The Nigeria Police: From the Sublime to the Ridiculous

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Abstract

For every society/state, the institution of police and policing is crucial to the maintenance of social order; and that is a fact. Thus the existence and place of the institution in national development cannot neither be underestimated nor overstressed. As elsewhere around the world, the institution of police exists in Nigeria, and has a long history that predates her independence in 1960—a history that has also been equally replete with standards of the sublime and those of derision, away from its classical decent performance into its current of abyss of inept and corruptiveness. One result of the foregoing is the un-arrested situation and spate of deviance and criminality amid an untamed atmosphere of violence and corruption and indecency. While the institution of police is more essential than ever, the performance of policing is as inept, ineffectual and corrupt as never. The degeneration in Nigerian police capacity/value needs to be evaluated in order to ascertain the underlying issues which have resulted to it. Although, the credibility of a people's police institution depends to the extent the Force executes its mandate efficiently, and whereas the complexity or weight of the challenges of policing varies from one society to another, one could establish some basic ingredients of effective policing accomplished within wider societal values. Consequently, this paper employs the analytical/theoretical methodology to undertake a historico-sociological appraisal of the Nigeria

Police in order to outlay their duties/performance, highlighting the underlying bases of their previous efficiency and indicating issues behind their current inept. It discovers that the quality of the institution and policing by the Nigeria Police has plunged, from the sublime/decent effectiveness to one of preposterous outwash, and therefore concludes that both the state and the institution's share in the sour state. Hence suggestions, which includes that the government should strive to step-up police welfare in order to stem corruption arising from poor conditions of service, were made.

Key Terms*:* Nigeria, police, policing, social order.

Introduction

The police force is a law enforcement agency charged with the responsibilities of maintenance of order and enforcement of the law, prevention and detection of crime, protection of life and property, preservation of the public peace, apprehension of criminal offenders and recovery of lost and stolen property, among other functions. It should be noted that these duties and responsibilities of the police just stated above, are very fundamental in the contemporary world.

However, other functions of the police include the participation in court proceedings, to create and maintain a feeling of security in the community as well as traffic control. The police also renders many other miscellaneous non-criminal services, such as rescuing people in emergency situations, act as escorts for visiting foreign dignitaries including members of the diplomatic corps in charge of their various foreign Diplomatic Missions and Embassies, serve as escorts and guards in large deliveries of money to and from banks etc.

The criminal Justice system is a combination of four major sub-systems: police, prosecution, courts, and corrections, each with its specific tasks. These subsystems are by no means mutually exclusive of one another, and what is done in one area has a direct effect upon another. The police represent the most visible subsystem and have the greatest membership of the four major sectors. They are the entry point of the criminal justice system for first offenders and the re-entry point for the failures of the other subsystems. It is very obvious that the police are the only component of the criminal justice system that is in daily contact with both

criminals and the public thereby making the responsibilities of the police to be more distinctive than those of other service agencies.

In contemporary times, there has been hue and cry by members of the general public against the Nigerian police force nation-wide about the high level of bribery and corruption as well as other vices which have permeated through the officers cadre as well as the rank and file and deeply per- petrated by them. Complaints abound about the corruption of the police as well as their arbitrary use of force culminating in brutality against members of the general public and sometimes resulting in gruesome killings of defenceless citizens and most of the time getting away with it in the name of accidental discharge and other flimsy excuses. These negative activities of the police against members of the public have resulted in soured relationships and odium as well as clashes between them leading to social problems. It is against this background, I intend to appraise the Nigeria police force generally and Benin Area Command in particular by examining how the members' activities have in one way or the other affected the members of the public either positively or negatively.

And finally, a detailed analysis of the functions performed by the police force in the Benin Area Command here in Benin City, vis-a-vis their nefarious activities will be X-rayed and possible solutions towards arresting this negative development will be proffered with a view to creating a just and peaceful society devoid of rancour and misgivings for human comfort.

Statement of the Problem

It is an obvious fact the corruption in the Nigeria police force has presently escalated. The corrupt practices of the police have constituted a social problem in Benin City in particular and the country at large with the resultant effects of leading to lack of public confidence in the police, soured relationship and odium as well as contempt for the police by members of the public.

It will be pertinent at this very point in time to quickly highlight the various corrupt practices of the police exhibited here in Benin City under the Benin Area Command as well as in other various police posts across the countries which, *inter allia* are enumerated below:

1. Openly accepting bribes (popularly called "Egunje" among Lagosians; and "Kola" generally).
2. Aiding and abetting with criminals.
3. Brutality in the form of forceful arrest and gruesome killings of innocent people in the name of accidental discharge.
4. Bail abuses.
5. Betrayal of trust by divulging secret information passed to them back to criminals and unnecessary delay in attending to complaints.

It will be mentioned here that as a result of the problem caused by the corruption of the Nigeria police, many people in Benin City and across the Country in general do not report or no longer report to the police some felonies and misdemeanour offences committed against them such as as rape, libel assault, stealing etc. This is because they have lost hope in the police to set things right for them because of their unnecessary delay in attending to complaints and poor handling of cases in their usual "come today, come tomorrow" syndrome.

Furthermore, the researcher needs to emphasise here that the problem caused by the corrupt practices of the police enumerated above has affected police-community relations. Consequently, there has been an increase in crime rate in Benin City, since most members of the public have almost lost confidence in the police with respect to crime reporting.

It will be mentioned here that the various police corrupt practices enumerated above in the preceding paragraph have generated social problems which are enormous. There is an urgent need to see that this social problem which has almost grown out of hand and has defied solution; and to ensure that the infamy is tackled and uprooted from the society.

Scope of the Study

This research intends to:

1. Focus on the causes of corruption in the police force with respect to the giving of monetary reward before the granting of bail at police stations and the conditions of police cells and detainees.
2. Moreover, a section will dwell on the History, Organisation and control of the Nigeria police force.
3. Furthermore, review extensively, relevant literature which borders on a wide variety of issues regarding police activities.

However, the specific objectives of this study include: To conduct a field survey of the practice of bail in the police stations with respect to some selected Division police Headquarters under the Benin Area Command; identify lapses in the system and offer suggestions on how these lapses can be obliterated; observe the conditions or state of the police cells and come out with a meaningful report on the existing conditions; and finally, to identify the factors that militates against police effectiveness and offer suggestions. By and large, it is important to undertake this review of this review of the comparative quality of the nature and essence of the Nigeria Police both for the reason of enhancing its performances and to identify/stamp out its disenabling conditions.

Conceptual Clarifications

Police/policing

The idea of police and policing is universally. Thematically, the concept implies "the governmental department charged with the preservation of public order, the promotion of public safety, and the prevention and detection of crime" (Garner, 2009). The police institution and policing are an integral part of Criminal Justice anywhere, including Nigeria. However, Criminal justice is both a field of study and "the methods by which a society deals (or apprehend) with those who are accused of having committed crimes" (Garner, 431). The criminal Justice system as a whole is concerned with the responsibilities, practices and policies about the detection, prevention, control and punishment of crime in the interest of security and protection of the general public—including correctional services.

Social problem

'Social' pertains to human relationships and 'problem' is a perplexing question for which we seek an answer. The two words put together however indicate an implication of undesirability. We see social problem therefore, as a condition involving human relationships that is considered undesirable by a large number of people in the society which needs a reform or an outright change.

Social order

Persons, systems, institutions, and other elements of interaction rely and influence each other in many significant ways in an extended interdependence. Thus, any man is tied to another or others in both symbiotic and non-symbiotic ways. Instrumental to the realization of these is value: the norms, methods and bureaucratic processes established to ensure order in society. This, then, implies the idea of culture—the totality of a people's ways of life and the progressive activity of learning such ways (Cuber, 1968, 76). These ways include those of family organization, building, dressing, law, social control and order. Thus, society is maintained at the interpersonal and group levels in an order. In every epoch of its historical development, every society operates in some social order. A social order, therefore, exists "when an entire community or society, for a significant portion of its history, is characterized by distinctive and interwoven patterns of social organization" (Broom and Selznick, 1973, 21). Whatever its nature, social order is "the total complex of the social institutions of a society and their interrelationships" (Hogan, 2006, 331). Traditional African society marked a type of order (incest taboos and disciplined behavior); but most modern African states grope with a type of order—this is because they still have modes of resource-allocation, corruption, violence, injustice, insecurity, underdevelopment, ineffective modes of social control, undefined model for justice (to mention but a few) to contend with; they have yet to establish useful schemes to deal with these malaises. Although many African researchers are looking back into their existing cultures and finding models and customs that can be adopted both to suit a culturally sensitive bases of social order, any useful measure must encourage responsibility—such as that that policing is meant to sustain (Asekhauno, 2013); and about which it has increasingly become inefficient.

Police/Policing: A Brief Historical Approach

It should be pointed out that authorities differ as to the origin of the word "police". But according to Sullivan (1966, 1), "the origin most widely accepted is the Greek word Polis. This word means "city", and is defined as a judicial and executive system such as an organised civil force in a town or city for the preservation of the life, property, and health of the community, and for the enforcement of laws. The French word for police is *policer*, meaning the power of the people. Historically, the title of "police" was officially designated in the famous Act of Parliament in England in 1829 under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel. This act has been a milestone in the progress of law enforcement throughout the world and particularly in the United States. It all began at the time in early human history when small, migratory family groups banded together for mutual protection against marauding animals and people. Therefore it became exigent and quite natural for these early communities to select the strongest and most dependable men to stand guard for security purposes while the other members of the tribe slept.

It should be emphasised that it was when these early roving bands organised themselves into tribes and settled down in small communities as their population increased, that they began to evolve rules and regulations governing personal and property rights. It became imperative for certain people like the warriors to enforce these rules and regulations governing personal and property rights, leading to the formation of a clique of law enforcers.

It should be pointed out here that law enforcement has a long human history. Sullivan (1966, 1) asserted that "…even in Biblical times, there were patrols of watchmen who went about the cities. More precisely, the military origin of Police systems can be traced to the Romans. Caesar Augustus, who was the Roman Emperor when Christ was born, used his soldiers to police Rome. Other nations copied the Roman military police system."

Emergence and History of the Nigeria Police Force

There have been coherent and undistorted accounts by various authorities as to the origins and history of the Nigeria Police Force. But Odu (1988. 37) offers a meticulous 'historical survey of the Nigeria Police Force'. According to him,

> …unlike in Britain where the Police as an organised profession was established by the people themselves who saw the need for the protection of their property and preservation of life and public order and therefore formed themselves into the organisation for the accomplishment of their objectives, the Police in Nigeria grew out of the desire of the British Government, then holding the reins of power in Southern Nigeria to protect themselves both against the natives (as was especially against the threats in Lagos during the annexation of the colony of Lagos in 1861), to enforce the British attempt to stop slave trade, and provide security for the assets and merchandise of the Royal Niger Company. Hence the Police in Nigeria was conceived, not as a service organisation for the natives, but as an instrument of coercion or the oppression of the natives. Odu's account shows that the first batch of Policemen that were recruited was the *Consular Guards* (25 of them) in April 1861, and it was not until 1862 (when H.S. Freeman became Governor-General) that the number was raised to 113. Later the *Hausa Constabulary* was added in 1863; and by 1866, the two forces had a population of 1,200 men. Both formations were merged in 1900 into the Hausa Constabulary following the transfer of administration from the Royal Niger Company as a result of the proclamation of the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria by the British Government; and it was this Constabulary that performed both military and civil duties. However, before the turn of the century, the Police was separated from the Hausa Constabulary to become the *Lagos Police Force* (January, 1896), under a commissioner of Police. By 1906, the force had been renamed *Southern Nigeria Police Force*; and in 1900, Lord Lugard disbanded the Royal Niger Constabulary which was set up in 1888 with its Headquarters at Lokoja but retained some men who formed the nucleus of the

> Northern Nigeria Constabulary. But by 1908, after a further re-organisation, the Northern Nigeria Constabulary was enlarged to Northern Nigeria Police Force. By the time of the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, there were two separate Police Forces, under two Inspectors-General of Police until 1930 when (on April 1, under Ordinance No. 2), the two Forces were merged and became known as the Nigeria Police Force (with Headquarters in Lagos, under the first Inspector-General of Police in Nigeria, Mr. C.W. Duncan; he had a Deputy Inspector-General of Police and two Assistant Inspectors-General of Police in Kaduna and Enugu respectively. Since then, the States have always had Commissioners of Police amid other ranks under them as provided by the constitution and Police Regulations".

Louis Orok Edet was appointed the first indigenous Inspector-General of Police (1964); and has since had several successors. Odu's account is corroborated by Ehindero (1986, 2). According to him,

> Until the first half of 1906, three separate Police Forces existed in what is now known as Nigeria. These were the Lagos Police Force, The southern Police Force and the Northern Police Force. In 1914, the Southern and Northern Police Forces were amalgamated. Under the ordinance No.2 of 1930, came the existence of the Nigeria Police Force which had its Headquarters in Lagos. In 1954, the Nigeria Police became a Federal Force in line with the 1954 Constitution. The implication of this was that the Federal and Regional Governments became jointly responsible for the maintenance of law and order in their areas of jurisdiction. When Nigeria became a Republic State on 1st October, 1963, the year in which Mid-West Region was carved out of the Western Region, the Police was administered under five command levels - Lagos, Northern Region, Western Region, Eastern Region, and Mid-Western Region each having a Commissioner of Police with the Inspector-General of Police as the overall head at the Force Headquarters level. In April, 1964, the Nigeria Police Force was

privileged to be headed by L.O. Edet, the first Nigerian Inspector-General of Police.

Ehindero (1986) states further that by 1972, the Local Government Police in different parts of the country were merged with the Nigeria Police Force. The unique contribution of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 is its provision that there shall exist no other forces than the Nigeria Police Force in this country. Section 194 (1) of the constitution states: "There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be styled the Nigeria Police Force and subject to the provisions of the section no other Police Force shall be established for the federation or any part thereof".

By and large, it has been established that the Police Force was established in Nigeria by the colonial British Government as an instrument of oppression. This assertion is made by the researcher because of the use to which the colonial masters put the Police, that is, in holding down the people by harassing tax defaulters, brutalising trade unionists and other nationalists, torturing persons accused of criminal offences as well as using the police force to hold on to power and to protect themselves, including enforcing the British attempt to stop slave trade, and provide security for the assets and merchandise of the Royal Niger Company (R.N.C.). Consequent upon the above factors, therefore, one will see that the colonial masters never wanted to establish a civil police. They wanted a coercive force to enforce their laws and that purpose the Police served. However, having discussed the history and origin of the Nigeria Police Force and factors that underlie its being set up by the British Colonial Government, the researcher will now focus on the organisation and command structure of the Nigeria Police Force. ***The reorganisation of the Nigeria police force*** The Nigeria Police Force has been restructured into five new Directorates (each headed by a Deputy Inspector-General of Police) and eight Zonal Commands each headed by an Assistant Inspector-General of Police. The Nigeria Police is further organized under other Directorates/Commands.

The Functions of the Police in Nigeria

It is a truism to state here that the police has a vital and indispensable role to play in Nigeria. Yet it should be noted that the duties of the police were not regulated

during the colonial period. Up till the late 40s, the police performed immigration duties including fire-fighting as part of their civic duties. It was not until the mid-sixties that the duties of the police became enacted.

By section 4 of the Police Act (1967) as amended by Act No.23 of 1979, the Police are charged with the following general duties:

(a) The prevention and detection of crime
(b) The Protection of life and property
(c) The apprehension of offenders
(d) The preservation of law and order
(e) The due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and
(f) The performance of such military duties within and without Nigeria as may be required of them by or under the authority of any Act.

Even though these seem onerous task, the service also provided for the welfare of its men and women (the reasonableness of such not the focus of present work).

The Police Standards

It would be recalled that the Nigeria Police Standard was designed in 1965 and is intended to be carried on important ceremonial occasions by a Standard Bearer. There is a ceremonial belt for carrying the Standard. It is made of blue super lute silk, embroidered in silver with the Police crest and scrolls bearing the history of the Force from 1861 to 1930 on one side. On the other side is the Nigeria Coat of Arms (in proper colours and scrolls) bearing the campaigns and expeditions in which the Force had been engaged from 1893 to 1965.

The Crest The Police crest consists of an eagle, crossed batons, elephant and portraying the ground on which the elephant stands. The eagle of the crest represents strength. The crossed batons stand for office and authority. The elephant represents steadfastness and reliability and while the ground on which the elephant stands is the rich vegetation of Nigeria.

The Flag The Nigeria Police flag has three conspicuous colours namely Blue, Yellow and Green. The Blue stands for love, loyalty and unity; yellow for discipline and resourcefulness, and Green for Energy and life.

The Police Mobile Force and Other Departments

The Police Mobile Force was christened "Quick Intervention Unit" not long ago. The first squadron of the Police Mobile Force was formed in Kaduna in 1962. It should be noted that the Mobile Force has grown tremendously over the years and has squadrons located all over the Federation, and always on the alert for emergency operations. The Police Mobile Force members are also called "Riot Policemen" because of the nature of their job as they are always called in to quell riots and to police troubled spots or hot spots in any part of the country. Each squadron has a commanding officer who is administratively under the commissioner of police of the state in which it is based.

Further, the Nigeria Police has many branches. These include an Armament Branch (set up in the early 1960s and it deals with bomb disposal and musketry); Signals Branch (established in 1950 with sub-stations linked with the Divisional/State Headquarters); Airing Branch (inaugurated when the Force acquired one Cessna - 310 aircraft and a Bell Helicopter model G5A in May, 1973 for enhanced movement of personnel and materials); Dogs Branch (trained in crime detection and prevention); Transport Branch (for administrative convenience, they are operationally responsible to their Area Command Commissioners in their respective states); Works Branch (for architectural design, construction and maintenance of offices, officers' quarters, barracks, police mess, canteens and recreation rooms in all police formations. The Branch is now responsible for maintaining all Police buildings); and the Supply Branch (the 'Q' Organisation).

Other Police Departments include the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.) (which deals with crime prevention, detection, investigation and the prosecution of offenders. It also maintains criminal records from all over the country. It is also the Central Authority for the collection, compilation, classification and recording of all criminal information); Traffic Warden Services (to supplement the efforts of the regular police by maintaining a free flow of traffic, assisting school children to

cross the road and enforcing minor traffic regulations such as wrong parking and stopping in unauthorised places); Ports Police (to ensure that business goes on without interruption by lawless elements and also to enforce ports laws and regulations); as well as Railway, Federal Highway and other units in the Police Formation. Unfortunately, one notorious element among all of the branches, departments and formations is the practice of corruption.

A Moral Evaluation of the Nigeria Police: From the Sublime to the Ridiculous

Discussions about the Nigeria Police and its activities border mainly on two issues: first, the inadequacy (or otherwise) of its welfare; and second, the allegations of corruption in the Force. Many Nigerians believe that police conditions of service are unmitigatedly not satisfactory—and these spread across different strata and categories. However, in an interview with the relations of suspects and the suspects themselves, the bulk of the relations of suspects maintained that the salaries received by the police is very meagre with respect to the risky nature of their job and also when compared with that received by those in other sectors of the economy such as the oil sector as well as other industrial sectors. Indications of poor conditions of service are rife in policemen tattered uniforms (seen faded and sometimes torn) while their black shoes are worn out in filled-off soles; their residences (barracks) are in a bad state from lack of maintenance and that a large number of them are not quartered. Besides, the basic income (salary) earned by police officers nationwide is preposterous comparatively with other civil servants'. All these initiate the proclivity to corruption.

Official police corruption obtains at different levels. Consider government directive of free bail, for instance. Although most police officers claim (as against popular belief) that they comply with the government directive of not paying for bail as it is free, however, majority of other categories of citizens including legal practitioners who have engaged with the police in one way or another, members of the public as well as the relations of suspects and the suspects themselves, aver that the police does not comply the government directive of not paying for bail; they demand and collect huge sums for bail, which is a mark of corruption.

It should be emphasised or rather elucidated that the other considerations which the police respondents emphasised as the determining factor in the granting of bail

to suspects at the police station included the nature of the offence committed by the suspect, the severity of evidence tendered against the suspect, the possibility of the accused impeding investigation into the offence committed and the likelihood of the accused absconding from justice by jumping bail. However, these important considerations enumerated above which the police assumed are the determining factor in the granting of bail to suspects at the police stations, are most of the time sacrificed at the altar of financial considerations. These were the views of the relations of suspects and the suspects as well who were interviewed by the researcher, coupled with observations of the researcher.

It should be emphasised here that a lot has been said and written about the activities of the Nigeria Police Force interface with the general public (civil society). Various writers, clergymen, organisations, commentators on national issues, leaders of thought, academics, criminologists, lawyers, sociologists, and the mass media, have written and commented on the activities of the Nigeria Police by way of appraisal. Most researches' assessment of the Nigeria police force is that the police force has not performed creditably well due to corruption. These factors (and for other reasons) have obviously led to the dented image of the Nigeria police force within Nigeria and abroad. These negative developments call for sanitization of the Nigeria police force with a view to bringing about efficiency, reliability and the generation of public confidence in the police leading to greater improvement in police-community relations. The above groups of people have also come up with what they regarded as the causes of corruption of the Nigeria police force and ways by which they feel the evil could be eradicated from the police force.

In summary, Okonkwo (1966: 6) enumerated the causes of friction between the police and the public which have resulted in poor relationship and widening gap between them to include the following:

(a) The exaggeration by the police of evidence in court.
(b) The use of unnecessary violence,
(c) Fatuousness in dealing with public demonstrations.
(d) Ineptitude in handling the public on occasions of public processions,
(e) Incivility to members of the public, and
(f) Unnecessary delay in attending to complaints".

Recommendations

On the basis of the above findings, the researcher has to make the following recommendations:

1. The government, police special task force, para-military, charitable organisations including concerned individuals, should help step in and check the excesses of the police in the areas of bail abuses, extortion of money from members of the public, betrayal of trust by divulging secret information passed to them back to criminals as well as the unnecessary delay in attending to complaints.

2. With respects to dealing with the above problems highlighted, the government should utilise the "Task Force on Extortion" which was set up in 1994 by the Inspector General (IG) of police, in the person of Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasie as well as the members of the "X-Squad Unit" which are popularly called "Coomasie boys", to monitor closely the activities of the police. Any policeman or woman found engaging in corrupt practices should be summarily dismissed from the police force and prosecuted as well in order to serve as deterrent to others.

3. Furthermore, it is recommended that all levels of Government from the Federal to Local Government, including charitable organisations as well as well-meaning individuals, contribute their quota in human, material and financial terms to the police force, in order to enhance its effectiveness and reduce corruption in the force drastically. Therefore, it is seriously recommended that vigorous effort should be channelled into buying a fleets of vehicles for logistics; equipment such as walkie-talkies, computers for instant recording and retrieval of crime information to replace the present cumbersome file records method.

It is also recommended that the Government should float an endowment fund for the police in order to cater for the welfare of her members. This should take the form of providing decent accommodation, good working conditions, health, insurance and pension schemes for her members in order to make them perform very effectively.

In addition, it was also recommended that the Government should increase tremendously the manpower base of the police in order to improve on its present police/population ratio of 1 policeman to about 663 citizens which is one of the lowest in the world. It is recommended that the police/population ratio of 1 policeman to about a 100 citizens should be the set target for effective policing.

Finally, the government should urgently address the present deplorable state of police cells which stinks and is unfit for human habitation. It is suggested therefore, that the government should provide functioning toilet systems in the cells, renovate the bad floors and the lighting system and as well make the cells well ventilated in order to make life bearable for the detainees in these cells.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was an attempt to appraise the origins, nature and activity of the Nigeria Police Force vis-a-vis their effectiveness. This was done by focussing on the functions of the police and the prevalence of internal corruption. Even though the research discovers that the Force was a colonial heritage, its functions are relevant now as were then. What may be at variance with the past (their efficiency amid adequate welfare) is a decay in the character of their formations (inadequate welfare amid vivid corruption). In other words, poor conditions of service amid a harsh economy have enhanced police official corruption; and adopting the recommendations offered above may help stamp out this malaise for optimum performance of the Nigeria Police Force.

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