

THE DYNAMICS OF PREVAILING VALUES AND THE DILEMA OF THE POLICE AND POLICING IN NIGERIA

OGEGE, SAMUEL OMADJOHWOEFE, PhD.
Department of Sociology and Psychology
Delta State University, Abraka.

Abstract

The Police unarguably constitutes a very visible and powerful arm of the law enforcement institution statutorily protecting life and property in the society. Obviously, but sadly charged with the responsibility of maintaining peace and enough, condemnation has become the lot of the Police from the tongue of the public, owing to the fact that the policing process is with corruption, brutality, extra-judicial killings and general abuse of power. Unfortunately, holders of this opinion have shown interest only in the symptoms of ineffective policing while completely ignoring the causes of ineffective policing that are deeply rooted in the prevailing values of the Nigerian society. Rather than hastily blame the Police, this paper has delved into areas in which Police performance contrasts public expectations and posits that, what the Nigerian Police needs from the public is empathy and sympathy and not apathy because, the Nigerian public has no moral justification or authority too condemn the Police as it is responsible for the deterioration of the Police to its present state.

Introduction

Historical experience has it that in pre-colonial Nigerian society, right and wrong were judged against the normative system of society. Then, the enforcement of norms was a communal affair. In other words, the arrest of a deviant was a joint responsibility of all community members who relied on their knowledge of prevailing norms of acceptable and unacceptable conduct, to prosecute, and where necessary, inflict appropriate negative sanctions on the deviant (Michalowski, 1985).

This scenario was altered as a result of societal evolution from a simple to a complex one (Quentin, 1986) with its complex administrative structures and institutions. Which became the responsibility of an organized institution known as the Police Force. The Nigeria Police Force, like any other in the world, is a creation of the State for the maintenance of law and order. Its establishment is the result of the appreciation of the fact that there is no perfect society devoid of crime, which unchecked, destroys the stability necessary for the maintenance of an orderly society. This explains why the issue of policing the society cannot be compromised.

With is law enforcement institution in place, every person is expected to go about his daily business, entrusting the protection of his life and property to the Police. For the Police institution to sufficiently carry out this noble role, its operatives, the rank and file, have to be disciplined and committed to duty. Very often, the society has condemned the Police for various act ranging from corruption, misuse of power, inefficiency, connivance with criminals and indiscriminate arrests to extra judicial, killings. The situation is so bad that sometimes, the Police is even more dreaded than criminals as Policemen are accused of ensnaring innocent people for selfish ends- These lapses have not only attracted public outrage, they have dwindle the image of the Nigerian Police. So pathetic is the situation that the Policeman is perceived as a tenor to the society instead of being a tenor to criminals.

At this juncture, the question should be posed whether the society should stop at blaming the Police for ineffective policing. It is necessary to appreciate the role of the government and the society at large in policing as one is tempted to believe that what the Police is accused of is situated and exacerbated by the prevailing values within the structural pattern of our society. It is against this background that this paper attempts to highlight the past and present state of the Police and policing in Nigeria; areas of lapses in policing and finally, the nexus between the prevailing values and the dilemma of policing in Nigeria.

The Past and Present State of the Police and Policing in Nigeria

The emergence of the Nigeria Police Force has a colonial origin, dating back to 1861, with the establishment of the consular Guard of thirty men by the British government. This however, became the Hausa Guard two years after its information. In 1930, the Southern Nigerian Regiment and the Hausa Guard were merged to form the present Nigeria Police Force, under the Police Ordinance Act No. 2 of 1930, with the Headquarters in Lagos (Annual Police Report, 1986).

The Nigerian Policeman in the distant past was a well kitted, smartly dressed, physically fit and intelligent young man, burning with the spirit of patriotism and service, and whose shirt tucked in very neatly into his trousers without tension or pressure from his belly, his well-polished shoe being the cynosure of all eyes. It was quite unimaginable then for a Policeman to be seen in tattered uniform or torn shoes, or putting on shoes other than the regular ones, and above all, he was always alert, courageous, disciplined and content.

These qualities helped the Policeman in using his statutory power to maintain law and order and in making sure that criminals were made to face the law. Thus, it was impossible for a Policeman on beat to be removed from it by money bags to cover funeral vigils and other irrelevant ceremonies as guards. Crime rate was relatively low and the culture of torturing innocent people for monetary gain was nonexistent. Policing then was thus effective and the Policeman enjoyed public confidence. All that is now history.

The image that strikes one on seeing a Policeman at the numerous checkpoints is that of a pot-bellied young man, absent minded in the extreme and disoriented. The only thing the Policeman of today is alert to is the art and science of extorting money from motorists and other members of the public. According to Muoboghare (2001), corruption seems to be the other name of the policeman and one needs not go to the barracks or police stations to have a feel of it. He stresses that this aspect of the Nigerian Policeman needs no further emphasis as anyone who travels on the Nigerian highways can attest to the menacing extortion of money from helpless and hapless road users.

In-depth interviews with police officers (Muoboghare & Ogege, 2001) show that widespread corruption is not restricted to only policemen on the highways; the Constable, Sergeant or Inspector at the checkpoint is only an errand boy to the Divisional Police Officer (DPO), to whom he makes returns of the criminal extortion. The Divisional Police Officer is in turn, the errand boy of the Commissioner of Police, to whom he makes his own return. Police officers reveal that proceeds from the harassment of innocent Nigerians find their way up the Police ladder or hierarchy, failure to do which attracts "dry posting," a metaphor for punitive positing and being marked down for observation.

Another disturbing aspect of present day Police and policing is the connivance between the men of the Police Force and criminals. We are not unfamiliar with reports of the source of arms and uniforms recovered from armed robbers being traced to policemen as in the case of the notorious Lawrence Anini who bought a riffle at the sum of N8,000 from Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) George Jyamu (Ehintero, 1990). The mere that robbers are found with Police weapons shows that there are still Iyamus in the Police Force today. Sometimes, according to Muoboghare (2000), Police Officers who work in concert with robbers often tell wealthy men that they are marked for attack by robbers. They later present the corpses of innocent people as the robbers referred to, and with this, huge financial rewards follow.

So bad is the situation with some good that if one runs into a check point with some good amount of money on him, he is at the risk of losing his life because of the Policemen's greayer need for the money. In the year 2001, for instance, fove ram dealers were robbed of five million naira by some Policemen at a check point on their way to Lokoja, Kogi State. The traders were burnt in their vehicles to obliterate any tell-tale signs. Unfortunately for the Policemen turned armed robbers, however, two of the traders escaped and told of their harrowing experience and the fate that befell their colleagues (Egbulem, 2002). Closely related to the above is the fact that the Policemen to whom a good citizen reports the whereabouts of suspected armed robbers ends up betraying the informant, with devastating consequences, thus confirming that the Police and criminals are partners in crime. This could also be the reason why Policemen most times are reluctant to confront armed robbers when distress calls come.

Inhuman treatment and extra judicial killings are common features of bad policing in Nigeria. In March 2002, unprovoked a Police Officer shot into a lorry, killing a passenger. In an earlier incident, a thirty five year old Uyo based transporter, Wilfred Effiong was killed by the Police allegedly for refusing to stop when asked to do so (CDHR, 2000). Often, these killings are explained off in the name of accidental discharges. This is of course expected from a fully armed Mobile Policeman reeking with alcohol and exuding indiscipline with his shirt unbuttoned and finger twitching around the trigger.

Police Officers deployed to quell civil disturbances or protests often turn such assignments to killing sprees. Rape has almost always been a constant accomplice to Police actions in Nigeria. Upon the conquest of rioters or protesters in a community, the women and girls become the spoils of war. The rape incident in Kaiama, Bayelsa State, twenty three days after Kalama Declaration attests to this fact (Nikoro, 1999). It is indeed beastly, and a show of shame, for a man, particularly in uniform, to forcefully make love to an unwilling and wailing woman after killing her husband.

The Nexus between Prevailing Values, the Police and Policing in Nigeria

Structurally, the Nigeria Police Command is hierarchically organized from Inspector General (1G.) at the apex, down to the Constable at the bottom of the ladder. Authority flows from the Inspector General to the Deputy Inspector General, down to the Assistant Inspector Generals, Commissioners, Area Commands, and Divisional Police Officers.

That the structural and institutional arrangements of the Nigerian society is a reflection of its value system is not a subject of disputation. The prevailing values of society form the

ideological super structure upon which every other social arrangement rests. The law enforcement institution is therefore guided by the prevailing values as vis the behaviour of individual member of the policy making body which determinably inform the performance of the Police. Some of these prevailing values are:

1. The Nigerian society emphasizes the accumulation of wealth through any means. In other words, nobody questions how people make money; thus, members of every stratum use whatever means and opportunity their class position provides to accumulate wealth.
2. Economic self-interest, rather than public duty, motivates behaviour.
3. Personal gain, rather than collective wellbeing, is encouraged. Mutual aid and cooperation for the all is discourage in favour of individual or group achievement at the expense of others.
4. In the process of each and everyone trying to get the best out of the system, the means of others in the society is blocked. This frustration leads to aggression, hostility and other forms of anti-social behaviours (Gordon, 1976: Peace and Tomb, 1993).

The prevailing value of blind accumulation of wealth by our leaders had negative implications for the Policeman in particular and the Force in general. Its first implication is manifested in salary and other financial benefits accruable to the Policeman. By the 1999 salary structure which was operated up to December, 2000, a Police Constable's monthly salary stood at N289 1.00 while a Corporal took home N2959.00 per month. The Sergeant earned N3328.00 while the Inspector took home N422 1.00 per month. An Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), by that salary structure, took home a monthly pay of N4522.00. Besides, this unattractive, discouraging and dehumanizing salary is not even paid regularly. Allowances are denied or at best delayed and when they are eventually paid, an uncaring Inspector General of Police considers such an act a favour to an already depressed work force. When the Presidency disbursed five billion naira for outstanding allowances, the directive to pay was flouted by the then Inspector General. It was this action of his which the policemen considered inhuman, that triggered off a strike by junior police officers and also cost him his job (Omokaro, 2002).

What accrues to a Policeman as compensation benefit is equally appalling. The death benefit for a Constable and Corporal is N30,000.00 and for the ASP/DSP, it is N120,000.00 (Obiora and Odumosu, 2001). In reaction to this inhuman treatment, the Policeman rationalize and chooses the angle from which he wants to act on the basis of maximum advantage. Thus, a smart Policeman, knowing that he has nothing to collect upon permanent disability, retirement or death tries to make all the money through whatever means while still in service (Ogbobine, 1982).

Apart from this cruelty in reward, the Police is starved of equipment. A Policeman has to lobby for uniform, he buys his personal handcuff, lacks communication facilities and equipment and other necessities for his rough and tough assignment. A State Government may decide to make some of its resources available to the Police Force, a Federal agency, by purchasing vehicles for use by the anti-crime unit or squad of the Police. To ensure efficient policing, men of this special ant crime outfit need to be properly motivated for their dangerous task of head-on collision with men of the underworld. Sad enough, they get no incentive whatsoever, with the squads becoming more or less self-sufficient and self-sustaining. With a situation like this they have no option than to extort money from the very members of the public they are meant to protect, in order to meet the basic needs of food and fuel.

The Policeman in the Station is unable to respond to distress calls due to lack of vehicles and other equipment necessary for them to confront criminals. Even if they decide to be responsive to distress calls, they discover to their peril, that their rifles have jammed, having not been serviced since they were bought. If the rifles do not jam, the Policeman's marksmanship would disappoint him because, since he was employed some decades ago, he has not undergone any form of further training. He has thus become rusty both mentally and physically and cannot in any way be a good match to the armed robber who is in a very high state of physical fitness, better armed and highly motivated in what he has set out to do.

The social terrain in which the Policeman operates makes him prone to crime. A Policeman on transfer from Calabar to Warri for instance, without provision for his transport and accommodation has to sort out things for himself. He leaves his family behind in Calabar and automatically becomes a married bachelor in his new station and to secure accommodation for himself, he must roam the streets of Warri after work so that his family could occasionally pay him visits. In the process, he runs into some crooks in Warri who make accommodation offers to him in a den of criminals with the hope of getting protection from him in return.

On the other hand, our dear Policeman finds it difficult to maintain physical contact with his family in Calabar due to cost and the call of duty, and because he has been used to living with a partner, he starts a love affair in Warri and before we know it, he has started another family in Warri in spite of his meager salary and the high cost of living. Poor Policeman, before he could settle down with his family of circumstance in Warri, he is transferred again, this time, to Zakibiam in Benue State and the whole process is repeated and frustration mounts.

To survive under the excruciating circumstance the Policeman finds himself, he allows his economic self-interest to motivate his behaviour. Thus, the average Policeman is constrained to go all out for extra money through road blocks and other criminal means. Regrettably, the system has devastated and pushed him into two bitter extremes-mixing with criminals and being turned into a criminal. Who then can justifiably blame such an officer who was pushed into this menacing behaviour by a society or employer who has refused to accept his responsibilities of providing an enabling environment for the Policeman to perform his duties.

Effective policing is affected by lopsidedness in recruitment, posting and promotions. People with questionable character are recruited into the Police Force regardless of their past records. This crop of officers joined the Force in the first instance, to achieve their criminal goals. Posting and promotion could also adversely affect policing by officers. Before now, ethnic calculation demanded that some strategic states like Lagos, Rivers, Anambra, Oyo, Kano, and Kaduna were solely reserved for officers of northern origin, save for Archibong Nkhana who was posted to Oyo State 1984 to 1986 during the tenure of Etim Inyang as Inspector General of Police. Postings to these states were done to particular group interests. During the tenure of Coomasie as Inspector General of Police (1993-1999), out of the thirty seven commissioners of Police in Nigeria, only fourteen were from the southern part of the country while a preponderance of twenty three were of northern origin (Dde, 1997). The same phenomenon is observed with promotions.

In the name of ethnic balancing or quota system, a policeman gets undue advantage over his counterparts on account of where he comes from. A northern officer could rise two steps or more above his course mates from the south within a few years of service. This breeds frustration among officers from the “disadvantaged” parts of the country. This probably explains why the Police no longer make breakthroughs in investigations and other aspects of policing. The fact remains that the unfavoured officers do not feel committed enough to put in their best while the beneficiaries of the so-called quota system do not measure up to the tasks assigned to them, having been promoted beyond their levels of competence.

One fundamental issue is that besides the fact that the police force has been thrown into problems by past and present regimes, every other aspect of public life in the country is influenced by the “Nigerian Factor.” Students are into examination malpractices, the politicians use the Police to perpetrate electoral fraud, elected officers are deeply immersed in corruption and mismanagement. Vice-Chancellors of universities are neck deep in corruption and cultism, while the youths are left strictly to their own devices. The police is thus being accused of what every public sector is guilty of. The unfortunate thing about the Police is that, while every person sees the process of the collection of N20 at the checkpoints, very few persons know about the dirty deals of inflated contracts, sharing of government funds and fraudulent siphoning of public money into foreign accounts by public office holders, according to Iyobosa and Mbah (2002). After all, it is not the activities of the Police that ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International, an international non-governmental organization.

The Way Forward

As long as society relies on the police for the policing service, there is the dire need to change their fortunes in order to enhance performance. The salary structure and other conditions of service should be improved and payment should be regular. Considering the dangerous nature of the policeman’s work, he should be given a very generous insurance coverage. This will not only elicit quality performance, but it will also take their minds off criminal behaviour. With the present state of affairs in the Police force, no policeman would feel bad if he is relieved of his appointment because it only amounts to moving from one state of joblessness to another.

The State should, as a matter of deliberate policy, provide the basic facilities that enhance effective policing. Accommodation should be made available to every policeman in the barracks, with relaxation and recreational facilities attached. Above all, there should be periodic training programmes for every policeman. The decrease in crime rate in Delta State in the year 2002 can be traceable to the equipment provided by the state government to the Delta State Command of the Force.

The unstated policy of perpetual domination of the force by one group or region, should be discouraged, not reversed so that people from other regions do not see themselves as strangers in the Nigeria Police Force. Recruitment, promotion, posting and retirement should be based on merit and not on quota system.

Frustrated police officers should not resort to drug consumption as a panacea to their problems. The consumption of marijuana and other hard drugs by men of the police force should be banned and such ban enforced. The menace of trigger happy policemen and the

irresponsible police culture which find expression in accidental discharges and brutality reported in the mass media could be traceable to the influence of drugs.

Nigerian leaders should place the police force on top priority in terms of funding. This is not all; machinery must be put in place to ensure that funds released to the police are spent for the purposes for which they are meant. If the contrary is observed, those involved should be brought to book without fear or favour.

Finally, Nigerians should distance themselves from the “Nigerian factor” syndrome, which is the act of getting undue advantage at all cost, at the expense of every other person. Our individual and collective action and inaction have bastardized the Nigerian Police Force.

Conclusion

Thus far, it is clear that there is a contrast between what the Nigerian police should be and what it is. A one time force known for effective policing has gradually slipped into the reverse under our own manipulation. The explanation for this ugly spectacle in policing is anchored on the prevailing values of the Nigerian society which permeate all public institutions. By implication, we are all guilty or responsible for what has happened to the Nigerian Police Force. Whatever ill that is associated with the police force today is a symptom of, or a reaction to societal decadence.

What the Nigerian Police expects from us is empathy and sympathy. The police institution cannot thrive when the society in which it operates is socially sick. The Nigerian society must be delivered of its social illness as any corrective measure aimed at the Police alone will not yield the desired dividends. Until all the institutions in the society undergo the desired transformation, effective policing will remain a mirage in Nigeria.

References

- Achindu, G. (2002). “The Police Revolution is Inevitable” *Insider Weekly*, March 25, 2002.
- Bunyard, R. S. (1978). *Police Organization and Command*. Plymouth: Macdonald and Evans.
- Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (2001). *2000 Annual Report on the Human Rights Situation in Nigeria*. Lagos: Frankad Publishers.
- Coommasie, I. A. (1988). *The Police, State Security and Human Rights*. A Paper Presented at the Workshop on Human Rights in Abuja, July, 1988.
- Dele, A. (1997). “A Northern Police Force” *Tell Magazine*, January 20, 1997.
- Egbulem, R. (2002). “A Word for Balogun.” *Insider Weekly*, April 8, 2002.
- Ehinder, S. G. (1990). *Essential Laws/Decrees for Police Officers*. Jos, Ehinder Nig. Ltd.
- Eitzen, S. D. (1980). *Social Problems*. New York: Alley and Bacon.
- Gordon, D. M. (1976). “Class and Economics of Crime.” In Chambliss and Mankoff’s (Eds.) *Whose Law? What Order?* New York, Willey and Sons.
- Iyobosa, G. (2002). “Playing Peekambo.” *Insider Weekly*. April 8, 2002.
- Membere, C. F. (1981). *Police and Law Enforcement: Standard Police Studies Manual*. Benin: Koda Publishers Ltd.

- Michalowski, R.J.M. (1985). *Order, Law and Crime: and Introduction to Criminology*. New York: McGraw Hill
- Mbah, G. (2002). "Return to Kleptocracy." *Insider Weekly*, April 8, 2002.
- Muoboghare, P.A. (2000). "Not Apathy, but Empathy and Sympathy for the Nigerian Policeman." Being a Guest Lecture Delivered at the Annual Dinner of the University of Ibadan Alumni Association, Ughelli Chapter, on December 11,2000.
- Muoboghare, P.A. & Ogege S.O. (2001). "Police Preparedness for Crime Control in Nigeria." (Unpublished Field).
- Nikoro, I. (1999). "Boodbath in the Delta." *Tell Magazine*, January 18, 1999.
- Ogbobine, R. A. I. (1982). *Causes of Armed Robbery in Nigeria*. Warri: Rufbine Book Centre.
- Orewa, J. (1997). *We are Guilty: The Nigerian Crisis*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Pearce, F. & T. Tomb (1993). *Global Crime Connections*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Quentin, S. (1986). *The Return of Grand Theory*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Uweru, B. C. (1994). The Nigerian Police and the Public: the Neglect of the Obvious. In Tamuno, T. (Ed.) *Police Nigeria: Reminiscences*. Lagos: Maithouse Press.