Towards Fighting Corruption And Other Related Crimes In Nigeria Through The Traditional Judiciary System: The *Igba Mbembe* Igbo Dance Drama As An Example

**Abstract**

It is no longer news that corruption and other related crimes have eaten deep into the fabrics of all facets of Nigerian systems. From all indications, our nation is sick and requires a state of wellness. The study conducted, discloses that many Nigerian citizens have lost confidence in the Nigeria Police force in terms of fighting corruption and other related criminal cases. The people interviewed by the researchers unveiled their minds that the Nigerian Police is not walking the talk. Some documented interviews on people’s views about the Police force are nauseating. The aim of the study is to enlighten the world at large, the Nigerian populace, particularly the Igbo on the need to revert back to the Igbo traditional system of justice known as *Igba mbembe* where confirmed perpetrators were brought to book by open disgrace through music and dance drama. The researchers are confident that by so doing, law and order will be restored and maintained in Igbo land and the society will once again experience the state of wellness as was the case in the olden days. The study is based on Skinner’s Operant Conditioning Theory. The researches employed observation, library and interviews of some Igbo indigenes as the research instruments and methodology.

**Keywords:** Judiciary, Police Force, Dance Drama, Corruption, Crime.

**INTRODUCTION**

Our dear country Nigeria had her independence in 1960. The questions that cross many minds today are:

- Are we free as a nation?
- Are the trends of events in Nigeria what they ought to be?

Our nation needs to be sanitized from all diseases, infections, contaminations and pollutions.

On the question of being free as a nation, the level of insecurity shows that we are not free. With the Boko haram and the Fulani herdsmen terrorists’ challenges where innocent souls are slaughtered on daily basis, is quite upsetting. The level of kidnappings, robbery at gun point and rape is startling. Same sex marriage is on the increase now in Nigeria. Sex for marks in Nigerian Universities, fathers putting their biological daughters in family ways, fake Pastors everywhere deceiving their congregation, sleeping with their female members are repulsive. The trends of events in Nigeria are scary and ought not to be so.

Things have fallen apart in Nigeria and the centre can no longer hold. With all the prayers and fasting by the Christians, there seems to be not much change. Our sins have separated us from God as if His hand is shortened that He cannot hear or save us as recorded in Isaiah Chapter 59:1. Faith without works is dead according to James 2:20. If we pray without taking drastic steps to pull ourselves out from this menace, the story may remain the same. This should be a time for sober reflection, to seek solution to this high level of evil bedeviling us in Nigeria. Nigeria needs a way out of her numerous ailments, turmoil and disorder.
In the olden days in Igbo land, justice prevailed; people feared God and obeyed the laws of the land for fear of being brought to book and molested in open disgrace by the entire community through Igba mbembe dance drama. There was law and order, no such evils then as we see them today as emptying people’s bank accounts through hacking, so many internet frauds exist. Today scammers are everywhere defrauding people of their hard earned money, committing criminal acts and many of them get away with it because of the level of decadence of the Nigeria Police Force as expounded in this study with documented proofs.

Now trending on social media is the transgender life where some male citizens go for surgery to look exactly like females. Through the surgery, they create curvy ‘back sides’ i.e. buttocks for them, they create artificial breasts for them and the recipients choose to be referred to as women or girls. The case of Idris Okuneye Olarewaju, AKA Bobrisky is a typical example. He (now she) spent millions of naira to change his gender. He even claimed to have cut off his manhood and created a hole in between his laps where his boyfriends penetrate. Many girls in tertiary institutions pay their fees through prostitution. Young men take to armed robbery or drug trafficking to survive. Jobless citizens who responded to job adverts in named locations were kidnapped and sent to early grave by the job advertisers. Paid drivers plan the kidnap of their employers, kill and bury them on shallow graves. Men of God have been kidnapped severely, beheaded and dumped even after receiving ransoms from their victim’s relations. Examination malpractice has grown to a pitiable dimension by the existence of expo websites where School Certificate candidates download real examination questions before the examination days and come into the examination halls with same under the protection of paid supervisors. The Police force has failed and the Churches have not achieved much. What is the solution and how do we get rid of all these societal viruses deadlier than corona virus contaminated by our dear country, Nigeria? Let us borrow a leaf from Skinner’s theory.

**Skinner’s Operant Conditioning Theory**

This research on Igba Mben be is based on B. F. Skinner’s theory of Operant Conditioning. According to Iversan (1992:20):

Operant conditioning theory believes that behaviour is an outcome of response that follows an action. The learner will possibly repeat the action or a particular behaviour if it is rewarded with a pleasant consequence (positive reinforcement). On the other hand, the learner is unlikely to repeat an action if it is followed by unpleasant consequences.

According to Skinner’s theory, there are two types of reinforcers namely; positive and negative reinforcers. For instance, giving a complementary remark to a person for a good behaviour is a positive reinforcer while a person that receives punishment for misbehaving is unlikely to repeat the action for which he has received an unpleasant/negative reward. This according to Skinner is a negative reinforcement.

According to Burns (1995:12), “learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior. Learning is acquired due to prior experience one has gained. A child may learn from his environment consciously or unconsciously, and in the process, his or her behaviour is being modified either positively or negatively.” Burn’s idea is in agreement with Skinner’s Operant Conditioning theory since both agree that a person’s behavior is modified based on the reward or punishment that follows an action. This of course leads to learning.

Skinner’s theory is in line with the Igba Mbenbe Igbo traditional judiciary where criminals were made public shows in the olden days by facing open disgrace and dancing to the music played by members of the community. Often, they were made to dance naked with aggressive floggings depending on the gravity of the offence. The confirmed guilty members of the community were humiliated openly before the entire community.

The offenders according to Skinner’s theory of Operant conditioning are unlikely to repeat such deviant behaviours and also other members no doubt will learn from the outcome of these miserable misbehaviours and take the decision to desist from evil and comply with the norms of the society in order not to face the same shameful treatment as observed by Skinner. That is why the researchers advocate for the Igba Mbenbe punitive measure to check corruption and other crimes especially among the Igbo tribe. Other tribes in Nigeria are however encouraged to device their own punitive measures for checking corruption through traditional means provided they do not get involved in anything fetish which God abhors. It is worthy of note that Igba Mbenbe approach to justice has no fetish connotation. It is as simple as that and works effectively because Ndị Eze (Chiefs) that gave the final verdict were incorruptible for fear of the consequences of any compromise in handling criminal cases.

**Dance Drama**

This is a type of dance where the dancers use body movements, gestures, and facial expressions to tell their story without speech. Nguma, Uba, Ayoola and Samkay (2010: 20), see a dance drama as, “a narrative dance where the dancers use music and body
movements in place of words”. The Igba Mbenbe is a dance where culprits were made to demonstrate their evil acts without words but with music for the dance drama supplied by the members of the community. The criminals were each subjected to demonstrations of their evil deeds in the dance drama. It is actually a non fictitious or real life dance drama. It is worthy of note that the Chiefs (Ndi Eze) of the Igbo communities who give the final verdict are incorruptible, hence their strictness in dealing with criminal cases. Once someone is summoned to the Eze and found wanting, he will face the music of open disgrace in the presence of the entire community, no bailing in this system.

Crime

Britannica Encyclopedia reveals that “crime is the intentional commission of an act deemed socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under criminal law.

Merriam-Webster on line Dictionary adds that “crime is any illegal act which someone can be punished for especially gross violation of the law.” The Business Dictionary sees crime as, “harmful act or omission against the public which the state wishes to prevent and which on conviction is punishable by fine, imprisonment and or death.

Examples of crimes according to your dictionary.com include: murder, rape, arson, sale of illegal drugs, theft, kidnapping, homicide, sexual assault, robbery, stealing, stealing from another person, traffic violations, indecent exposure of one’s private part in public, driving without license, drug influence, disturbing peace e.g mobilizing an unlawful public assembly, threatening to cause harm to a person. It adds that “when a driver runs through a stop light, that is a crime and the offender would have to pay a fine if found by a police officer.”

The Duties of the Nigeria Police Force

According to an internet source, the duties of the Nigeria police force are highlighted below:

- Prevention and detection of crime
- Apprehension of offenders
- Preservation of law and order etc.

(Source: Wikipedia online Dictionary)

We shall discover from this study, the extent the Nigerian Police Force performs these duties. We shall analyse our findings and take a stand.

The Menace of the Nigerian Police

According to an address to senior officials in September 2009, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) identified some of the problems of the Nigerian Police. He said:

It is apparent that indiscipline, unprofessionalism, and widespread corruption have been the bone of the Nigerian police over the years, a situation that has greatly hampered the quality of service delivery…. Our image has been battered time and again, leading to loss of confidence by members of the public on the police. Source: Human Right Watch: 2009).

Activities of the Nigerian Police

Corruption and human right abuses by the Nigerian police

John Emerson (2010) of Human Rights Watch stated that:

Countless ordinary Nigerians attempting to make ends meet as taxi drivers, market traders and shop keepers are accosted on daily basis by police officers who demand bribe and commit human rights abuses against them as a means of extorting money. Those who fail to pay are frequently threatened with arrest or physical harm. Often, these threats are carried out. The activities of the Nigerian police also include; arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention and acts of violence, including physical and sexual abuse.


Random Arrests and Detention of Citizens According to Guttschuss (2018):

The police round up citizens in public places, including mass arrests in restaurants, markets and bus stops. In some cases of blatant deception in plain clothes, police officers simply masquerade as commuter minibus drivers, pick up unsuspecting passengers at bus stops, take them at gun point to nearby police stations where they demand money in return for their release.

Personal Documented Encounters of Some Nigerian Citizens with the Nigeria Police

Eric Guttschuss, Nigeria researcher in Africa, of Human Rights Watch, conducted more than 145 interviews with victims and witnesses on police extortion, and corruption related abuses including market traders, commercial drivers, passengers, okada motorcycle commercial drivers, sex workers, criminal suspects and victims of common crimes. (Note that names of the interviewees were withheld for security purposes according to him). Below are some of the findings he made:

From the father of a 16 year old boy arrested in Anambra State on April 19, 2009.

The police told me they had arrested my son in a robbery…. They beat him up mercilessly. He had wounds on his back and body. My son told me they put a stick between his arms and legs and suspended him. If I didn’t pay, they would have killed the only son I have and after I paid the money, they released the boy for me. No bail, no statement, nothing.

They released a robbery suspect without hearing or sitting simply because the father paid and he boy was freed. What a corrupt society.
**Arbitrary Arrests and Detention**

A market trader in Onitsha recounted how in December, 2007, he and others were randomly picked up by eight policemen and unlawfully detained.

Around 6pm, we were sitting outside a restaurant having drinks. They arrested us and took us to Niger Street where their vehicle was parked. They took us to Fegge Police Station and detained us. I called my people and my brother came and paid N6,000.00 and I was released. My other friends also paid before they were released.

How can we trust the Nigerian Police Force since their preoccupation is to collect bribe? This is quite disgusting.

**Sexual Assaults Associated with Extortion: From a sex worker in Lagos.**

She attested that: Last week at 9:30pm, I was standing on the street when the police came and arrested me. They took me to their van with other ten girls who are also sex workers to the Ikeja police station. They took me to a small office and asked for N3,000.00 ($20). Because I didn’t have money, he had sex with me inside the office without condom after which he released me. This is terrible. The police men rape girls in lieu of bribe. Who will rescue this nation?

**Torture and Extrajudicial Killings**

In Dec, 2009, a student of Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Victor Obrige was allegedly killed by the police at Omoku Police Station in Rivers State. Victor’s brother revealed that:

I went to the police station that day; the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) said they would grant bail to Victor. The officer in charge of surveillance Department demanded N20,000.00 ($132). I offered N5000.00 and he rejected it. They beat up Victor mercilessly, hit him with their baton and kicked him with their boots. They beat him to death and deposited his remains at Archbong Clinic. The Doctor told us that Victor was already dead when they brought him to the clinic. Lives were wasted because they couldn’t pay bribe to the police. This is horrible, agonizing and unbearable.

**The Igba Mbembe as an Option**

From people’s reactions, it is crystal clear that many citizens of Nigeria do not confide in the Nigeria Police and even the Judiciary for obvious reasons. In late Sunny Okosun’s song, he asked “which way Nigeria (x2) which way to go, I love my father land. I want to know which way Nigeria, is heading to?

It becomes imperative to seek an option where citizens will find redress when they are suppressed by anyone. The Igba Mbembe Igbo traditional judicial remains an option. This is a traditional judicial system practised in Igbo land in the olden days, and where confirmed criminals were disgraced openly. For instance, if someone was caught red handed harvesting cassava in another person’s farm, she was made to face the Igba Mbembe tribunal on a fixed date for trial.

**Stages Involved in the Igba Mbembe Tribunal**

**Stage One**

The suspects would be summoned to the elders of the community where they come from on a given date and time. They would be communicated of the charges against them from members of their community. They would be given opportunities to defend themselves to avoid false accusations. Those who accepted the charges against them without denying would be booked for another session with the Eze of the community and the elders.

**Stage Two**

Those who denied the allegations would be made to face a team of witnesses on a given date and time. They would be given the opportunity to give their own sides of the story on the case. After the witnesses’ confirmations, the innocent ones would be released if any, by the ruling of the Igba Mbembe Judiciary.

**Stage Three**

The next stage is for all the confirmed culprits to have a sitting with the Eze for final hearing and the final verdict. A date would now be given for the final parade of the offenders for the Igba Mbembe judgment.

**Stage Four**

The final stage is the Igba mbembe proper. As a very little girl, the first researcher witnessed two Igba Mbembe cases of two culprits in her community; Ezeoke Nsu in Ehime Mbano in Imo State, Nigerian the seventies. What she saw terrified her and she vowed never to be involved in any act that would tarnish her image and be prejudicial to her family name in spite of the family home training she acquired from her parents who were Ministers of the Gospel. She upholds this undertaking till date.

The first experience was when a woman was caught harvesting cassava from another woman’s farm was openly disgraced. The Ikoro was sounded aggressively to invite the entire community that the set time for the open disgrace was due. The Ikoro is a giant slit wooden drum deposited permanently in the village square; Obi because of its gigantic size. The Community members started gathering and within a twinkling of an eye, the village square i.e. Obi was filled to the brim. The culprit was dragged to the centre of the village square. She was stripped of her wrapper, pants, brazier and blouse. Her fellow women used grasses to cover her private part only but her other parts; breasts, laps armpits, the whole body were exposed. She was a very fair and beautiful woman and her whole body shone brightly because of her nakedness. The drummers and other indigenous
instrumentalists did justice to their musical instruments by playing with distinct expertise.

Madam Onyekwele, that was the culprit’s name, which the first researcher still remembers vividly, was weeping bitterly because she was also flogged aggressively and intermittently especially for any failure to dance rhythmically to the sound of the music being played for her to dance to especially at the point she got tired of dancing. Her children could not contain it as they were weeping profusely for their mother who stole in order to feed them.

To make matters worse for her, after dancing for a while at the village square, she was paraded round the entire community carrying a local basket nkata or ekete full of cassava depicting the item she stole while dancing to the music. It was a horrifying experience. Many people vowed openly never to involve themselves in any crime that would make them to be relegated to the background, which many of them upheld. Cases of theft were no longer or rarely heard of in our community.

Below is one of the songs the entire community sang for her which was backed up by indigenous instrumental accompaniments and which madam Onyekwele danced to:

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\text{E G B U E O N Y E O S H I N M A}
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\[
\text{Translation: When a thief is matcheted, the indelible mark from the matchet cut marks him as a thief where ever he or she goes to.}
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Below is another song rendered for woman involved in theft.

\[
\text{Onyekwele}
\]

\[
\text{Transcribed by Dr. Mabel Okpara}
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\[
\text{Translation: Onyekweluwa, you have been a perpetrator of evil for quite a long time.}
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The First Researcher’s Second Witnessing of Igba Mbenbe Punishment

The second time one of the researchers witnessed the Igba Mbenbe, was a case of adultery between a married man and a married woman. Like Onyekwele, the duo was shamefully dragged to the village square where they were made public show. They were stripped naked and as usual the women covered Akunna’s (the adulterous woman’s) private part with some grasses. To my surprise, the man was stripped totally naked with his penis dangling as he danced.

To add salt to their injury, they were forced to demonstrate how they had the affair rhythmically to the sound of the music but without any penetration as they were warned. The naked woman was made to lie down with the stack naked adulterer on top of her in perfect demonstration of the filthy act to the sound of the music. Recall that Onyekwele was made in her own case to carry a basket full of cassava dancing to showcase the item she stole. Any missed beat amounted to aggressive flogging of the duo on the floor which led to an improved demonstration of the act by them. Some women turned their faces as they could not watch continuously the terrifying dance drama. In the case of
Madam Akunna and Mr. Onyeka, they were involved in sexual acts and were asked to demonstrate the act to make public their offence and as a warning to the observers to beware of such an act.

Next, as usual, they were paraded round the community with singing, drumming by the community members and dancing by the culprits. The community members shrouded their shoulders in total submission to the norms of the land. Below is one of the songs they sang while parading the offenders round the community with high level of drumming.

Below is another song rendered by the community for the two people that were caught in adultery.

Translation: Akunna, you mean you are married and still disgrace yourself? Eh eh eh eh

Translation: When a fowl rejoices over his misbehavior, a time will come for his disgrace.

The Efficacy of Music (Songs) in the Transformation of Lives

Songs play no small role in the upbringing of the Igbo citizens. In the words of Emeka (2002:205), “Igbo traditional music emphasizes character formation and starts early to enculturate the young into those values, behaviours, attitudes, speech, action and traditions that are considered necessary for the making of a person in a given environment.” In the same vein, Okafor (2005:208), states that, “in traditional Nigerian society, music is an integral part of education.” From the foregoing discussion, it is very clear that music plays vital roles in the education of citizens of any given society as in Nigeria. Ikem and Anene (2006:47), also unveil that:

Social control was enforced through subtle means like an evil doer being criticized and mocked during festival with songs. The Ine song stands as an important object of caution to those who are about to go contrary to the societal norms.

This was exactly what Igba Mbenbe tradition achieved in the lives of the citizens of the Igbo
communities before independence. The Igbo citizens were conscious, watchful and mindful of their behaviours to avoid attracting the anger and the judgment of the community members. Morals are acquired by members of the society through music. Agu (2011:4) opines that:

Moral education is mainly channeled through the medium of folk music because it enhances easy comprehension and assimilation. Therefore songs are considered most effective for this purpose and carefully selected to create the desired impact.” This again proves the efficacy of music in the transformation of lives. Onyeji (2011:19), expatiate:

African music is a certified agent valued for its role in the maintenance of social and political order. It is valued as the last resort for tackling difficult social situations in a community. Its value as policing agent in African societies finds great usage when addressing the high and mighty in the society. Onyeji’s take suggests that the Igba Mbembe will go a long way to maintain law and order in the Igbo communities. It really did in the olden days when it was enforced. The lawlessness we battle with today will be a thing of the past if we embrace the Igba Mbembe traditional judicial system. Ofuani (2011:42) also discloses that:

In Aniocha, (Delta Igbo), they have customarily enforced social control in their communities through subtle means. They achieved this by exposing the violators of which ever communal norms through commenting on such individual and the societal ill committed.

This again brings to limelight the efficacy of the Igba Mbembe tradition in positively affecting the lives of the Igbo communities as in the olden days. Today the Nigerian Police has taken over in the maintenance of law and order in our nation Nigeria with the problems of indiscipline, corruption and serious criminal acts staring at us on daily basis. The Igba Mbembe Judicial approach remains a better option for the maintenance of law and order in Nigeria and in the Igbo communities in particular. The researcher therefore advocates for that.

**Findings:**

**Loss of Confidence in the Nigerian Police by the Masses**

Many Nigerian citizens no longer confide in the Nigerian Police force in terms of the ways they handle cases of corruption and other related crimes. We can establish people’s opinions on the illegitimacy of the conducts of the Police force. The analyses of the interviews conducted in the course of this study and some documented interviews on people’s views about the Nigeria Police are upsetting. There were clear cut cases cited by some individuals on the nuisance of the Police force who are supposed to fight corruption. It was discovered that other than fight corruption; they promote it and are as well agents of corruption and crimes. Another finding is the efficacy of music in the transformation of lives. Many researches prove that folk music plays vital roles in teaching morals to the members of a community. This is achieved through policing the members and punishing deviants through songs.

The researchers brought up the Igba Mbembe Igbo traditional judiciary involving dance drama accompanied by songs of assault as practised in the olden days (before the colonization of Africa with its attendant novel ideas which sometimes do not pay off) as the way forward to fight corruption and other evil practices without negotiation in our society. This involves open disgrace to confirmed perpetrators of evil. This no doubt will reduce the level of corruption and criminal cases in our society because the Chiefs (Ndi Eze) are incorruptible and strict in handling such cases for fear of the outcome of any form of compromise in dealing with confirmed offenders. Also observed were the observers’ reactions during the Igba mbembe. People would scream while some decided to denounce any evil practices they were involved in to avoid such a shameful exposure and some others vowed never to involve themselves in any deed that would subject them to such a public disgrace.

There is need to mention at this point that Skinner’s Operant Conditioning theory is a suitable one since it believes that when someone is punished for an undesirable behaviour, he is unlikely going to repeat such an act. People’s reactions during the Igba mbembe are enough proofs to accept his theory in this regard. Also the sanity enjoyed in our nation before the colonial masters took over was glaring.
Textual Analysis of the Igba Mbembe Songs

Translation of Song One:

Egbuo onye-oshi nma
Ebe na ebe O gara
Anyi a huwala ya ama

When you give a knife cut to a thief
Where ever he goes to
We will recognize him

This song portrays the appalling outcome of stealing. It says:
When you give a knife cut to a thief, which is permanent, wherever he goes, we will recognize him. This shows the deplorable situation a marked thief faces as a result of the igba bembe disgrace and the indelible marks they receive. It is a didactic song that leaves a lesson to the guilty and the audience.

Translation of Song Two:

Onyekwelawa mgbi- mewere eteele
Mgbe I mewere eteele

Onyekweluwa, you have been a perpetrator of evil
You have been a perpetrator of evil

This song brings to lime light the despicable outcome of committing a crime. It says: Onyekwelawa, you have been a perpetrator of evil. It is contemptible for one to be known for evil as the woman in question. This type of exposure will definitely affect the woman’s family as it will be regarded as a family where thieves are bred. They will have no say in community matters since they are known for stealing. No right thinking person would like to be associated with such a family in marriage. Therefore the audience would guard against such identity for themselves and their families. People in those days detested evil and brought up their children well.

Translation of Song Three:

Akunna, isi na-I luru di
Ma na-agba ga onwe gi-oshi
Ey, eh eh eh eh eh eh eh.

Akunna, you mean you are married
And still you disgrace yourself
Eh, eh eh eh eh eh eh

The song says:
Akunna, you mean you are married and still you disgrace yourself? In the olden days, people rarely got involved in extra marital affairs to avoid such embarrassments. They even went the extra mile of circumcising their girls to make them remain virgins before they married.

Translation of Song Four:

I mere ole iwe, hea I mereole
Oke okpa gara ogu, iwe
Obi ya sara mbara
Efocha nnekwu odu, iwe
Oke okpa a chigbulo onwe ya

What have you done, sad, hea what have you done, sad
A hen that goes for war, sad
Is usually happy
When the chick is exposed
The hen laughs her to scorn

This song exposes how illegal it is for a married man to sleep with a married man and vice versa. It is an abomination in African culture. The translation of the song: when you are enjoying sexual affairs with another person’s spouse, you seemed to be enjoying yourself but at the end of the day, you are both ridiculed by public disgrace.

CONCLUSION

The rate of criminal cases in Nigeria is heart breaking. The Nigeria Police was established in 1930 to secure lives and property and to fight corruption and other related crimes and to arrest criminals and make sure the offenders were brought to book.

From the research conducted, the Nigeria Police are far from performing their duties. Instead of protecting lives, they grossly waste lives for failing to pay bribe as reported by some people who encountered them. Suspects of serious criminal cases were released on payment of bribe as the father of a 16-year boy suspected to be involved in robbery testified against the police who collected money from him and released his son without any trial of the robbery case. That shows that if one is unfortunate to encounter robbers and reports to the police, nothing will come out of it as long as the suspects release money to the police.

The Igba mbembe judiciary, practised in Igbo land in the olden days remains the best option if our communities return to the practice in order to sanitize our land. Other tribes in Nigeria are encouraged to device their own traditional means of eliminating evil in their localities without involving themselves in any fetish practice that will release the anger of God. By so doing we are sure of a better Nigeria where peace and justice reign supreme and where law and order will be maintained thus leading to our dream healthy Nigeria.
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