II.2.2 Islam and Corruption

For long, Islamic Jurists and other scholars of Islam have developed abstract concepts of what is “good” or “evil”. Izutsu (1966) has located the origin of morality in Islam to the eschatological framework provided by God in the Qur’an, which makes the ultimate destiny of man dependent on his conduct in the present world. Thus, for man to attain moral goodness as described in the Qur’an, his conduct should reflect some of the commonest conceptions for ethico – religious excellence.

Behaviours that are good or evil are itemised in the Qur’an, “good” is desirable and should be cultivated while “evil” is to be avoided or dispelled. Some of these are represented in the following terms:

- **Salih:** This term is translated as “righteous” or “good”.
- **Su:** Derived from the root word *Su’*, is the opposite of *Salihat* in the Qur’an (verse iv, 122-124).

- **Birr:** This term is similar in meaning to *Salih*. It may be interpreted to mean “piety” or “righteousness” or “kindness” (Qur’an verse 11, 172/177).
- **Fasad:** This term is used to denote various kinds of evil doings such as stealing, homosexuality, violent oppression and the acts of sorcery and other acts of corruption.
- **Ma’ruf and Munkar:** *Ma’ruf* is defined very often as what is acknowledged and approved by the divine law (Izutsu, 1966). Its opposite *Munkar*, means what is disapproved precisely because it is unknown and foreign.

The definitions discussed above have been important in Muslim criticism of the secular state as well as Islam’s emphasis on justice and in the development of Shari’a legal codices. This perhaps explains the importance of legal tradition Muslim thinking. Indeed, other Islamic scholars have expressed views that show the abhorrence of Islam of corruption. In their view, Islam does not sanction any form of fraud or corruption, which are categorized under the major sins (Shehu, 2007). For emphasis, any wealth that is earned through any corrupt or fraudulent means is unlawful and illegal (*haraam*), and if one desires to make a decent living, it has to be through honest means and hard work. Also, abuse of public responsibility by leadership is seen as one of the grievous forms of fraud.

For Muslims, “a set of rules exists, external, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of man, which defines the proper ordering of society...These rules are to be implemented in social life (Gellner 1983:1). Thus, there is no separation of state and religion in Islam. That is why for Adegbite, “the disrespectful rating of Nigeria as the third most corrupt nation in the world would not arise in the Islamic context, as Shari’ah, properly administered, would have taken care of all corrupt elements in society (2006: 147). The Izala has been the vanguard of the Shari’ah movement.

II.2.3 African Traditional Religion and Corruption

The disposition to attribute the breakdown of societal values to the incursion of a new or foreign religion (such as Christianity and Islam) is a major tendency among practitioners of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Concerning ethics and moral values, African traditional religions have an elaborate system of morals and levels of discipline that are expected of different groups of people. For instance, priests of shrines are known to be ‘different’, and they are often believed to pursue rigorous ascetic existence which gives them disposition to encounter the world of spirits and transmit messages from the supernatural order to the material world. Just as ATR perceives continuity between the supernatural and the natural order, so it provides a repertoire of ethical prescriptions for everyday living.

Egberongbe (1988:123) observes for instance, that the traditional *Ifa*⁸ corpus associated with the Yoruba speaking people of south west Nigeria imposes dos and don’ts on man’s activities in relation to nature’s dictates. This is to make an individual conscious of his or her role in the community, to be a good citizen and contribute to social stability and prosperity. *Ifa* “encourages hard work, emphasises honesty and devotion to duty, abhors dictatorial action given to human mentality, promotes more consultation with the esoteric for divine guidance towards good governance on earth, condemns in totality the attitude of rumour mongering, back biting, lies, stealing, arson, murder, suicide, ostentation, fraud, pride, avarice, and a lot more of the vices that many a human...” Bad behaviour is not tolerated and is usually visited with instantaneous justice. He is of the view that the justice system received from the West is part of the causes of the problem of corruption because it is too slow and in practice is virtually devoid of the spiritual. That is why Nigerian leaders can swear to the Bible to preserve the constitution and uphold the public interest and then proceed to prey on the state. With *Ifa* or any other deity, one cannot display acts of dishonesty and go scot-free, because the foundation of co-existence among the ‘*Irunmole*’ is based on absolute piety”. He goes further to argue that foreign religion has led to a salient lackadaisicality in the lifestyle of leadership which has become an indirect parasite on the nation’s wealth and ability to develop (Egberongbe 1988:124).

ATR practitioners argue that their religion is ‘natural’ to the African and that moral depravity is the consequence of relying on an ‘inauthentic’ adherence to an alien religion. Although exponents of traditional religion exalt the values of ATR and their usefulness for uplifting the morality of society, and although they locate the current moral crisis and corruption in an alien religious incursion, they fail to chart a way out of this crisis except to ask for a

⁸ *Ifa* is a Yoruba divination system. See Olupona J.K. (2007) “Communities of Believers: Exploring African Immigrant Religion in the U.S.” in J.K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani (eds.), “African Immigrant Religions in America” NY and London, New York University Press.

return to traditional religion and values. They therefore fail to deal with the reality of cultural dynamism, the question of adaptiveness to modernity (not Westernisation) as well as the possibilities of universal values.

The question of adaptiveness also points to the fact that some of the traditional values and practices may be hindrances to progress in terms of modernity. But more important is the fact that traditional religion practitioners fail to deal with the question of the effects of traditional religiosity on individual ethics and attitude towards corruption. Indeed, Christianity and Islam in Nigeria are perceived to be different from Islam and Christianity elsewhere, in the sense that such religions have been affected by ATR. Some churches are described as syncretic because of close relations between their practices and those of ATR. Islam and Christianity have also influenced each other in Africa. Also, the assumption that if traditional religion dominates the public domain corruption will be reduced is not borne out by experience in pre-colonial African societies as such societies were not completely devoid of corruption in any sense of the word. It is also debatable to claim that such societies were more stable and humane than post-colonial societies.

One clear problem area for African Traditional Religion is the deployment of supernatural powers for criminal and corrupt (especially political) purposes. There are instances where traditional powers were sought to carry out clearly immoral or corrupt activities. Thus, there is a need to clarify the concept of good and evil, right or wrong, corruption and honesty within ATR, especially as it relates to power in the context of the modern state. Indeed, Ellis and ter Haar (2008:182) explain that often, ATR has been a major factor fuelling corruption and as well in political confusion and violence, and the example of the Okija Shrine saga⁹ and other similar cases show that when a politician *turns to the spirit world for help in destroying his enemies or keeping his position, he does so in deadly earnest.*

Flowing from the above review of literature on the three main religions in Nigeria, we, present empirical findings from the field research on three analytical categories on aspects of the issue of religion, ethics and attitudes towards corruption in Nigeria.

III. 1 PEOPLES' PERCEPTION OF RELIGION AND MORALITY (ETHICS)

In this section, the study examines the views of respondents about religion and morality, including whether there is any association between the two. In addition it examines the relationship between religion, morality and corruption. There is convergence of views among respondents of all faiths on the positive association between religion and morality. The basic line is that religion guides everyday living and shapes moral decisions along the way. In the first place, there is broad perception of a natural inclination to religious worship or devotion: "Human beings have been created solely to worship God; so basically the role of religion cannot be overemphasized, "whatever you do, its foundation comes from the religious point of view" (IDI, *HISBAH* official, Male, Kano). This derives from the acclaimed religiosity of the average Nigerian and a widespread belief system which has God at its very heart as evident from the following quotes:

"Human beings have been created solely to worship God; and so basically its role cannot be over emphasized. Whatever you do its foundation comes from the religious point of view" (IDI, Muslim, Male, Kano).

"...The link between us and God is the light and sound, and that is still possible till today. Thus, I have seen the light and sound and it guides every of my way of life" (IDI, Male Eckist, Ibadan).

"I have come over the years to understand what religion is and what impact it has on the general public. And I've found that there is hardly any human being that can do without any particular religion whether Christianity, Islam or otherwise. And you know...we are born into especially here in Nigerian we are deeply religious and in fact, we have been said to be notoriously religious, at least anybody in Nigeria has a religion so it's part and parcel of our life here...Am a Christian apart from been a

⁹ See Ellis Stephen, (2008) "The Okija Shrine: Death and Life in Nigerian Politics", *Journal Of African History*, 49, pp445-466.

Christian, am also a Catholic. So religion has been guiding my steps, it has been guiding my way of life...” (IDI, Catholic Priest, Ibadan).

In general, religiosity involves two key elements: faith and practice. Muslims profess faith (Imam) and practices or rituals (Ibadat, meaning acts of worship). *HISBAH* respondents contend that religiosity can be deduced from well-grounded practices. In their view, religion comes with a repertoire of rules of conduct or injunctions admonishing “right” living. Thus, many religions lay out fundamental attitudes and behaviours that are considered good and desirable and others that are ruled immoral and to be avoided. In a nutshell therefore, *a religious person should be a morally upright person* (FGD, Hisbah officials, Kano). This position finds support across our sample of respondents: Christians, Muslims and ATR practitioners alike.

For Christian respondents, the centrality of religious injunctions in daily life leads to humility and fear of God, which enforces good behaviour and avoidance of certain vices. For the Christian, God is a perfect being, as he created man in his image (Genesis 1:56), therefore man should be upright and perfect just like God (IDI, Male, ECWA Pastor, Kano). Also, a female civil servant opines that:

“Yes, morality has to do with your way of life, while ethics has to do with the ethics of the Bible and your discipline. So I believe both morality and ethics go together. If you are religious you are supposed to be morally and ethically same” (IDI, Female National Assembly Worker, Abuja).

There are clear shared grounds between Christian and Islamic beliefs about the impact religion should play in daily living. While asserting that religion provides a measuring rod or barometer for individual scrutiny or personal examination of moral strength or failings, Christian informants affirm as well that religion is total and complete and should thus guide lives, teach etiquette, provide knowledge about society and environment and offer a sense of security, protection and sustenance. More importantly, from the standpoint of this study, respondents contend that it exposes the danger to the faithful of engaging in immoral acts such as stealing, fornication, etc.

Broadly, it can be said that the position of African Traditional religion (ATR) practitioners on morality is consistent with those of the other two faiths discussed above. Their main thesis is that truth is sacred and must underlie all dealings among mankind. The ATR code is essentially based on trust, truth and integrity which qualify as moral teachings. According to an *Ifa* song:

*All religions are useful
Throw away bad behaviours
So that your mind can be clear
No religion supports bad behaviour* (IDI, Female, ATR, Ibadan)

From all the above, it is clear that respondents from all three religions agree that corruption represents a violation of rules, norms or any values of society that are not to be condoned. Corruption is seen as behavior or attitude that goes against the norms and laws of the society as received from God. As one respondent puts it “I think there is no religion that allows for corruption, so based on my religion, my attitude towards corruption is to reject it completely”¹⁰.

III.2 Secular/Professional against Religious/Personal values: do people separate public and private morality?

The purpose of this sub-section is to determine how, if at all, positionality influences respondents’ attitudes towards corruption. It also looks at distinctions, if any, between secular and religious values. Positionality is generally seen as a person’s location by circumstances, resources, information etc that enables him/her to do something.¹¹ It is

¹⁰ Male Muslim Informant.

¹¹ In other words, does being closer to opportunities for corruption influence attitudes towards corruption (more than religious belief?), See Religion and Development (RaD) Research Programme, Research Component ic) Ethics, Religion and Attitudes towards Corruption Research Proposal.

believed by most respondents to influence public servants and elected government officials' attitudes towards corruption. In general, politicians are wont to steal from the civic public realm for personal benefit as espoused by Ekeh (1975) and more recently, Osaghae (1994). Ekeh speaks of a bifurcated public realm and amoral politics. This refers to the fact that Nigerians are more attached and committed to the primordial public as against the civic public realm that is characterised by predatory rule, that is in turn a reflection of its illegitimacy (of the civic realm). This is because while morality holds sway in the primordial public realm, the civic public realm is amoral. On his part, Osaghae described the political arena as amoral and permissive to behaviours that are considered morally reprehensible in other contexts as politics and government are perceived in extractive or instrumentalist terms. This means that few people become politicians or seek office for altruistic reasons.

Duality propensities dominate the attitude of citizens whereby religious devotion or practices are strikingly at variance with the level of morality displayed in public life. This line of argument was widely accepted by informants who observe a divergence between the life that public servants live in the office and the life that they live in their religious spaces as exemplified by the following responses:

"well, as a matter of fact we are supposed to use religion in all our endeavors. With this we will succeed; but now in Nigeria we don't normally use them" (IDI, Muslim Hisbah official, Male, Kano).

"Religion and morality are there to guide people in business that are principle ethics which should guide the business activities but now a days people are using politics there is nothing like ethics or morally in them but the truth of the matter is business should be free from cheating" (IDI, Christian Leader, Abuja).

"Most people see it as normal i.e. to them it is not corruption but they just do it. But it depends on the level of activity; in essence they know but they don't want to believe it is corruption; but that they are only doing business which they consider normal" (IDI, Male, Muslim, Electoral Commission Official, Abuja).

One manifestation of this duality syndrome occurs when politicians and public office holders take oaths of offices clutching religious paraphernalia such as the Holy Bible and the Qur'an and pledging to serve the people in honesty and truth only for them to grossly neglect these principles in the course of their public service. Indeed, widespread religious devotion does not find full expression in public conduct among agents of the state. It is not unusual to observe extreme lack of consideration for the plight of the people, outright disrespect for the rule of law, unconscionable display of arrogance, flamboyance and impunity among political elites (See Box 1).

Box 1: Public Conduct of State Agents

Extreme lack of consideration for the plight of the people was exhibited in the revelation that Parliamentarians in Nigeria's National Assembly (NASS) were earning ridiculous salaries compared to what their counterparts in the US Congress were earning (See, "Legislathieves: How Federal Lawmakers squandered N700billion", in *Newswatch*, July 12, 2010, pp12-20); Congressional Research Service (CRS), August 30, 2007, pp1-15); "Jumbo Pay (US spends less than one per cent on Congress", in *The Punch*, December 19, 2010, p79. Indeed, in a country where poverty (intensity of deprivation rate) is among more than half of the population, standing at 57.9% according to UNDP (2009) HDI statistics, the Central Bank of Nigeria Governor raised an alarm to the effect that the NASS alone got 25.41% of the total national budget for 2010 (See, "National assembly summons Aganga, Sanusi over funds", in *The Guardian*, December 1, 2010, pp1-2; "Sanusi adamant on NASS's spending, threatens to quit", in *The Guardian*, December 2, 2010. p1, 4 and "Sanusi holds ground against Reps on pay claims", in *The Guardian*, December 8, 2010, p1, 4).

Outright disrespect for the rule of law and unconscionable display of arrogance could be seen in the House of Representatives' inappropriate suspension of ten of its members (who had accused the House leadership of corruption), as well as refusal to immediately admit same after they challenged the action in court and won (See, "Bankole, in the eye of the Storm", in *Newswatch*, June 28, 2010, pp32-33 and

“Bankole House of Commotion”, in *Newswatch*, July 5, pp37-39).

Flamboyance was for instance shown in the lifestyle of a former Speaker of the House of Representatives. The media reported skyrocketed contract sums of money voted for renovating and furnishing the Speaker’s official residence. This ultimately led to the official’s impeachment in 2007 (See “Etteh, Fire in the House”, *Newswatch*, September 3, 2007, pp24-26 and “The Controversial Contract Papers” and “Untold Story of her Life”, *Newswatch*, September 17, 2007, pp16-28).

Impunity among political elites was displayed when Lagos (an Action Congress (AC) state and Nassarawa, Ebonyi, Niger, Katsina (all Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) states created additional local governments and conducted elections based on them and were expecting to receive statutory federal allocations from the Federal Government. The then President, Obasanjo, ordered the stoppage of the monthly revenue allocations to Lagos state which refused to comply with the order to revert back to status-quo. This was done despite that the matter was still in court and was ultimately decided in favour of Lagos State. Other PDP controlled states had earlier reverted back to the former structure (See *The Comet*, October 22, 2002, p1).

Similarly, in the private sector, employers take advantage of the acute unemployment in the land and the desperation of the people to keep their jobs, to underpay their workers or subject them to indignities or literally keep them in servitude.

“...In business we don’t have good attitudes today; we want to maximize profit at all cost and all means regardless of the situation (IDI, Muslim Tijanniyyah Male, Kano).”

Religious teachings, sermons and prayers have clearly taken a back seat as public offices and official conducts are personalised within the context of corruption. The popular media including radio, television and newspapers are inundated with reports of corruption of mindboggling proportions by people who are in government or occupy positions of public trust. “*There are few transparent people in government. Because of half-hearted religious worship, Nigerians are more corrupt than religious*”¹². This is because people lack the moral character to resist certain negative influences prevalent in the society they find themselves (IDI, Male, Christian, Public servant (Head of Public Agency), Ibadan). Furthermore,

“We are in a materialistic world where people are getting desperate by the day; they want to make it by becoming rich so the moment they are given a position, what first comes to their minds is what they can make out of it” (Male, Muslim Qadiriyah Informant, Kano).

In essence, the distinction between secular and religious values appears vague from the revelations of informants. Moreover, secularism is believed to be a threat to morality and morality cannot be devoid of God¹³. Indeed, “*a person who portrays himself as very religious may be lacking in ethics and morals*” (IDI, Male, Christian, Kano).

Furthermore, on the issue of private versus public morality, it appears that the moral of religious teachings are professed in private life whereas utterly different considerations affect the way they are applied in public life. One informant asserts that,

“We are more religious in terms of belief, but we are more corrupt in terms of practice. Nigerians believe that religion is playing ceremonial role in their lives today. We go to worship God but we practice what we like. A Christian will say, *E fi ti Kesari fun Kesari, E fi ti Oluwa fun Oluwa*, meaning, give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” Religion has become part of a burgeoning showbiz. Thus, it seems that one is expected to be corrupt once in a position of power. People engage in corruption because they want to satisfy societal needs, expectations and pressure. As against religious teachings and doctrines, they want to acquire the societal needs of life at an early age

¹² IDI, Male official, Muslim Students Society (MSS), University of Ibadan.

¹³ See *The Redeemer*, Vol 4, No. 4, Redemptorist Youth and Vocation Ministry, Lagos, January –April 2003, pp2-3.

and at the expense of others. Government has a lot to do in addressing the scourge of poverty and aspirations for materialism” (IDI, Male, Ibadan).

From the foregoing, the position in which people find themselves, whether in or under authority, influences their attitude towards corruption, much more than religion.

IV. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PERSONAL ATTITUDES TO CORRUPTION

Here, we examine the relationship between religious beliefs and personal attitudes to corruption. Some of the issues raised include: Do Nigerians believe they are more religious than corrupt or vice versa; what is the role of FBOS (since they promote religious beliefs) in promoting or discouraging corruption and what is the relationship between religion and politics? In Nigeria, religion and corruption are intertwined to the extent that the predominant position among informants is that festering corruption is a manifestation of the degree of the people’s disconnection from God and religious teachings/doctrines. One oft-heard refrain is that one will be brought to account here and in the hereafter for every act and deed. This is normally expected to impose a moral consciousness on people to remain mindful of how life is led in view of the inevitability of God’s judgment. In Islam, any act that contradicts the tenets and teachings of religion is seen to be corrupt and these injunctions are stated in the Qur’an and Hadith of the Prophet. In *A DAIDAITA SAHU*, one informant confirms this: “I think there is no religion that allows for corruption, so based on my religion, my attitude towards corruption is not to accept it totally”, (sic, meaning at all) (Male Muslim Informant).

Christian informants gave similar response when their views on religious teachings and attitudes to corrupt practices were sought. A female informant confirms that her religion is against all vices and states that “as a believer, I am supposed to live up to the tenets of the religion whether they suit my selfish ends or not: corruption is not godly”. A Pastor of the ECWA church also gave a succinct description of attitude to corruption from the perspective of the Bible:

“Corruption is a social evil; it is an evil that is culturally embedded in the minds of people. Genesis says ‘man became a victim of every kind of evil in responding to sufferings’. I look at corruption as bad because my Bible specifies clearly that what does not belong to you does not belong to you”(IDI, Male, Christian, Kano).

But strict observance of prayers and simultaneous perpetration of corrupt acts make religious worship an exercise in futility. According to an informant,

“God said the righteous ones are those who fear Him. If one is knowledgeable once there is no fear of God, such a person can still perpetrate corruption. Those who have the fear of God will do exactly what God had directed them to do. Some people believe that supplication can wipe away their bad deeds without thorough repentance. So they still engage in it.”(IDI, Muslim, Ansarudeen, Ibadan).

Although Islamic and Christian faiths are dominated by preaching around contentment, many Nigerians live a dual life of obvious religious practices side by side with practicing rampant corruption. This is a logical extension of a culture of subjective and controversial interpretations of religious texts and teachings. As in the case of corruption, deeply divisive issues such as sexuality, dressing, marriage, polygamy, tithing and sin atonement are sometimes interpreted in a subjective manner for selfish reasons. For instance, in Islam, adherents who want to have more than one wife say up to four wives are allowed for one man, while those who do not support it qualify this with the fact that the man must treat the four wives equally, a fact that they consider impossible.

“Usually people do things first the way they want as they are looking at (teachings) of the religion as a joke and some people think that the Day of Judgment will not even come” (FGD, Hisbah official/Izala adherent, Kano).

“My religion is always against corruption, it fights against it, it preaches against it but today many people claim to be religious but involve in corruption; they seat in the front row in the churches and mosques. If you believe in the teachings of Islam you will never have anything to do with corruption no matter how poor you are” (IDI, Male Muslim, Abuja).

Religious leaders are not in the least absolved from culpability on this score. According to Ebenezer Obadare, religious leaders (particularly Christian Pentecostals) have evolved as veritable handmaidens of the state, meaning that overall, their class loyalty (...) is to successive ruling elite as opposed to the Nigerian people.¹⁴ Indeed, within congregations, these religious leaders are often accused of tolerating or turning a blind eye to apparent proofs of corrupt enrichment or in fact, perpetrating corruption themselves since corruption thrives in worship places in various forms as well as expressed in the following responses:

“These days in Nigeria, Some religious organizations have contributed a lot to increase corruption because some times what the religious leaders preach is not what they practice and to that is corruption” (IDI, Male, Christian Youth Leader, Abuja).

“... We are all keeping silent; we religious leaders are keeping silent and not telling people the truth as if it is the number of people in the church that will determine whether we will enter the kingdom of heaven. So we are not ready to say anything if people wear wrong dresses to church, we keep shut, but these days, the ministers of God are surrogates of political authorities. I don't know if I have spoken” (IDI, Male, Christian Leader, CAN Secretariat, Ibadan).

“They may come to the church after rigging an election to come and give thanks and do all sorts of things and so religion is not helping. So the religious leaders again should really speak out and warn against corruption” (IDI, Male, Christian Reverend, Ibadan).

“Churches receive donations and also members of the church give donations to their churches too, but the man who is using this money may not know where its coming from, in our church we have what we call the parochial church committee is the government of the church, they are the ones to approve whatever that is going to be alone using church funds but they are not the ones to say don't take this donation take this one, it is the vicar who will say so. They preach against corruption but it does not stop them from receiving donations from individuals who they know/do not know their source of income and an ordinary man in the church does not know how these donations are spent but members of the parochial committee will know, religion influences corruption in the sense that there are some kind of competitions in some churches” (IDI, Male, Academic, Owerri).

Moreover, the clear absence of institutional checks and balances in Pentecostal churches creates a fertile ground for corruption to thrive. Indeed, several of these churches¹⁵ are led by individuals and are only accountable to themselves. This is in sharp contrast to Mission Churches where the ministers do not manage money, as there is usually a Council or a Board that handles money matters. Of course, this is not to imply that institutionalization means lack of corruption. Moreover, the mission churches are not themselves without their own genre of corruption, as seen in the corruption scandals affecting the Catholic Church [over child abuse] and [over sex scandals related to homosexuality even in the Vatican, and which for instance, implicated a Nigerian chorister] (see *Newswatch*, March 29, 2010, p33-34).

Thus, respondents consider unusual and questionable donations to Churches as deliberately or inadvertently instigating corruption by encouraging the faithful to pillage public funds¹⁶. Moreover, the idea of running religious

¹⁴ Obadare, Ebenezer (2010) “Our Naked Men of God” *The Guardian*, Tuesday, April 13, p. 79.

¹⁵ See for instance, Chris Oyakhilome: His Business Empire, His Controversies”, in *Newswatch*, March 20, 2010, pp12-21.

¹⁶ *Newswatch*, March 29, 2010: 17 reports the example of one Lawrence Agada, an Assistant Pastor of a Pentecostal Church who in installments, donated stolen cash and gifts totaling approximately N39 million to his church ‘in the name of sowing a seed’.

services or programmes during working hours or week days translates to corruption because it involves cheating work and sabotaging the economy and society. A female Christian Academic in Ibadan suggests that, *“the several days night vigil that are usually prescribed for certain Christian adherents, especially of the Pentecostal hue, affect their concentration and alertness at work and ultimately their productivity”*.

V. FAITH BASED ORGANISATIONS (FBOs) AND ANTI-CORRUPTION

This section sought to determine what role religion has to play in curbing or fighting corruption in the society; the measures that are taken against corruption within FBOs; what the principal weapons are for this endeavour; what factors may undermine such role and how religion can be used to mitigate corruption. The broad perception among respondents is that religion has a huge role to play in curbing or fighting corruption in the society as evident from the following quotes:

“Yes, religions have impact on the available sanctions against corrupt acts. In the Holy Qur’an there are penalties to every offence committed e.g. if you steal up to a certain amount you will be given a sanction of cutting up your hand, if you commit adultery you will be stoned to death, if you commit fornication you will be given 100 lashes e.t.c” (IDI, Male, Muslim, Abuja).

“Yes, religions have available sanctions against corruption, because God says the wages of sin is death. In order to punish you if you are corrupt He will kill your soul. God also said Give to Ceaser what is Ceaser’s; you must obey the law of the society”(IDI, Male Christian, Abuja).

Chiefly, the principal weapons for this endeavour are the trite injunctions in religious books prescribing heavy penalties such as stoning, decapitation and death for stealing or covetousness.

Some informants suggest that money laundering thrives in religious organizations through donations and tithing with the leaders turning a blind eye. Others believe that religious organizations increasingly manifest the end time syndrome in various forms. For instance, disputation and litigations over posts, positions and authority are commonplace in religious organizations these days while rape cases have also been recorded¹⁷. For some, many religious leaders are downright dishonest and utterly fraudulent.

On the positive side, FBOs allude to promoting moral regeneration among religious organizations and their members. For example among Muslims, NASFAT members claim to have succeeded through preaching and sermonising based on Islamic injunctions, in reducing night parties that was rampant and lead to waste of money and tend to promote of immoral behaviour. Also, according to some Muslim women, FOMWAN’s activities, including songs, teach moral values and ethics. FOMWAN claims to preach against moral laxity and teach Islamic values. For youths, FOMWAN organizes annual outreach camp and women learn ethics and values from the Qur’an fortnightly. The organisation also counsels their members to embrace transparency in their financial dealings.

Apart from religious preaching and condemnation as anti-corruption device, voluntary organizations such as Boys and Girls Brigades provide moral and religious instructions to the youths. Churches also organise teenage clubs to engage children and youths during vacations and to steer them away from immorality. Some (Christian) organizations¹⁸ carry out budget tracking periodically and send memorandum to government on anti-corruption (IDI, Catholic Priest, Ibadan). Furthermore, some FBOs and NGOs maintain partnerships with the EFCC on grassroots mobilization against corruption. They also collaborate with local governments on budgetary, planning and allocation matters in order to ensure accountability and transparency in government. In terms of representing the views of some of the FBOs encountered during the study, below are some responses:

“We are trying our best here through propagation and preaching more especially to our market brothers; we enlighten them on what is the best course of action from the religious point of view. But ours is to propagate ... but it is all left for a believer to accept” (IDI, Hisbah, Male, Kano).

¹⁷ IDI, Male Pastor, Ibadan.

¹⁸ Such as the JDPC and Centre for Leadership Development Research & Training (CELDAD), in Ibadan.

With regards to the kinds of engagements with corruption that FBOs envisage, respondents are of the view that this is in several ways. According to them, the most widely employed method is through preaching and proclaiming the repercussions of engaging in corruption and sensitizing the people to them. The expectation is that continual preaching of the word of God touches the conscience of listeners in the process inducing in them a transformation from what is bad to what is good. For preaching to produce significant behavioural modification, both preacher and listener must apply the content of the message to their everyday living. For Christians, the goal is to reproduce the quintessence of Christ's model in the faithful. As one respondent puts it, *"You know the Bible told us 'look onto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith'. When you look at Jesus, the teaching, the ministry and life, you don't look at any human being"*. The imperative of focusing on Christ, at least by this respondent, is informed by the contradictions between the Christ model and lives of many present day preachers of the word of God who sometimes fall desperately below the high standards of Christ.

A Christian cleric also confirms the role religion can play in combating corruption. For him, religion is everywhere: (i) we pray for good leaders (ii) we tell them what God requires about politics, and (iii) we always show them what to do.... *"This is what we are doing all the time; trying to tell people what is good and bad and this controls people's behaviour sometimes"*. In the church they also have disciplinary procedure whereby if an individual is found wanting, it will be declared before the church members, and he or she will never be allowed to head any church committee or organize church activities. Yet others say that religion can be used to teach morals in institutions of learning and go ahead to suggest that religion should be reintroduced into school curricula.

VI.1 CONCLUSION

Our fieldwork and analysis were guided by impulse and of necessity, collaboration with our respondents. Several analytical categories, including notions about respondents' perception of religion and morality (ethics), secular/professional versus religious/personal values: whether people separate public and private morality; religious beliefs and personal attitudes to corruption, and the role, if any, of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith based organizations (FBOs) in mitigating corruption were examined in this report.

The study found that public servants and indeed most Nigerians usually separate public from private morality. Thus, their attitudes to corruption are not informed by the religion they embrace or profess or religious teachings that they listen to or read about. By implication, most respondents do not feel bound to live out religious teachings relating to ethics in their jobs or callings and indeed deliberately ignore them in practice. While all religions in Nigeria explicitly condemn corruption, this does not seem to impact or influence attitudes to corruption in a positive way. In other words, the fact that corruption is often roundly denounced by religious people and religious houses has not brought about any moderation or diminution of corrupt tendencies in the public space.

Moreover, positionality has a role to play regarding attitudes towards corruption. The thesis here is that the closer a person is to opportunities for self-enrichment, the more the temptation to engage in graft. Thus, exposure to an environment for acquiring illicit wealth creates a stronger push factor to engage in corruption much more than the counteracting force of religion. By for instance, not being critical of sudden surge in financial or material status of their followers or as in some cases, actually being caught in corrupt acts themselves, religious leaders appear complicit or compromised to the extent that they lack the moral authority to sermonize or check their followers' corrupt behavior. Thus, religious organisations and FBOs themselves minimally impact their members' attitudes towards corruption.

VI. 2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on respondents' beliefs and attitudes towards corruption, it may prove useful if anticorruption agencies begin their work by first cataloguing and organizing the taxonomies and typologies of the corruption problem in the Nigerian society before proceeding to map appropriate strategies for tackling each of the forms or classifications. These agencies should then relate these anti-corruption strategies and measures will need to aggressive programmes of social and value orientation as well as leadership by example.

2. The role that positionality plays in the manifestation of corruption in Nigeria deserves close attention. It requires concerted enlightenment and infusion of patriotic sensibilities targeted at mindset change and dramatizing the futility of private accumulation as an end itself in favour of a grander, altruistic and selfless pursuit of societal benefits.
3. The anticorruption efforts of FBOs have had modest effect in taming the rampaging corruption in the country. This calls for a review of the current strategies, modalities and instruments which have been limited to sermonizing and dissemination of literature denouncing the malaise and consequent clamour for its rejection by society. Perhaps what will provoke greater acceptance of the anticorruption message is recourse to evidence-based approaches including pursuing the struggle through the use of acclaimed role models in the society. Going forward, FBOs can help the fight against corruption by condemning in the strongest possible terms established cases of corrupt enrichment within their fold and the society at large while leading the campaign against corruption through role models and their proselytizing activities. The anticorruption message would likely be more impactful if it is framed and led by a critical mass of people in the various strata of society including FBOs and religious denominations who are largely untainted by the corruption monster.

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