Beyond the Buffered Citadel: Diagnosing Systemic Corruption in Nigerian Leadership through Taylor's Secular Framework and the Afro-Relational Imperative

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a philosophical and empirical inquiry into systemic corruption in contemporary Nigerian political leadership by deploying Charles Taylor's historical-philosophical architecture from *A Secular Age*. Taylor posits that Western modernity shifted from an enchanted "porous self" a subject inherently vulnerable to transcendent spiritual forces to a "buffered self," an autonomous, disenchanted agent insulated behind rationalized boundaries. We argue that the crisis of Nigerian governance stems from an unviable postcolonial hybridity: an administrative state operating on disenchanted secular assumptions superimposed upon a populace whose underlying social ontology remains ostensively porous. This fracture enables political elites to adopt a hyper-buffered, transactional posture within state apparatuses while mobilizing a manipulative, pseudo-porous posture to exploit ethno-religious identities. To transcend this dualism, we ground our diagnosis in contemporary empirical governance metrics and synthesize Taylor's framework with the philosophical contributions of Theophilus Okere and Jude Uwalaka. This paper adopts a hermeneutical methodology grounded in Gadamer and Ricoeur and proposes an *Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance* that re-enchants civic duty without succumbing to sectarian fundamentalism.

Keywords: Charles Taylor, Porous Self, Buffered Self, Philosophical Hermeneutics, Nigerian Governance

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Nigeria presents a profound socio-political paradox. It stands as one of the most overtly religious nations globally, where public institutions, political rallies, daily commerce, and educational environments are routinely inaugurated with spiritual invocations (Achunike, 2006). However, this ubiquitous religiosity coexists with institutionalized corruption, political clientelism, election manipulation, systemic embezzlement, and infrastructural decay (Achebe, 1983). Standard political and economic analyses attribute this condition to structural poverty, weak law enforcement, rent-seeking economic architectures, or colonial legacies of extractive statehood (Ekeh, 1975). While these diagnoses offer indispensable insights, recent empirical data highlights the magnitude of the institutional crisis. Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* consistently ranks Nigeria among the lower quartile globally (scoring 25–26 out of 100) (Transparency International, 2024). Similarly, the *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Political Corruption Index* underscores high expert-coded structural corruption across executive and legislative arms (V-Dem Institute, 2024), while the World Bank's *Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)* reflect persistent deficits in the Control of Corruption and Government Effectiveness dimensions (World Bank, 2023).

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To diagnose this crisis at its ontological roots, this paper engages Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's framework in *A Secular Age* (2007). Taylor traces the Western transition from an enchanted worldview of "porous selves" open to divine order to a disenchanted "buffered self" an insulated agent capable of disengaged, instrumental reason. In postcolonial Nigeria, an administrative state built upon disenchanted logic was superimposed on a porous ontology (Gyekye, 1997; Mbiti, 1969). Political elites maneuver this mismatch through a double posture: adopting a hyper-buffered, transactional posture to plunder public coffers while deploying a manipulative, pseudo-porous posture to exploit ethno-religious sentiment for political immunity (Falola, 1998). Resolving this dualism requires synthesizing Taylor's architecture with African philosophical traditions specifically Theophilus Okere's cultural hermeneutics (Okere, 1983) and Jude Uwalaka's ethico-ontological vision of *Ndu* (life/vital force) (Uwalaka, 2003) to yield an *Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance*. In *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor undertakes a monumental socio-philosophical investigation into the master narrative of Western secularization. Taylor frames his inquiry around a fundamental historical paradox: how did Western civilization transition from a condition in 1500 CE wherein belief in God was unproblematic, socially imperative, and virtually unavoidable to a contemporary horizon in which faith is merely one optional stance among many, often struggling to justify its continued public relevance? To unravel this epochal transformation, Taylor constructs a conceptual architecture rooted in the philosophical transition from the "porous self" of the enchanted world to the "buffered self" of disenchanted modernity. This conceptual division provides a diagnostic lens for analyzing how moral obligations, existential vulnerabilities, and institutional duties are perceived and executed across differing civilizational contexts.

THE POROUS SELF AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ENCHANTED COSMOS

For the pre-modern porous self, the boundary separating the internal human psyche from the external cosmos is fluid, permeable, and perpetually open. Meaning, purpose, and moral imperatives do not originate within the autonomous mind; rather, they are discovered as objective, ontological realities embedded within an enchanted universe populated by transcendent forces, spiritual entities, ancestral presences, and divine decrees (Taylor, 2007). In this horizon of existence, the agent does not look inward to construct meaning; instead, meaning presses inward upon the agent from the surrounding cosmos. Sensations of guilt, awe, moral dread, or sacred duty are experienced not as subjective psychological states, but as direct encounters with external, cosmic forces breaking into human experience (Idowu, 1962).

Man is not purely spiritual and intellectual being, but also bodily. His intellectual desires cannot realize in separation from sensual and organic dynamisms. The realization of human perfection is needed strictly cooperating of all forms of dynamisms-desires. Also the sensual desire must be considered. Therefore the sensual movement is an appetite resulting from sensitive apprehension. The act of the apprehensive power is not so properly referred to any motion as the act of the appetite. The activity of the apprehensive power is accomplished in the very essence that the thing perceived is in the one that perceived it. The function of the appetitive power is accomplished in the very essence that he who longs is turned towards the thing sensible. In order to elucidate this point we must investigate that in natural corruptible things there is need for a tendency not only to acquire what is valuable and the prevention of what is harmful, but also the refusal against corruptive and conflicting agencies which are an impediment to the accession of what is valuable, and are productive of harm (Ngihbi, 2022)

Crucially, within an enchanted worldview, social structures, political authority, and ethical obligations are inextricably tied to cosmic teleology. Civic duties are not arbitrary social contracts forged by disembodied individuals; they are visible expressions of a sacred order. To violate a moral oath, commit a transgression against the community, or abuse public trust is not merely an administrative infraction or a breach of positive law; it represents a cosmological violation that threatens to disrupt the equilibrium of the universe and invite retributive consequences from transcendent realms (Mbiti, 1969). This ontological openness is vividly illustrated within traditional African worldviews, such as the Nso cosmology of the Cameroon Grassfields. Ancestors function as active, living-dead custodians who protect the moral code, ensuring that taboos surrounding incest, theft, elder disrespect, and land disputes carry immediate existential weight. Within this setting, human misfortune is rarely reduced to raw, random chance. When a lineage experiences unexplainable illness, crop failure, or infertility, the porous self-interprets these events through a hermeneutic

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of spiritual cause and effect. The family consults a diviner (*ngam*) to discern which ancestral presence or spiritual order has been offended and to determine the precise customary restitution required. Restitution achieved through ritual reconciliation, public confession, and sacrifice restores the disrupted cosmic balance. This framework constructs a robust moral economy where civic integrity and social harmony are continuously policed by both the dread of transcendent retribution and the deep yearning for ancestral favour (Ngihbi & Dzelabvem, 2026). The porous self cannot conceive of an amoral public sphere, because every realm of human activity is embedded within an all-encompassing matrix of sacred relationships.

DISENCHANTMENT, THE IMMANENT FRAME, AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE BUFFERED SELF

Through the historical convergence of the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the rise of commercial capitalism, this enchanted cosmos underwent systematic disenchantment (*Entzauberung*). The human agent gradually retreated behind an insulated psychological boundary, emerging as what Taylor terms the buffered self. The buffered self comes to understand itself as a master of its internal mental space insulated from spiritual presences, ancestral oversight, or external cosmic teleology. Sensations of meaning, value, and moral purpose are no longer encountered as external cosmic demands; rather, they are conceptualized as internal, subjective constructs generated through disengaged, rational reflection (Taylor, 2007). The emergence of the buffered self-coincides with the construction of what Taylor calls the "immanent frame." The immanent frame constitutes a self-contained natural order, governed entirely by secular cause and effect, material laws, and empirical verification. Within this frame, political, legal, and economic institutions operate according to their own internal, secular logic, detached from transcendent moral oversight or divine mandate as demonstrated in the diagram below.

Analytical Dimension	**The Porous Self**	**The Buffered Self**
Ontological Boundary	Fluid, permeable, and open to cosmic and spiritual forces.	Insulated, closed, and psychological; protected from external spirits.
Locus of Meaning	Discovered externally in an enchanted, teleological cosmos.	Generated internally through disengaged, rational reflection.
Ethical Grounding	Embedded in cosmic teleology, ancestral oversight, and sacred oaths.	Governed by procedural legalism, contractual utility, and immanent reason.
Primary Existential Threat	Spiritual pollution, ancestral curses, and cosmological disruption.	Internal alienating emptiness, absurdity, and loss of personal meaning.
Conception of Public Space	Intrinsically sacred; civic violations trigger cosmic retributive sanctions.	Disenchanted and administrative; governed by procedural legal compliance.

The transition from the porous to the buffered self-brought significant civilizational advances: the codification of universal human rights, the growth of scientific inquiry, constitutional democracy, and impersonal administrative law. However, it also executed a profound ontological severance. Stripping public institutions of their enchanted, transcendent weight, Western modernity reduced public morality to procedural legalism and utilitarian management. Public office ceased to be a sacred stewardship policed by transcendent sanctions; instead, it transformed into an administrative mechanism designed to balance competing self-interests. Therefore, transposed into postcolonial environments where state apparatuses lack deep socio-cultural legitimacy. This disenchanted logic leaves civic spaces vulnerable to extreme instrumentalism draining public duty of its intrinsic moral force and reducing compliance to a matter of legal evasion. To ensure analytical rigor beyond purely descriptive illustration, this study explicitly operationalizes philosophical hermeneutics from the foundational contributions of Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 1960/2004) and Paul

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Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory*, 1976) as its primary interpretive methodology for institutional analysis. Rather than approaching the postcolonial Nigerian political landscape through detached, quantitative abstraction or uncritical descriptive narrative, philosophical hermeneutics provides a sophisticated, text-analogue framework for decoding the complex interplay between imported administrative structures and indigenous socio-cultural horizons. This methodological approach proceeds through three interconnected dimensions that bridge theoretical philosophy and concrete political critique in the following ways.

First, the inquiry is grounded in Gadamer's conceptualization of pre-understandings (*Vorverständnis*) and historical horizons. Hermeneutics firmly acknowledges that any rigorous analysis of political institutions is never value-neutral or historically unanchored; rather, it emerges from a specific horizon of inquiry. We apply Gadamer's concept of historical situatedness to examine how contemporary Nigerian political actors and citizens alike interpret bureaucratic rules, civic duties, and legal mandates through a dual hermeneutical lens: navigating inherited colonial administrative structures on one hand, while remaining tethered to deeply ingrain primordial cultural horizons on the other. This dual pre-understanding explains why imported legal-rational frameworks are frequently re-signified by local actors, transforming formal state procedures into informal arenas of patronage and kinship loyalty.

Second, following Paul Ricoeur's seminal theory of discourse and textual interpretation, institutional behaviors and elite practices are treated as "meaningful action considered as text." Just as a written text can be detached from its author and subjected to critical objective exegesis, the observable phenomena of Nigerian governance such as legislative budget inflations, executive manipulation of immunity clauses, and elaborate state-sponsored public prayer sessions are interrogated as symbolic texts laden with latent meanings. Hermeneutical interpretation allows us to decode how political elites symbolically deploy religious discourse, spiritual invocations, and ethnic solidarity to perform a pseudo-porous posture, effectively masking structural plunder behind a facade of public piety. This textual decoding exposes the mechanisms by which moral language is co-opted to legitimize elite impunity within the civic public.

Finally, the methodological framework utilizes the hermeneutic circle and the revolutionary concept of the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*). Analytical movement proceeds iteratively between individual political practices and institutional pathologies (the parts) and the overarching postcolonial structural crisis (the whole). Through intentionally facilitating a fusion of horizons between Western secular modernity (as articulated through Charles Taylor’s historical-philosophical genealogy) and African relational metaphysics (drawing upon the insights of Theophilus Okere and Jude Uwalaka), hermeneutics functions as a critical theoretical toolkit. It moves beyond mere critique to demonstrate how abstract legalism and disenchanted institutional frameworks can be critically re-evaluated, ultimately translating foreign bureaucratic mandates into lived, indigenous moral imperatives that resonate with African social realities.

Contextualizing Taylor: Alternative Perspectives and Postcolonial Critiques

Applying Charles Taylor’s secularization framework to Sub-Saharan Africa requires addressing its historical and Eurocentric limitations. In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor explicitly maps the specific historical, intellectual, and religious trajectory of Western Christendom tracing its shift from a late-medieval enchanted order to an immanent frame governed by exclusive humanism. Consequently, uncritical application of this architecture to postcolonial African environments risks theoretical distortion. The historical conditions that birthed the Western buffered self (such as the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the rise of industrial capitalism) did not unfold organically in Africa; rather, a disenchanted state apparatus was abruptly superimposed upon societies whose social ontologies remained deeply relational and transcendentally oriented. Postcolonial sociologists, anthropologists, and African theologians (e.g., Asad, 2003; Gifford, 2015; Meyer, 2004; Nyamnjoh, 2017) demonstrate that Sub-Saharan Africa has not experienced linear institutional secularization or a "subtraction narrative," wherein religion progressively recedes from the public sphere into private option. Instead, contemporary African public spheres are characterized by a vibrant hyper-visibility of the sacred, driven significantly by the explosive growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic movements, Islamic reformist groups, and indigenous public religions (Marshall,

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2009). Far from fading under the weight of postcolonial modernity, religious idioms have expanded, saturating public discourse, media landscapes, political campaigns, and commercial ventures.

In contemporary Nigeria, this public religiosity does not signify a simple, static survival of pre-modern porosity or an institutional failure to achieve Western-style secularization. Rather, public religion functions as an active, modern language of political legitimation, economic survival, social protection, and civic resistance. Religious expressions in public spaces are contemporary institutional practices deployed by citizens navigating systemic uncertainty and state neglect. Therefore, Taylor's theoretical architecture is deployed in this study not as a universal or teleological model of history, but as an analytical heuristic. It serves as a diagnostic tool to examine how political elites interact with inherited, disenchanted colonial state mechanisms. By adopting a hyper-buffered, transactional posture within bureaucratic apparatuses while simultaneously performing a pseudo-porous posture in the public sphere, political actors construct an amoral civic realm. Grounding Taylor within postcolonial sociology ensures that the manuscript critiques state predation without misreading Africa's vibrant public religion as an outdated anomaly.

The Postcolonial Nigerian Dislocation: An Unresolved Dualism

To understand how Charles Taylor's historical genealogy of secularization operates within the African post-colony, his theoretical architecture must be integrated with Peter Ekeh's landmark socio-political theory of *The Two Publics in Africa* (1975). In his foundational analysis, Ekeh argues that the socio-historical reality of colonialism in Africa generated two distinct public realms with radically divergent moral imperatives, contrasting sharply with the unified public realm characteristic of Western liberal democracies. The first is the primordial public, which encompasses the communal, ethnic, regional, and ancestral domains. This realm operates largely on porous, transcendent assumptions, wherein actions are bound by strict moral duties, sacred communal solidarity, and mutual socio-relational obligations. Betraying or misappropriating resources within the primordial public incurs profound social shame, moral condemnation, and ancestral sanction. Conversely, the second public is the civic public, comprising the formal state apparatus the civil service, military, judiciary, legislature, and public treasury inherited directly from the colonial administration. Because the colonial state functioned primarily as an alien, predatory engine of economic extraction and administrative coercion, indigenous populations developed a civic ethos that viewed the state as an illegitimate, amoral entity to be outwitted, subverted, and plundered for the preservation and material enhancement of oneself and one's primordial constituency. When analyzed through Taylor's philosophical lens, Nigeria's structural governance crisis emerges not simply as institutional weakness, but as an unresolved ontological dualism. The civic public functions as a disenchanted, alien space stripped of intrinsic moral obligation or transcendent oversight. Inherited colonial administrative systems were built upon the disenchanted, legal-rational logic of the modern buffered state; however, they lacked the centuries of organic philosophical, cultural, and ethical development that grounded the Western social contract. As a result, public office within the Nigerian civic sphere is widely perceived as an ownerless reservoir, an amoral "no-man's-land" waiting to be converted into private wealth or deployed to fortify primordial alliances (Achebe, 1983).

Dimension	**The Primordial Public**	**The Civic Public**
Ontological Basis	Porous, Transcendent, Relational	Disenchanted, Bureaucratic, Colonial
Empirical Metric	High Social Trust & Kinship	Low WGI/CPI Scores, High Corruption
Moral Expectation	Sacred Duty, Shame, Solidarity	Amoral, Transactional, Extractable
Elite Posture	Community Patron & Protector	Hyper-Buffered Plunderer
Public Treasury	Communal Heritage (Sacred)	"No-Man's-Land" (Ownerless)
Systemic Outcome	Moral Obligation & Cohesion	Endemic Corruption & Impunity

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The contemporary Nigerian political elite shift this postcolonial dualism through a sophisticated double movement, exploiting the worst structural features of both the buffered and porous paradigms to consolidate power and evade civic accountability. Within the civic public, state actors exhibit hyper-buffered instrumentalism. Operating inside government ministries, state departments, and legislative chambers, political actors manifest the extreme disengaged rationality of Taylor's buffered self. Power is approached with cold, transactional calculation. Public treasuries are privatized through inflated procurement contracts, budget padding, and systemic embezzlement, while basic public infrastructure such as healthcare, roads, and educational institutions is left to decay. Because the civic realm has been systematically drained of moral weight and sacred accountability, elite actors experience no acute crisis of conscience when misappropriating funds intended for the collective good. The state is treated as a purely instrumental matrix where success is measured solely by material accumulation, elite network retention, and political dominance (Nzimiro, 1992). Conversely, within the primordial public, these same political actors execute a strategy of manipulative porosity. When faced with legal scrutiny, institutional auditing, or anti-corruption prosecutions by statutory bodies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), elite figures abruptly abandon their disengaged, secular posture. They retreat into porous idioms, framing judicial investigations as deliberate ethnic persecutions or partisan witch-hunts against their regional communities. They sponsor elaborate public prayer sessions, procure spiritual blessings, and secure high-profile endorsements from prominent religious leaders and traditional custodians (Agbiboa, 2013; Falola, 1998). In doing so, faith, ethnicity, and ancestral identity are co-opted as defensive shields against civic accountability. Religion is stripped of its transcendent ethical demand for social justice, equity, and institutional integrity, becoming reduced to a performative, transactional instrument for political immunity.

This double posture institutionalizes a profound moral breakdown within the postcolonial state. High personal religiosity and public spiritual performance coexist comfortably with systemic institutional plunder, as the language of the sacred is weaponized to validate the ongoing extraction of the civic public. The postcolonial Nigerian dislocation thus remains an unresolved dualism: an administrative state functioning as a hyper-buffered citadel for elite plunder, shielded by the cynical manipulation of an underlying porous social reality.

Indigenous Philosophical Foundations: Theophilus Okere and Jude Uwalaka

To overcome the postcolonial ontological fracture and dismantle the hyper-buffered instrumentalism of contemporary Nigerian political leadership, political thought cannot rely solely on further importations of Western liberal secularism. As demonstrated by the historical evolution of Ekeh's civic public, modern secular state apparatuses in postcolonial Africa when divorced from deep socio-cultural legitimacy tend to reinforce an amoral environment wherein state institutions are viewed as ownerless reservoirs for elite extraction. Technical institutional reform, procedural legalism, and administrative restructuring remain insufficient if they operate on an alienated conceptual foundation. To construct a viable, enduring political ethics, Nigerian governance theory must draw upon indigenous philosophical traditions capable of re-establishing an unbroken link between moral identity, communal responsibility, and political power. The philosophical contributions of Igbo-Nigerian thinkers Theophilus Okere and Jude Uwalaka offer the theoretical and hermeneutical tools necessary for this foundational reconstruction.

Theophilus Okere: Hermeneutics of Culture, Identity, and Meaning

In his landmark monograph, *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility* (1983), Theophilus Okere formulated a rigorous methodological foundation for authentic African philosophical inquiry. Rejecting both the uncritical, descriptive cataloging of traditional worldviews (often criticized as "ethnophilosophy") and the unreflective adoption of Western universalism, Okere established that genuine philosophy is an interpretative, hermeneutical engagement with a culture's lived experience, historical memory, and symbol-systems. Drawing upon European hermeneutical thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, Okere demonstrates that human reflection never occurs in a vacuum or from a disembodied, hyper-buffered vantage point; rather, philosophy is always historically and culturally situated. For Okere, culture serves as the indispensable horizon within which human beings discover meaning, structure their social reality, and formulate ethical imperatives. Philosophical

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reflection is the conscious, critical interpretation of this cultural horizon elevating implicit symbols, proverbs, worldviews, and lived experiences into reflexive, systematic thought. Applying Okere's hermeneutical framework to the problem of postcolonial Nigerian governance reveals why imported Western administrative, legal, and political architectures repeatedly falter or collapse into systemic corruption: they remain unmediated by the cultural symbols, linguistic horizons, and moral sensibilities of the populace. The inherited bureaucratic state exists as an un-interpreted, alienated shell operating above and outside the lived social reality of the people it governs.

To establish an effective political ethics, administrative concepts such as "public duty," "civic stewardship," "official transparency," and "institutional accountability" must be systematically re-interpreted through indigenous hermeneutical horizons. Rather than relying on abstract, alien legal codes that carry no moral weight within the popular consciousness, governance principles must be translated into meaningful moral imperatives rooted in foundational cultural concepts such as *Omenala* (normative tradition and ancestral moral order) and *Igwebuike* (relational power and communal solidarity) (Kanu, 2017; Okere, 1983). By hermeneutically mediating civic duties through indigenous cultural symbols, the amoral civic space is re-infused with moral weight, bridging the gap between formal state apparatuses and the lived ethical obligations of the citizenry.

Jude Uwalaka: Socio-Political Ethics and the Metaphysics of *Ndu*

While Okere provides the necessary hermeneutical methodology, Jude Uwalaka addresses the substantive socio-political and ethical pathologies of the Nigerian post-colony. In *The Struggle for an Inclusive Democratization in Nigeria* (2003) and his associated treatises on social ethics, Uwalaka provides an incisive critique of postcolonial Nigerian governance, diagnosing it fundamentally as an ethico-ontological collapse. Uwalaka argues that the Nigerian state has been captured by a predatory elite class that conceptualizes political power not as an instrument for public service or human flourishing, but as an amoral mechanism for personal enrichment, factional dominance, and resource extraction. To counter this predatory political logic, Uwalaka grounds his socio-political philosophy in the core African metaphysical principle of ***Ndu*** (Life or Vital Force). Within traditional African ontology, *Ndu* represents the ultimate, supreme value the foundational good around which all social, ethical, and political structures must gravitate. Life is not understood as an isolated, biological property of an autonomous individual; rather, *Ndu* is a dynamic, shared vital force that flows through the web of communal, ancestral, and environmental relationships. Consequently, Uwalaka posits that political authority, institutional leadership, and state power derive their sole normative legitimacy from their capacity to preserve, protect, enhance, and communicate *Ndu* to the entire community. The Igbo people's close attachment to the soil and nature, the warmth of their humanity in personal relationships, their vitality and zest for life which are not circumscribed by too much planning are cultural treasure that needs no apology (Edeh, 1985).

Analytical Category	**Predatory Postcolonial Governance**	**Uwalaka's *Ndu*-Centered Governance**
Ontological Orientation	Anti-existential, extractive, and hyper-buffered.	Relational, life-affirming, and communally embedded.
Conception of Power	An instrument for elite dominance and resource theft.	A sacred civic trust (*Ofevfe*) dedicated to communal life.
Evaluation of Corruption	A minor legal infraction or administrative breach.	A direct ontological assault on human life (*Ndu*).
Primary State Objective	Capital accumulation and political preservation.	The protection, enhancement, and communication of *Ndu*.

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Under Uwalaka's ethico-ontological framework, the hyper-buffered instrumentalism of contemporary Nigerian leaders is exposed as anti-existential and illegitimate. When political actors embezzle public funds earmarked for hospitals, road networks, educational institutions, or clean water, their actions cannot be dismissed as routine administrative breaches or victimless financial crimes. Within the metaphysics of *Ndu*, public corruption constitutes a direct ontological assault on the life of the community a deliberate denial of vital force that results in preventable deaths, physical suffering, and socio-economic paralysis. Uwalaka's framework re-conceptualizes governance as a sacred trust (*Ofevfe*), stripping political leadership of its hyper-buffered insulation and re-anchoring power within an ethic of stewardship (Uwalaka, 2003; Wiredu, 1996). Synthesizing Okere's hermeneutical mediation with Uwalaka's metaphysics of *Ndu*, African political philosophy provides the constructive foundation required to transform the civic public from an extractive "no-man's-land" into a sacred, life-sustaining arena for collective human flourishing.

Synthesis: Toward an Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance

Synthesizing Charles Taylor's diagnostic architecture of the porous and buffered selves with the constructive African philosophical contributions of Theophilus Okere and Jude Uwalaka yields a robust theoretical framework: the Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance. This synthesis addresses the profound ontological fractures and administrative pathologies plaguing contemporary Nigerian leadership, moving beyond the limitations of both Western liberal secularism and uncritical traditionalism. To understand the conceptual transformation proposed by this framework, one must examine how it restructures the fundamental dimensions of political life across three distinct paradigms. In Western buffered modernity, the human agent is conceived as an autonomous, buffered individual operating within a disenchanted immanent frame. Conversely, the deformed postcolonial reality of contemporary Nigeria exhibits a cynical, hyper-buffered elite

posture coupled with a manipulative, pseudo-porous defense mechanism. The Afro-Relational Synthesis supersedes both models by anchoring political self-conception in relational communitarianism, where individual identity is dynamically realized through reciprocal community engagement. Furthermore, while Western modernity conceptualizes the public space as an amoral, bureaucratic arena governed by procedural rationality, and the postcolonial Nigerian state has reduced the civic sphere to an extractive "no-man's-land" awaiting plunder, the Afro-Relational framework re-envisions the public domain as a sacred civic trust. Public institutions and state treasuries are elevated from amoral administrative machines into collective communal heritage. Morality is correspondingly transformed: moving away from purely utilitarian or procedural legalism, and away from dualistic, performative religious displays, the proposed synthesis grounds public ethics in a life-affirming ethic (*Ndu*). The primary goal of governance shifts decisively from raw resource extraction or isolated individual freedom toward holistic communal flourishing. Finally, where accountability in Western models relies strictly on formal legal mechanisms, and postcolonial governance suffers from fragmented and evasive oversight, the Afro-Relational framework establishes an integrated civic-moral duty where political stewardship is continuously policed by both institutional transparency and relational responsibility.

Attempting to resolve postcolonial dualism by simply forcing pre-modern porosity back onto a complex modern state risks triggering sectarian conflict, religious fundamentalism, and ethnic nepotism. The Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance expertly navigates this dilemma by grounding civic obligation in African relational personhood, drawing upon the insights of Ifeanyi Menkiti and Kwasi Wiredu. Within this relational ontology, the individual is neither an isolated, buffered unit seeking private accumulation nor a passive subject swallowed by the collective, but a relational agent whose moral integrity is realized through responsible participation in community. This synthesis establishes three core normative principles for institutional renewal. First, the civic realm is reclaimed as sacred moral ground; through hermeneutical re-interpretation, state property and public infrastructure recover the same moral weight as primordial communal property. Second, guided by the ethic of *Ndu*, political leadership is judged strictly by its capacity to preserve and enhance public life, framing administrative corruption as a direct existential assault on the populace. Third, relational accountability (*Igwebuike*) re-anchors political actors in solidarity, dismantling the hyper-buffered insulation that permits leaders to remain indifferent to citizen suffering.

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STRATEGIC ACTION PIPELINE FOR INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

To translate the theoretical synthesis of the Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance from an abstract philosophical framework into actionable structural transformation, concrete policy mechanisms must be instituted within the postcolonial African state. Overcoming the systemic corruption and ontological dislocations of contemporary Nigerian leadership requires moving beyond top-down legal mandates or imported anti-corruption templates. Instead, reform must target the foundational structural nodes where public ethics, institutional oversight, and cultural identity intersect. Systematically, the educational, administrative, and socio-religious spheres from this strategic pipeline provide an operational blueprint designed to bridge Peter Ekeh's "two publics" and dismantle the hyper-buffered instrumentalism of the political elite;

1. Curricular Re-Orientation and Civic Hermeneutics

The long-term sustainability of institutional reform depends upon a fundamental re-orientation of public education and civic pedagogy. In contemporary Nigeria, formal educational curricula remain largely tethered to Western legal-rational frameworks that present civic duty through abstract, disenchanted bureaucratic concepts. Because these models are detached from the lived cultural horizons of the citizenry, they fail to generate intrinsic moral obligations, leaving public administration vulnerable to extractive mindsets. To eliminate this pedagogical gap, national education ministries, university departments, and civic education boards must integrate African political philosophy, relational ethics, and cultural hermeneutics directly into primary, secondary, and tertiary curricula. Drawing upon the philosophical insights of Theophilus Okere, Jude Uwalaka, Kwasi Wiredu, and Kwame Gyekye, civic instruction must frame public service not merely as administrative employment or career advancement, but as a sacred, life-affirming trust dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of communal vital force (*Ndu*). When the Igbos speak of Chi as a being reserved to Chineke and found in creatures, they mean that God, the source of "*Ndu*" (life), is here and now producing "*ndu*" in creatures (Edeh, 1985).

This curricular transformation requires operationalizing a "civic hermeneutics" a pedagogical method that systematically translates abstract constitutional rights, legal codes, and state duties into culturally resonant moral imperatives. Through this hermeneutical mediation, concepts such as official transparency, public property, and fiduciary responsibility are linked directly to indigenous ethics such as *Omenala* (normative tradition) and *Igwebuike* (relational solidarity). In an Igbo community which integrate traditional culture, there is synergy among people residing permanently in a single locality. The members of such community share the basic conditions of a common life (Edeh, 1985). Similarly, socializing emerging generations to view the state treasury and civic infrastructure as collective communal heritage rather than an ownerless "no-man's-land," educational institutions can dismantle the hyper-buffered cynicism that currently characterizes elite engagement with the civic public.

2. Decentralization and Community-Led Institutional Oversight

The structural persistence of systemic corruption in postcolonial governance is deeply intertwined with the hyper-centralized administrative architecture inherited from colonial rule. This centralized structure insulates state actors behind bureaucratic barriers in distant capital cities, creating a hyper-buffered space where public resources are easily diverted without direct accountability to the communities impacted by such theft. To resolve the alienation between Ekeh's primordial and civic publics, state governance structures must undergo deep administrative and fiscal decentralization. Decentralization brings formal state apparatuses into direct proximity with local communities, subjecting public officials to the immediate social and ethical realities of the populace. When administrative authority and budgetary execution are localized, the formal civic public begins to overlap with the informal, morally binding primordial public. Operationalizing this decentralization requires establishing institutional frameworks for community-led participatory auditing and local peer review. Statutory oversight mechanisms such as public procurement boards, project execution committees, and anti-corruption monitoring units must mandate the inclusion of local community leaders, civil society organizations, traditional custodians, and respected civic associations. Under this participatory model, local communities actively monitor contract awards, inspect infrastructural developments, and audit budgetary

allocations within their immediate jurisdictions. Through empowering local communities to exercise direct oversight, the traditional moral economy characterized by communal peer review, social shame, and relational accountability is integrated into formal public financial management. The community endeavour to maintain the different groups within it while maintaining itself as a community. Hence, the life and purpose of the community come, in certain matters, before the individual interests of the members (Edeh, 1985). When a public official knows that misappropriating healthcare or educational funds will draw immediate, face-to-face condemnation from their local community, the hyper-buffered insulation that enables unconscionable embezzlement is effectively dismantled.

3. Demanding Ethical Accountability in Religious Institutions

Given the profound hyper-visibility of religion in contemporary Nigerian public life, faith-based institutions including Christian denominations, Islamic organizations, and traditional religious institutions hold immense structural power to either reinforce or challenge the postcolonial crisis of governance. As previously demonstrated, political elites frequently exploit performative, pseudo-porous religiosity to shield themselves from civic accountability, using spiritual endorsements, public prayer rallies, and lavish donations to sanctify the proceeds of state plunder. Religious institutions must urgently dismantle this transactional paradigm by refusing to serve as moral sanctuaries for corrupt political actors. Faith leaders and religious bodies must establish strict ethical codes governing political engagement, which include rejecting monetary donations, infrastructure sponsorships, and patronage from public officials whose wealth cannot be verified through transparent, legitimate means. By refusing to sanitize illicitly acquired wealth through public spiritual performances, religious bodies eliminate one of the primary mechanisms elites use to evade socio-political accountability. Furthermore, religious organizations must move beyond individualized, quietist doctrines of personal piety to restore a robust prophetic critique within the public square. Faith traditions must align their theological proclamation and public ethics with substantive social justice, institutional integrity, and the protection of human dignity. Religious pulpits and public platforms should function as spaces for critical civic education—demanding that political leaders demonstrate their faith through transparent stewardship, equity, and service to the common good. When religious institutions actively enforce moral standards against public actors, religion is transformed from an instrument of political immunity into a vital catalyst for institutional integrity and civic renewal.

CONCLUSION

Systemic corruption in contemporary Nigerian political leadership is fundamentally an ontological and ethical crisis rooted in postcolonial structural dislocations, rather than a mere failure of legal enforcement or administrative mechanics. Charles Taylor’s historical-philosophical architecture of the porous and buffered selves alongside contemporary empirical governance indicators, reveals how the Nigerian state apparatus operates as an alien, disenchanted space superimposed upon a deeply relational populace. Postcolonial political elites maneuver this structural mismatch through a dual posture: executing a hyper-buffered, disengaged instrumentalism to plunder public resources as an amoral "no-man's-land," while simultaneously mobilizing a performative, pseudo-porous posture to co-opt ethno-religious identities and evade civic accountability. Overcoming this entrenched pathology requires moving beyond both the uncritical adoption of alien Western secular structure and the romanticized retreat into pre-modern traditionalism. Taylor’s diagnostic insights with an Afro-Relational Hermeneutic of Governance reconnect moral identity with state power. This is grounded in the metaphysics of *Ndu* (life) and the ethics of *Igwebuike* (relational solidarity) as public office in Nigeria is stripped of its hyper-buffered insulation and re-conceived as a sacred, life-affirming trust dedicated to human dignity, institutional integrity, and collective flourishing.

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