The Social Cost of Corrupt Leadership Among Ogoni People: A Re-Reading of Ezekiel 22:27-28.

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Abstract

The article examines the social cost of corrupt leadership among the Ogoni people of the Eastern Niger Delta by re-reading Ezekiel 22:27-28. The people of Ogoni have suffered ecological and environmental crises for decades as a result of the deleterious activities by the Multinational corporations, Shell BP and others. These have given rise to a lot violent agitations by demanding from Shell SPDC adequate compensation and remediation. Unfortunately, however, these agitations have been met with stiff opposition by the Federal Government in complicity with Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC). The climax was the killing by hanging of Mr Ken Saro Wiwa and nine (9) others in 1995. This sparked international condemnation in the UN, AU, as well as other ancillary agencies. The social cost was huge. The aftereffects were indiscriminate killing by soldiers, kidnapping, maiming, rape and cult clashes in most Ogoni communities. The article therefore explores the implications of corrupt leadership through a re-reading of Ezekiel 22: 27-28. The method adopted is is qualitative research. And the theory deployed to tease out this study is African Cultural Hermeneutics popularized by such scholars as David T. Adamo, Teresa Okure and Andrew M. Mbuvi. Findings show that it was a failure in leadership by SPDC, Federal, Government and the conspiracy of some corrupt Ogoni leaders that led to the destruction of Ogoniland. The essay recommends that a transparent and servant leadership on the part of all the stakeholders is what is needed to bring healing and reconciliation and mutual enrichments in Ogoniland.

Introduction

Leadership is a social phenomenon, which can be traced back to human history. As the history of the human society advances, leadership mutated into various kinds, in

accordance with the ages of development. Ancient and contemporary histories provide us with ideas of human beings who have risen in leadership in their times (Kayode 2013). The Hebrew Bible provides of God inspired leaders who at one time and another rose to prominence to save their people from slavery, manipulation and exploitation from their adversaries. In Ezekiel 22:27-28 one reads of the Prophet Ezekiel vehemently expressed dissatisfaction over the corrupt activities of the leaders of Judah. The Prophet condemned their insensitivity and nonconformity to the Deuteronomist covenant code. As a result some of the vassal states regained their independence (Omoregbe, 1999)

Leadership is the condition of being a leader, the ability to lead or an institution that provides guidelines for leading a group of people. The rising and falling of any nation depends on leadership (Damazio 1988). Leaders are responsible for the maintenance of the political and geographical boarders of their societies (Beers 1991). It is the people's representatives at the central level or before their controlling Deity (Nyoyoko 2012). It involves discovering as well as inventing ways and means of dealing with nature, other men, and the inner man (Sabine and Thorson 1973). Bruce (1980), Beers (1991), Mckenzie (2002) and Mieroop (2004) explain how leadership in the Ancient societies extended from civil or societal view points to the religious cycles in order to mold society morals. Leadership is sometimes called "Government" in political terms (Needam 2016). Leadership is an instrument to provide the bridge that enables the society to cross from a static situation to a more purposeful state. It is a powerful tool to reshape a people's collective destinies. However, many people struggle for leadership positions only to satisfy their own pride, with oppressions that produce negative implications and problems to the people they so lead. Ezekiel 22:27-29 reveals the wrongness in the characters of the leaders in Judah and Jerusalem at various levels in the days of Prophet Ezekiel that made God to release His wrath on the people and the land. Ndoga (2014, p.251) identify Judah's political leaders (Ezek 22:27) who operated at a high level of conspiracy to oppress and defraud their people. This is similar to those of the contemporary Ogoni leaders.

Leadership Problems

Whatever constitutes or causes difficulties in a system or entity becomes a problem to such. Human beings are said to be the architect of their own problems, but leadership is put in place to shape the excesses. However, bad leadership produces negative effects on a people. These bring about the devastations in the society's political, socio-Cultural and religious atmospheres. Ojigoro (2014) posits that leadership causes problems when leaders decide to do wrong outside the laid down principles and expectations of the people. However, Sverre Spoelstra and Rene Ten Bos (2011) posit that effective leaders can have moral failures, while Ciulla (2014) opines that there should be a clearer distinction between

ability and morality. Michael (2012) asserts that the Ancient societies have been the Centre for religious, economic and political conflicts throughout history due to leadership problems as in the contemporary society.

Kayode (2013) and Mbonu (2013) posit that leadership is that personal ability which an individual portrays as to influence others to work harder for the achievement of organizational, communal or societal goals. However, when leadership fails; lawlessness prevails, growths are stunted and development is limited. These constitute leadership problems. It is a misguidance of the followers by leaders at the point of responsibility display (Ojigoro 2014). This brings problems in leadership (Omoregbe 1999). Leaders as instruments of influence, either positively or negatively, are important personalities in any society to show the way the people are to go. However, this research observes a sharp contrast between expectations from leaders and the reality among the Ogoni people in recent times.

The Ogoni in Historical Perspectives

The Ogoni People are groups of indigenous people occupying South East region of the Rivers State of Nigeria, otherwise the South Eastern Senatorial District of the Rivers State as rightly observed by Crayford (1996). The geographical location is on the Eastern Coast of the gulf of Guinea (Sonpie 1997), east of the city of Port Harcourt city with a land mass area of about 1,050 Square kilometers on aerial measurement as their homeland, also referred to as Ogoni Land. Deezia (2016) asserts that the 2011 National population census indicates that the Ogoni people numbered up to two million (2,000,000) people and above, living at home but Giami (2010) observes that the true head count of the people are always not certain from national population census because the exercise in most cases are not usually extended to most of the remote villages and interior farm settlements where majority of the people dwell since farming is their major occupation. The Ogonis and the Ijaws share common environmental challenges streaming from oil related problems and pollution together with other Niger Delta People of the Political Zone. Ogoni land consists of six kingdoms. They are;

i. Babbe Kingdom
ii. Eleme Kingdom
iii. Gokana Kingdom
iv. Ken-Ghana Kingdom
v. Nyo-Ghana Kingdom
vi. Tai Kingdom

There exist four languages, dialectically spoken within Ogoni land. Although they are related, they are not mutually intelligible. Despite the introduction of Christianity through

the main line mission Churches in the area, the tradition and culture of the Ogoni people are still highly upheld as traditional religious believers. Related ethnic groups and neighbours surrounding the Ogonis are the Ibibios and Efik at the South, the Andonis at the south West, the Okrikas at the West, Ndoki/ Umuagbai at the East,and the Ikwerres at the North. The main Nigerian East-West road runs through the Ogoni kingdoms, dividing through Nyo-Khana with part of that Kingdom, Ken-Khana, Babbe including Gokana at the left, while others are on the Right of it by driving through from Akwa Ibom to Port Harcourt City

The Ogoni people have inhabited their present location for over 500 years (Sonpie 1997). Their social system is well organized and established under a monarchy in which men and women are able by courage to enjoy special status by merit. They had a strong tradition that forbade marriages with any neighboring tribe, except the Ibibios. This helped to make them live in relative isolation before the colonial era, and earned them the descriptive name, "Ogoni pure-pure" by British colonial rulers, noticing that they were void of mixed blood (Giami 2010). This, to some neighbouring tribes who did not understand the reason for the name looked like a derogatory name. According to Giami (2010), the British colonial rules after the Berlin treaty of 1885, only got to Ogoni land in 1901. Although the Ogoni people resisted them because of the cultural differences but they were not strong enough to stop their patrol.

Indigenous Ogoni Worldviews

In their world view, the Ogoni people like other African Societies have their thoughts dominated by high religious consciousness, being deeply religious (Idowu 1973). They believe that the spiritual world is full of spirits and mystical powers as much as humans in the Physical world. However, (God Almighty) called *Bari-Bunyon* or *Bari-Kaara* who is believed to have created the heaven and the earth and has absolute control over other gods and deities with all humanities is at the Apex of their religious thought. The people also believe in other deities that are said to have aided the founders of the communities and sustained them in their lifetimes. That is why names such as *Gbene agu Loore, Gbene Yorkum, Gbene Yaakoo, Gbene Yaagaah, Gbene Beka,* are associated to such deities, meaning that they are great as the word "*Gbene*" means great in Ogoni concept of realities. This informs us why the Kingdom kings bear are given the title "*Gbene*" which means "Great",

The Kings are normally being selected from the dynasty of the community founders as the Royal Highness to rule the Kingdom by the Kings makers with the aids and directives of the Community deity priests who are believed to possess the eye of the gods and inspired to understand the minds of the deities (Abalubu 86, interviewed 06-02-2021). This is

followed by the cult of the ancestors, which are the organizations that believe in the Spirits of the dead fathers and relatives (Mbiti 1980). These dead fathers are also believed to be close to the Supreme Being when they die and are translated into the world of the Spirit (Deezia 2016). It is also believed that the elders are close to the ancestors by reason of their age and experience. This is why rituals and sacrifices to appease ancestors and deities are performed by them. The Ogoni people additionally believe that other divinities cooperate with the ancestors to transmit the requests and biddings of the living to the Supreme Being for the continuous existence and sustenance of the human societies. There also exist some who are said to be super humans among the living people who possess mystical powers; the medicine men and charmers. These include the herbalists and rain makers who are able to consult the Spirits and deities and interrupt nature with these powers. These people are believed to read times and consult unseen powers and this makes them to form their cults of mystical men. However, they may be over powered by the ancestral cults and the community deity when they offend the land and this may lead to their being expelled or exiled from the community or May even be killed depending on the gravity of their offence against the

Traditional Leadership among the Ogoni people

Leadership among Ogoni People can be viewed from the perspectives of Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods. The Ogoni people lived in organized societies with their internal Political System that was more monarchical in nature. Wilson Giami an ardent historian of the Ogoni existence trend posits that they had their Chiefs, and the Community Leaders who were assistants to the Chiefs, appointed by an established body of elders who understood the foundations of their communities and the leadership system. According to Giami (2010), the Ogonis did not lose any of their members to enslavement during the slave era. However, colonialism had several effects on the people and their leadership system.

Pre-Colonial Leadership in Ogoniland

Like in the early cities along the Mesopotamia where government and religion were closely related (Beers 1991), the pre-colonial Ogoni people organized their leadership system based on their traditional belief in the village deities and religious system like the theocratic nature of the Ancient Hebrews leadership system (Ndoga 2014). It was strictly based on the local values. Decision making process and implementations were chiefly governed by the monarchical system (Sonpie, 1997). The monarchs or Chiefs were empowered to shape the relationship between the traditional rulers and the local people. Each village was headed by its own local Chief and his team of elders with whom he took decisions on matters bothering on issues relating to the development of the village.

According to Sonpie (1997), leaders took the security and welfare of the people very serious and gave high attention to it. According to Ollornwi (2013), the village leaders, which comprised the Chief and council of elders usually, conveyed meetings at the discretion of the Chief where other members of the community are appointed into leadership stream on merits. They made collective contributions to the rules and regulations with which they governed the community and foster development and communal progress. The people believed that gods and goddesses control the forces of nature, and therefore linked or related their leadership institution to their religious believes. Monarchical stool was hereditary and dynastic, which was as to Israel as noted in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles of the Hebrew bible where a king is always been succeeded by his eldest son. In most cases, the Priest of their deities worked closely with the Chief or monarchs to win the favour of the gods in and prevent their communities from being ravaged by disasters should the gods be displeased with their people. The Priest known as the (*Kohen)* knew the rituals to perform in other to influence the gods to favour the people described in Ezekiel 22:27-28.

In some cases, the Chiefs play double roles as the deity priest to perform some rituals, especially at the absence or demise of the priest while expecting a new priest to be chosen by the deity to serve in the Shrine. Likewise, the community deity Priest probably headed the political system as "Priest-King" at the demise of the Chief (Beers 1991). The people had their morals under control by the rules and regulations stipulated by the village heads (the Chief and Councils of Elders), as directed by the deity Priest who act as the mouth piece of the gods. Lying, cheating, stealing, false witnesses, adultery and murder were forbidden and regarded as taboo, which leaders respond to with strict punishments that may be as much as death sentence (Ollornwi, 2013). Human lives were held so sacred that, not even the Chief would dare shed any blood without facing the sanction and banishment from his village and community. According to Sonpie (1997), no one was above the law of the community deities. Judgment for any high offense was for the gods to decide the fate of the offender either by death, or banishment. All the rules and decisions which govern the various clans were taken, by the Chiefs in Council who made up the legislative assembly or judicial council. They decide on issues affecting the clans, group of clans or communities that made up the kingdom. The head of the kingdom had the title "*Gbenemene*" as the king that rules over the entire kingdom and other Chiefs or smaller kings.

The village head called *"(Mene-bue)"* was a hereditary ruler with direct biological relationship with the first male child of the community founder. Whoever was to assist the village head must have his ancestral link to a co-founder of the village or have played

significant role in the foundation of that village or community. The authority of the "*Mene-bue"*, his assistant and Chief Priest to govern the Ogoni people had religious and mythical origin. Ollornwi (2013) explains that the difference between the *"Mene-bue"* and the "*Mene-bua*" or paramount ruler was in charge of a group of clans or villages while the *Mene-bue* was in charge of a particular village or clan. The *Mene bua* may be chosen as the *Gbenemene* or the Kingdom king based on experience and communal acceptability (Sonpie, 1997). But in recent years, various anomalies and negative impacts has been felt by the people due to leadership problems.

The Social Cost Leadership in Ogoniland in light of Ezekiel 22: 27-28

27 Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy 8people, and to get dishonest gain. 28 Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord had not spoken.

The periscope of this essay which is taken from Ezekiel 22: 27-28 puts it squarely that the social disintegration of any society is a reflection of the manner in which power is exercised. And as a result there is a social cost. Thus the crises in Ogoniland is the result of failure in leadership. Gberegbara (2016) attests that there was a sound social system in the area before the arrival of the colonial rule. But now, there exist so much abuse of human right, oppression of the less privileged, conflicts, insecurity, violence and social unrests, loss of lives and properties in Ogoni land while their leaders are taking little or no positive steps towards addressing the situations properly. There are so many clashes of interests among the leadership of the people in some of the communities, incessant abuse of power or misuse of authority, manifesting in power tussles and show of personality superiorities. Such issues are exemplified in the Biblical narrative in Ezekiel 22:27-29 of the leaders in Judah and Jerusalem at various levels in the days of Prophet Ezekiel that made God to release His wrath on the people and the land. Failure to adhere to traditional principles has led to corruption and injustice that ravages the traditional thrones. Agitations have constantly increased and created opportunities for the rise of militancy (Gbarale 67, 06/11/2020) interviewed. Leaders no longer face the facts in any matter. The sacred thrones have been polluted by lies. There is so much insincerity in the leadership of the people in recent times which defiles the traditional tenets and kingship values. These have created some gaps among members of the same society and instigated greed which devastates moral values and regards for leaders. kayode (2013) sees it as a philosophical imbalance between materialism and idealism. Johnson (2018) argues that wealth in the modern terms is affluence and valuable possession. The leaders of the modern days have shifted their focuses from their duties to the society to acquisition of wealth and material possession,

which they have allowed to corrupt their minds and sense of commitment to their people. According to Mckay et al when commenting on the teachings of Socrates, they declare,

> Socrates is committed to the search for truth and for the knowledge about human affairs that he believed could be discovered by reason. His method was to go among men, particularly those inputted to know something, such as craftsmen, Poets, and Politicians, in order to question and cross-examine them. Although as a young man, he was interested in Speculations about the physical world, he later turned to the investigation of ethics and morality (2004, p.91).

The high rate of corruption in leadership has made the search for truth and the exercise of justice almost impossible and an outdated virtue among the people and the social system in Ogoni land.

Social Implications

The killing of the top leader and Ogoni environmental activist- Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 created a huge leadership vacuum in Ogoni land. It was so pitiful that despite the condemnation by the international community, the Federal Government in compliance with Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) otherwise regarded as Shell British Petroleum Company plotted and executed nine (9) Ogoni leaders including Ken Saro Wiwa. Many Ogonis saw this as affront to their sensitivity of justice, and this resulted to the Ogoni land being thrown into chaos and anarchy. Under these circumstances of anomalies and lawlessness, some individuals used the opportunity to present themselves as suitable leaders who could continue with the work of the late heroes. However, their activities portrayed selfish interests and greed above the people's interest. These further led to the emergence of many cult groups that masterminded killings, kidnapping, maiming, rape and successive violence in the area. Extra judicial murder by these cult groups and soldiers became the order of the day. Gberagbara (2016) accuses Shell Petroleum Development Company and the Federal Government of masterminding the messing up of the Ogoni traditional stools so that they can penetrate into the people, set them against their own people and thereby create the instability which results to factions among their Chiefs in order to buy over the faction that will dance to their tone at the expense of their people's wellbeing. Those who are on the part of Government and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) exercise dominion on the people, oppressing and denying the people the right to experience developmental stride that could transform their society.

Captivity looms in the entire Ogoni land from one form of oppression to another. Most people do not have right to express themselves except those who praise these corrupt leaders even in their weaknesses. Every attempt of the common person to express his/her view or request for any compensation for devastated land is regarded as an affront and rebellion to the leaders and Federal Government that carries death sentence. To affirm this, the Federal Government enacts and approved the bills of a National Prison and National Cemetery as Federal Government Project on Ogoni land in 2019. The land that was formally earmarked for Agricultural project of school to land has been converted to the building of National Prison and Cemetery along Bori – Wiiyakara road enroot to Kono. All these have negative implications on the people politically, religiously, socio-culturally, and otherwise.

Political Implications

The Political system of any society or nation is responsible for the organizations and appointment of those to be in authority as well as leading and maintaining cordial relationship that should ensure peaceful atmosphere to ensure good leadership and followership environment. The greedy and wrongful ambitions of the Kings and those of the royal families mounted so much oppression on the people with gross injustice. This has led to the unlawful killings of the innocent in their bids of taking their treasures and precious things forcefully. The high level of violence witnessed in the area can be linked to biblical Hebrew word "*hamas*" which suggests more than a mere state of violence as could be observed on an occasion (Ndoga, 2014). Ezekiel 22:27 puts it as *sareyhaa b^{a}qibah kize'ebiym Tor'pey Tarep lisphak 'adam.* Her Princes in the midst of her have "shed blood and devoured human lives."

Instead of using their political powers to guide and protect the people as their traditional name of "*Mene Kpega*" implies; they stand over the people as slave masters and rulers, instead of providing leadership that could give the people confidence in them. They become cruel and uncaring about the people's wellbeing (Oluwawusi and Falanya, 2018). In some cases, they may arrange their own cult boys to kill the existing chiefs, community development chairmen, youth leaders or other respected prominent members of the community so that the people will have no option than to seek for their emergence, and if anyone dare resists them; such a one does that at the expense of his/her life or those of his/her relatives who are suspected to be supporting them. The fear that a government may emerge and frown at their dubious acts leads them to mobilize their boys to attack, kidnap and murder any opposition whom they suspect would win the approval of the people over them.

Religious implications

Ezekiel observed that the *(nabis)* or Prophets have turned to be white wash (Ezek 22:28) is how the religious leaders have led in deception, this is understood in the sentence- *Uw'nabiy eyhaa taachuw choziym shaw* or seen false vision for them (Ezek 22:28). The people's belief in *Bari bunyoo* or *Bari kaara*; the creator of Heaven and Earth cannot be compromised. The other Deities are believed to have aided the community founders, and form the ancestral spirits (Deezia, 2016), which guides and direct in the choosing of the kings, chiefs and leaders of the various communities and villages (Ollornwi, 2013). The system has encouraged the enthronement of unqualified persons to mount the chieftaincy thrones, and thereby defiled the sacredness of the traditional institutions of the society. The Christian religious leaders such as the Pastors, ministers, Bishops, the General overseers and their lay leaders; generally regarded as men of God, to whom great respects are accorded in the name of the Most High God have joined the bandwagon in order to make themselves relevant to the political and monarchical leaders. The result is unhealthy synchronism that has eroded the purity of religion away from the society.

Moral and Cultural implications

The tradition of the Ogoni people just like other African or world societies is the product of their culture. It is called "*Doo nu keneke*" in Ogoni; the honouring of the Land (Deezia, 2018). The rules, laws and the belief system practiced by the Ogoni people form their tradition and culture. The Occupants of the chieftaincy stool are always from the Patrilineal and ancestral lineage called (*Abaa zim*). This has been eroded and bastardized in recent time due to the corrupt nature of both the kings' makers and the traditional religious priests who were regarded as the eyes of the gods. They were to make consultations with the deities of the land and the elderly who understand the laws surrounding kingship. So many factions exist among the Ogonis, and are created by those in leadership in order to have those to clamour for their continuous oppressive acts in the name of being in leadership. It has distorted the original social system of the pre-colonial Ogoni society (Gberegbara, 2016). The enmity created among the people because of diverse conflicts of interests result to the many oppositions and divisions.

Concluding Remarks

The present leadership keep selling the land to companies and government agencies without due compensations to their owners. Even though the crude oil from the land is said to be yielding enormous income to the nation Ollonwi (2013) yet, the land owners and inhabitants are ravaged with poverty and hunger. The remaining spaces are constantly polluted by oil spillage that damage the crops and render the land infertile, unproductive and death of economic trees like palms and plantains. The rivers and creeks that added

economic values to their lives through fishing activities, which make up their second main occupation has also suffered so much pollution due to same oil spillages. The oil companies operating in the area have most of their workers from outside the Ogoni area Ollornwi (2013), and make most of the employable youths unemployed. The leaders at the representative level of government divert or cause impediments on government's attempts at developing the area as to create employment opportunities. No economic activity can thrive well without peaceful and tranquility among the people. All these constitute the social costs of corruption and ineptitude in leadership. However, we're hopeful that these anomalies are corrected by having transparent and servant leadership Ogoni will rise again.

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