

MANAGING SECURITY AND ORDER IN NIGERIA: THE POLICE DILEMMA AND THE CITIZENSHIP FACTOR

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Abstract

Management of security and order is the most important function of any government. But the several problems of security and order that wrack the Nigerian society now and again cannot but conspire to vitiate this onerous government responsibility to the detriment of the public. The paper observes that the cumulative effects of the official machinery for the management of security and order have only tended to spawn more and more bureaucracies, costly in every aspect and ultimately less productive of demonstrable security and order. The paper particularly presents a critical analysis of the police dilemma in Nigeria, arguing that the management of security and order is a matter too grave to be left in the hands of an exclusive police or group of policy makers. The paper recommends the development and management of policing in Nigeria that is based on a conception of citizenship. This, the paper believes, is a formidable challenge both to sociological imagination and political resolve.

Introduction

At no time in the history of Nigeria has there been so much need for security and public order than now. Crime, delinquency, disturbance, riot, violence, unrest and deviance of all kinds which wrack the nation have become subjects of increasing concern to the citizenry. Indeed, such major breaches in the nation's security and peace in recent times, such as dangerous infringements on the basic rights of citizens, social disturbances, illegal arms trafficking, ethnic militia, communal vigilante and other violent crimes, attest to the spate of insecurity and disorder in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 2001). To compound matters, the machineries of state security and public order, most visible of which is the police, have appeared to be unable to grapple with the problems. The available knowledge on these problems is revealing (FOS, 1996; NISER, 2001). More revealing, however, are our dailies which have become bulletins for crime, violence and conflicts of all kinds, and from which one could monitor not only the increasing incidence and seriousness of our security and order problems, but also, the relative incapability of the law enforcement agencies, and the nature and level of concern of our increasingly helpless citizenry (Odekunle, 1979; Idowu, 1986; Obasanjo, 2001; Igbinovia, 2003).

Undoubtedly the citizenry feel a dire need to do something, to search for solution to the crisis of security and order in community life, but what? In this circumstance, concerned citizens and government need to give a wider meaning to the responsibility that tends to vest only the police with the primary responsibility of protecting lives, property and liberties of the citizens. At least, the duty of involving as many citizens as possible in effecting measures for their own security and safety deserves greater recognition and wider application. Indeed, unless the citizens agree to make the commission of crime and breach of security and order as difficult as possible, other measures of a formal kind will serve only cosmetic purposes, such that had been the case in varying degrees in Nigeria since the colonial times to the present day. The challenge, therefore, is new and a more appropriate conceptualisation of the responsibility for security and order that gives greater recognition to the principle of citizenship. This requires that the ground norms need to be reinterpreted so that all citizens share in the responsibility for the enforcement of security, law and order. That such recognition of the citizenship factor had been diplomatically neglected by governments over the years, this paper contends, is a major reason for persisting and increasing crisis of security and public order in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Police Dilemma in Security Management

The paper wishes to propose at the outset that there is an unsalutary crisis of management of security and public order in Nigeria. So much has gone wrong and nothing is being done about the inglorious state of the nation's security. Neither are things done right, nor are the right things done. Ultimately, people's needs and expectations are not being satisfied in this important area. This is coterminous with management inefficiency and ineffectiveness on the part of government and the formal security operatives.

Most knowledge about the police role in modern society rests on a taken for granted notion (Cain, 1974). The police are assumed to be a state agency mainly patrolling public places in uniforms with a broad mandate of crime control, law and order maintenance and service functions. Understanding the nature of

policing, especially over a broader span of space and time requires some conceptual deconstruction of this assumed idea of the police. Modern societies are characterized by the ideological assumption that the police are a functional prerequisite of security and order, defending against chaos (Morrison, 1984). The contribution of the police to the control of crime and maintenance of security and order today is debatable as studies of police and civil society security operatives effectiveness imply (Ninalowo, 2003; Obioha, 2003; Ode, 2003; NISER, 2001; FOS, 1996).

In the Nigerian situation, the police as the foremost machinery of government with the responsibility for security and law and order is not instrumental to the practical fulfilment of the people's security and safety needs and aspirations. Various evaluations of the Nigeria police force and its functional performance have shown that the police can only be credited for the near brilliance and of successful suppression of disorders and protecting the establishment. It however falls far short of optimum standards in terms of the amount and quality of security or protection it offers the citizens and by the degree of confidence and co-operation it enjoys from the average Nigerian (Okonkwo, 1966; Tamuno, 1970; Odekunle, 1976; Dambazau et al, 1996; Ninalowo, 2003).

There is today, a growing rate and widespread feeling of fear and insecurity in all parts of Nigeria. Nigerians do not feel safe anywhere: at home, at work, on the streets, on the highways, on the waterways, at the airports, and even within the hallowed precincts of places of worship (quoted in UNDP, 1998:59). Other pointers to the abysmal failure of the government and its police in providing security and public order is the phenomenal emergence and multiplication of the use of civil society security operatives. Renunciatory militant groups have found active expressions in different parts of the country: The Odua People's Congress (OPC) in the South-west, the Bakassi Boys in the Southeast, the Ijaw National Youth in the South-south (or Niger-Delta) and the Arewa People's Congress in the North. In other parts of the country, several other civil security outfits such as the vigilante and neighbourhood watch groups are active (Obioha, 2003:154; Ode, 2003). The unconstitutionality of these organisations notwithstanding, they have taken it upon themselves to devise what appears to be relatively more efficient and effective alternative for combating insecurity and violent crimes,

The problem of a democratic society is to preserve the social order, while also allowing for the growth of people and changing ideas. The responsibility for the enforcement of security, law and maintenance of order include the preservation of the rights of all people. The struggle to maintain a proper balance between effective law enforcement and fairness to individuals permeates the entire criminal justice system. This is particularly crucial and apparent in police work (Jones and Smith, 1994). The Nigeria's form of government, its laws and constitution all express the desire to maintain the maximum degree of individual liberty consistent with the maintenance of law and order. The process of striking this balance is, however, complex and delicate. If the government is to balance accurately law enforcement needs against human rights, the former must be properly articulated. They seldom are. The legislatures, which are responsible for establishing police policies, defining in detail how and under what conditions certain police practices are to be used rarely make any conscious efforts to state precisely what they want the police to do. In like manner, police administrators have not attempted to set forth consistent law enforcement policies. Yet these decisions are at the heart of police work. How they are made determines to a large extent the safety of the community and the attitudes of the citizens toward the police. The dilemma of both the government and the police is that while law and order is a collective good, too much law and order impinges upon the citizen's liberties, and consequently, the police cannot expect to retain popular confidence (Skogan, 1996).

The Police and Security Function in Historical and International Perspective

The attempt in this section is to inquire into the historical evolution of the modern police function in society and to show evidence that the system of policing in any society is closely tied to her national history, the needs of the society and the nature and temperament of the people. The problems that face the Nigerian society were the same problems that plagued the British and the American societies: crime, violence and a growing loss of confidence in the state and its institution of policing by many segments and persons in society (Robinson, Scaglione and Olivero, 1994; Mawby 1992).

The modern British police were established during the first half of the 19th century against high tide of violence and crime. The authorities at the time decided that the state needed a disciplined group of guardian angels to guarantee security, law and order. This idea had led in 1829 to the creation of a police force of 1,000 men for metropolitan London (Emsley, 1991). The architects of the British police tradition (Peel, Rowan and Mayna) strove to construct a distinctive organisational style and image for the police which emphasised the idea of the police as an essentially civilian body, minimally armed, relying primarily on the same legal powers to deal with crime as all citizens shared, strictly subject to the rule of law, insulated from governmental control, and drawn from a representative range of working class backgrounds to facilitate popular

identification (Emsley, 1991). However, conventional histories of the British attempt to trace a direct lineage between the ancient tribal forms of collective self-policing and the contemporary Bobby. The consequence of this populist pedigree is that the British police are routinely referred to as role models for the world. The "Bobbies" of London are the precursors of the modern police all over the globe (Brogden, 1987; Mawby, 1992). In any case, the supposed benign British model or what has become known as the British police advantage was for home consumption only. A more militaristic and coercive model was from the outset exported to colonial situations, including Nigeria (Brogden, 1987; Robinson, Scaglione, Olivero, 1994).

The Nigeria police under the colonial era was an instrument of exploitation and subjugation, a terror machine, indeed. This partly explains the reason Nigerians have come to fear the policeman. He was seen as an enemy. The colonial experience has continued to permeate the rank and file while the public still cowers before the police despite the full "indigenization" of the force. From the time of its inception on a regular basis in the late 19th century till today, the Nigeria police still appear hooked to its colonial inheritance of brutality, dreary inquisition and role passivity in the protection of the public which more appropriately suited the punitive and repressive climate of colonial times. The average policeman has gradually added to the colonial hand-over, a passion for menacing threats, corruption and complicity in criminality (Odekunle, 1979; Akporugo, 1988; Akpederi, 1988; Igbinovia, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The historical evidence provides the answer to the question: "Why should a kindly guardian angel in Britain simply transform into an enemy, an impersonal, stone-hearted exploiter of our foibles and weaknesses in Nigeria?" Robert F. Kennedy explained this twist of irony: "Every society gets the kind of law enforcement it deserves or it insists on" (quoted in *The Newswatch*, June 30, 1986:9). The colonial and neo-colonial situation as a factor of the underdevelopment of the Nigerian society created a different set of relationship between the Nigeria police and the citizens (Odekunle, 1978; Emsley, 1983; Brogden, 1987). The historical evidence suggests the historical perspective of the underdevelopment model in the neo-Marxist theoretical tradition, which on the basis of its analytical framework has also come to be known as dependency theory. It places emphasis on a different set of causal relationships, particularly, on the way in which third world countries, Nigeria inclusive, have been integrated into the world capitalist system, a process which dependency theory regards as a determining factor in the present social, economic and political conditions and relationships in these countries (Odekunle, 1978). A proper review of the theory falls outside the scope of this paper. It will suffice to present the basic tenets of the theory which is the conception of a dialectical relationship between the developed societies of Britain and the underdeveloped Nigerian society. Historically this dialectical relationship has unfolded through mercantilism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. From this theoretical perspective it is possible, not only to inquire into the historical evolution of the dilemma of the police and the problems of security and order, but also to deal adequately with the "citizenship" factor in the management of security and order in the Nigerian State. Consequently it is argued that the a-historical and a-theoretical approach which hitherto assumed the role of the police in Nigeria as if it were an autonomous social institution unconnected with the historical and social processes of the Nigerian society has an implicit conservative stance which accepts existing on the economic and political relationships unquestionably. It should therefore, be discarded for the underdevelopment and dependency model which should be a more helpful explanatory framework for the police problem and the management of security and order in Nigeria.

The exigencies of colonial and neo-colonial rule require a much more unfriendly and passive police-community relations. The role of the police since colonial times has been to protect the person, property and future prospects of the imperial masters and those local groups who are dependent on them for power and wealth. Thus, greatly affected, and to a very large extent, handicapped by the ideologies, policies and practices of colonial and neo-colonial government, the Nigeria police seem unable to grapple with its most important function of providing security and maintenance of law and order in Nigeria. To cater for the needs of the "creator", of the people within the police and at the same time provide the level of services required by the public, make heavy and conflicting demands on the police force. Most policemen spend their time doing routine patrol, and in doing this they usually find themselves in situations which demand knowledge of human being, and the personal, as opposed to. official authority to influence people without the use of even the threat of force. These characteristics are not commonly found in our policemen because the police departments do not consider these values as paramount. Undoubtedly, much discord exists between the police and the public. Thus, the police do their work with the consciousness that they are distrusted and hated by many of the citizens.

Citizenship

The principal weakness of conservative assumptions about security and order however, and about police policies, practices and reforms in Nigeria, to a large extent, is the apparent neglect of the "Citizenship" factor. The effectiveness of conservative police reform efforts is seen as being hindered by the failure of the police to consider that public attitudes toward them do not exist in isolation, but are part of a broader complex of attitudes toward the system of legal and social justice (Pinker, 1971). Discussions of the police role necessarily raise questions about the values and ideologies, which lie behind particular systems, and there are always implications for legislations and administration if a particular set of beliefs about individual rights or collective responsibilities is to be expressed in policing. The notion of citizenship is linked to the question of democratic control and citizens participation in the enforcement of law and order (FGN, 1999; Okeke, 2003). The essential requirement for policing based on citizenship is standard of policing that is adequate, and this can only be achieved when all citizens share in the responsibility for policing (Tamuno, 1985). Radical reformers usually think in terms of government activity when changing social institutions is the issue. But there are other dimensions to the conception of a good society, which allot public authorities and bureaucracies a much smaller place (Titmuss. 1970). This is expressing faith in a particular kind of relationship between the governed. The essential basis of civilised social life lies in the readiness of people to share or accept responsibility for one another. Such co-operation, above all else, is indispensable for a united society, and where it is missing the quality of social relationships inevitably suffers- Thus, it becomes important to avoid government activity which undermines or discourages that kind of voluntary mutual aid and altruism which is expressed in citizenship. The message is essentially a simple one: unless people feel, and express in their actions, concern and compassion for one another, no amount of government security will lead to an integrated and stable society. On the contrary, human relations will be impoverished and society in imminent danger of disintegration. This raises in a new form the old controversy about the part voluntary effort can play within the formal system and more a matter of the part the government can play in fostering and encouraging voluntary action. This puts the problem of proper relations between government authorities and the people they serve in a different perspective. Whatever else it may suggest, this paper's advocacy lends powerful support to the policy of encouraging people to take part in both the planning and provision of community security and order which is expressed in citizenship (Parker, 1977; Okeke, 2003).

Conclusion

There is not only a need to develop a professional image of the police, but it is even more imperative that government, citizens, and the police find a mutually acceptable definition of the role of the police. Police-community relations carry the connotation of conflict resolution, of two-way dialogue, with all enclaves of the civic community, of open relationship between the police and the public. Change in the system of Nigerian policing and in the problems of security and order will not occur unless and until large numbers of concerned citizens from all enclaves in the society, socially aware police and criminal justice experts, sensitive government legislators and administrators begin to address the real issues rather than dealing with abstractions and procedural minutiae. In the final analysis the development of a "Nigerian" police based on a conception of citizenship and collective responsibility is therefore, a formidable challenge both to sociological imagination and to political resolve.

Policy Recommendations

The most frequent and conservative recommendations by criminal justice experts, crime commissions and opinion leaders seem to suggest that only the police and an exclusive group of policy-makers are capable of determining what policing should be. But do the people policed have a say or the right to a meaningful voice in their policing? It is correct, we believe, to say that policing is too important a business to leave to an exclusive police or group of policy makers. The police is an institution of the community and, should exist to assist the entire community to make it a safe and just place to live. Therefore, the people policed should have a say or a right of say and responsibility in their policing. The paper therefore, should like to make the following recommendations consistent with the principles of citizenship, democracy and the constitution, which if implemented would make citizens experience a more secure, safe, just and orderly society.

1. Specialised human policing in any form should become a smaller part of an array of impersonal control processes built into the environment, such as technological control and surveillance devices, and the guardian and self-policing activities of ordinary citizens.
2. The police should be replaced by a more varied assortment of bodies with policing functions and a more diffuse array of policing processes.
3. Police officers can no longer be totems symbolising a cohesive social order, which no longer exist. They will have to perform specific pragmatic functions of security and crime management

- and emergency peace-keeping in effective and just way, or forfeit popular and political support.
4. It would be helpful to experiment with demilitarised police organisation, which will involve elimination of military ranks: stripes, bars and stars, with stature and respect gained by virtue of competence and integrity. This will allow more flexibility of programme-oriented operations.
 5. It would also be helpful to experiment with a variety of methods of more community involvement in police operations, involvement that provides for citizens participation in decision making relative to police priorities and enforcement policies for particular neighbourhood in which the involved citizens live: for people should understand their police, support them and control them.
 6. There should be the establishment of a civilian review commission to investigate problems and complaints related to the Police.

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